

The demise of Sanders' "political revolution"

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In the wake of his losses in five out of six northeastern primaries, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders has effectively conceded that former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will be the Democratic nominee. On Wednesday, the Sanders campaign issued layoff notices to several hundred staffers.

In a series of media interviews, Sanders and his top campaign aide Tad Devine indicated that the candidate would bow to demands from leading Democrats that he stop criticizing the frontrunner for her ties to Wall Street, and instead direct his attacks against the likely Republican nominee, billionaire Donald Trump.

Thus the Sanders campaign ends not with a bang, but a whimper. The candidate has every right, however, to declare "mission accomplished." His main concern, as the campaign developed, was how to keep his supporters within the Democratic Party. Millions of youth and workers attracted by calls for a "political revolution" and denunciations of the "billionaire class" are now to be dragged to the polls to cast their votes for Clinton, a Wall Street lackey and war criminal.

The mass support for Sanders was the product of the experiences American workers and youth have made with the capitalist system, particularly over the past 15 years, during which they have seen nothing but war, economic crisis and deteriorating wages and social conditions.

A Harvard University survey of young adults aged 18 to 29, made public this week, found that 51 percent of those surveyed did not support capitalism, compared to 42 percent who did. One-third of these young adults affirmatively supported socialism, and near-majorities agreed that health care, food and shelter were basic human rights. This is in a society where socialism has been virtually criminalized and both major parties, the media and academia all sing the praises of the profit system.

As the WSWS wrote in February, "Sanders is not the

representative of a working class movement. He is rather the temporary beneficiary of a rising tide of popular opposition that is passing through only its initial stages of social and class differentiation." His entire campaign has been dedicated to preventing this leftward movement from breaking out of the straitjacket of the Democratic Party.

Sanders began his bid for the Democratic presidential nomination with no expectations of electoral success or even significant influence. His aim was to play the role of previous left-liberal candidates, like Dennis Kucinich and Al Sharpton, and use the presidential primary process to give the Democratic Party a "left" face. The Clinton campaign itself welcomed his participation, counting on Sanders to allow her to position herself as the "responsible progressive" during the primary contests.

To the surprise and shock of the corporate-controlled media, Democratic Party officials and the candidate himself, Sanders won an immediate hearing, first among young people and then more broadly. It was noticeable that the more radical and enthusiastic his followers became, the more the senator dropped his longstanding pretense of "independence" and insisted that the Democratic Party was the only possible political avenue. His "political revolution" turned out to be nothing more than getting out the vote for the Democrats, his "socialism" merely warmed-over liberalism, without the slightest threat of any inroad against capitalist property.

Sanders avoided the overriding issues of war and militarism, on which Clinton was most vulnerable given her role as secretary of state in the Obama administration, responsible for the US-NATO war in Libya, the US-instigated civil war in Syria, and the campaign of drone missile assassinations, among other crimes.

Now that Clinton has effectively clinched the

Democratic Party nomination, Sanders' role will be to foster illusions that the Democratic standard bearer, a proven servant of American imperialism with a political record stretching back four decades, can somehow be pushed to the left.

Speaking at a rally in Bloomington, Indiana on Wednesday, Sanders made perhaps the clearest statement of his own political role. "Our job, whether we win or whether we do not win," he said, "is to transform not only our country, but the Democratic Party—to open the doors of the Democratic Party to working people and young people and senior citizens in a way that does not exist today."

He expanded on this political alchemist's theme of transforming the Democratic Party at a rally Thursday in Springfield, Oregon, where he declared, "The Democratic Party has to reach a fundamental conclusion: Are we on the side of working people or big money interests? Do we stand with the elderly, the children, the sick and the poor? Or do we stand with Wall Street speculators and the drug companies and the insurance companies?"

And the devil must decide whether to stand on the side of the angels!

The class character of the Democratic Party is not open to question. It is an integral component of the two-party system, which the American ruling elite employs to manage its affairs of state and to suppress all opposition from below.

As for Sanders, he will get a cameo appearance at the Democratic convention while Clinton will "move to the center" for the general election campaign, i.e., she will seek the support of sections of the Republican establishment, Wall Street and the military wary of a Trump or Cruz White House.

Among the pseudo-left groups, where enthusiasm for Sanders has prevailed, his defeat may prompt an alteration of tactics, but not of political orientation. Their enthusiasm for his campaign was in no small measure bound up with the fact that they saw it as a means of entry of their own organizations into the capitalist establishment. They will continue to pursue that goal, including through support for the Greens, a bourgeois "third party" in the political orbit of the Democrats.

Throughout the election campaign, the Socialist Equality Party has explained both the objective

significance of the mass support for Sanders and the role of the candidate himself as a vehicle for strengthening the Democratic Party. We have stressed that Sanders was not the leader of a movement from below, but an instrument of the political establishment for containing, misdirecting and ultimately dispersing that movement.

Those who are serious and who are looking for a real anti-war, socialist political movement must draw the necessary conclusions. We call on all of you to support the Socialist Equality Party election campaign of Jerry White and Niles Niemuth, to help build a genuine socialist movement of the working class and prepare for the struggles to come.



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