

Clinton, Trump take major steps toward US presidential nominations

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Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump greatly increased their leads in the contests for the Democratic and Republican presidential nominations in primary voting in five states Tuesday: Florida, Illinois, Missouri, North Carolina and Ohio.

Clinton swept all five states, winning by sizable margins over Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders in Florida, North Carolina and Ohio, narrowly in Illinois and Missouri.

Sanders' failure to win a single state, after his upset victory in Michigan last Tuesday, was a significant blow, and his campaign did not even hold a rally with the candidate to watch the vote results come in.

While Sanders continues to attract widespread support among young people, with his calls for a "political revolution" and his claim to advocate "democratic socialism," his campaign is an attempt to give a "left" gloss to a right-wing corporate-controlled political machine. From the beginning he has pledged to back Clinton in the event that she wins the nomination, which is now likely.

The Democratic Party cannot serve as the instrument of a progressive transformation of American society. On the contrary, its reactionary corruption and complacency only provokes the anger that helps fuel the campaigns of ultra-right demagogues like Trump.

Trump won four of the five states, losing only Ohio to the state's incumbent governor, John Kasich. Texas Senator Ted Cruz finished a close second in Missouri and North Carolina, and a distant second in Illinois. Florida Senator Marco Rubio finished a distant second in his home state and announced he was suspending his campaign.

Kasich had campaigned in Ohio on the basis of the supposed economic revival of the heavily industrial state. He touted the creation of 400,000 jobs over the past five years, although median family income has plunged 16.1 percent since 2000. His comfortable margin over Trump

came in part from a sizable crossover vote, as Democrats voted in the Republican primary, mainly to oppose Trump.

In terms of convention delegates required for nomination, each frontrunner has now passed the halfway mark. Clinton's advantage is substantial, because under the rules of the Democratic Party more than 700 party officials hold automatic positions as convention delegates, and the vast majority have pledged their support to her.

Trump's lead is more precarious, as he currently has less than 50 percent of the delegates selected, and he could well fall short of the 1,237 required for nomination. Cruz is unlikely to overtake Trump, and Kasich cannot do so, mathematically, making a contested convention with multiple ballots a real possibility.

It is increasingly likely that in the November presidential election the corporate-controlled two-party system will present the alternatives of Hillary Clinton, who as the wife of a president, senator and secretary of state embodies the American political establishment, and Donald Trump, a billionaire who personifies the criminality and viciousness of the financial aristocracy.

These repulsive alternatives only underscore the completely undemocratic and manipulated character of the US political system, where only candidates approved by or directly recruited from the Wall Street oligarchy need apply.

Trump would be the first candidate with a distinctly fascistic and authoritarian program to win the nomination of one of the two major big business parties. His vote is driven largely by economic and social despair. As the *Washington Post* noted in a recent report, Trump's support tracks closely with those areas with the highest death rates and unemployment rates among middle-aged whites.

A profile in the *New York Times* Sunday of volunteers at a Trump campaign office in Tampa, Florida found a wide

range of backgrounds, but one thing in common: all had faced economic ruin from the 2008 financial crash, either losing jobs, homes or businesses.

Trump's main remaining rival in the Republican Party, Cruz, is an equally reactionary figure. His speech to supporters in Texas Tuesday night was a hysterical rant, denouncing Trump exclusively from the right, claiming he was soft on Iran, on support for Israel and on the appointment of ultra-right nominees to the Supreme Court.

In her remarks to campaign supporters Tuesday night, Clinton offered no alternative to the deepening social and economic crisis of American capitalism or the threat of these ultra-right demagogues. She paid lip service to the ongoing campaign for the Democratic Party nomination, but spoke as though the general election campaign had already begun, using the generalities that characterize the Democratic Party's posturing as the vaguely "progressive" alternative to the Republicans.

Except for a pledge to "expand Social Security, not cut or privatize it," Clinton made no specific statement on social policy. Significantly, this followed the declaration by Trump, at last week's Republican debate, that he opposed any cuts in the federal retirement program.

Likewise on foreign and security policy, Clinton made only one specific statement, criticizing Trump for his open support for torture. Otherwise, she embraced the record of the Obama administration, with which she, as secretary of state for four years, is completely identified.

As soon as the Sanders challenge can be dispatched, the Clinton campaign will execute its long-planned pivot, shifting even further to the right, and seeking to win the favor of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus as the "responsible" alternative to the erratic and potentially explosive character of Trump.



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