

Sanders calls for supporters to back Clinton, “transform” Democratic Party

Tom Hall
18 June 2016

On Thursday, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders delivered a speech to his supporters live over the Internet in which he laid out the next stage of his “political revolution” in the aftermath of the Democratic Party primaries. The speech exposed the real political content of his campaign: channeling the leftward political radicalization of workers and youth into the Democratic Party, one of the two main parties of American capitalism.

The speech was doubtlessly coordinated closely with the highest levels of the Democratic Party establishment. It followed by barely a week Sanders’ closed-door meeting with President Barack Obama after the California primary, and by only two days Sanders’ meeting with Hillary Clinton, the party’s presumptive nominee.

Sanders began his speech by noting the widespread support for his campaign: 12 million votes including huge majorities among young voters, victories in 22 state primaries and caucuses, rallies and meetings that attracted 1.5 million people and contributions from 2.7 million people, averaging \$27 apiece.

He also listed the political and social conditions in the country motivating those who backed his campaign: an electoral system dominated by billionaires, “the grotesque level of wealth and income inequality,” declining life expectancy, child poverty, soaring student debt, poverty wages, collapsing infrastructure, increasing homelessness and record corporate profits.

All the anger over these conditions, Sanders insisted, must now go into support for Hillary Clinton. Though he did not formally concede the nomination, Sanders said, “The major political task that we face in the next five months is to make certain that Donald Trump is defeated and defeated badly. And I personally intend to begin my role in that process in a very short period of

time.”

This is to be the basic political framework for drumming up support for Clinton: “Anybody but Trump.” Sanders made no effort to provide any analysis of the origins of Trump, who arises out of a political environment steeped in criminality and violence, overseen by both political parties. Moreover, Trump has been able to make an appeal to the most socially distressed layers in large part due to the right-wing policies of the Democratic Party, which long ago abandoned its program of limited social reform.

Sanders also made no mention of the fact that Clinton is planning to run arguably the most right-wing campaign in her party’s history, directing her appeal to sections of the military and the Republican Party opposed to Trump’s candidacy on the grounds that she is the more reliable choice for “commander-in-chief.”

Sanders went on to say that “defeating Trump cannot be our only goal.” He sought to focus the attention of his supporters on the Democratic Party convention, saying he would be involved in “discussions between the two campaigns to make certain your voices are heard and that the Democratic Party passes the most progressive platform in its history and that Democrats actually fight for that agenda.”

As everyone who is knowledgeable about the functioning of the Democratic Party knows, the platform is a meaningless document that has played no role in the actual formulation of policy for decades.

Sanders continued, “I also look forward to working with Secretary Clinton to transform the Democratic Party so that it becomes a party of working people and young people, and not just wealthy campaign contributors: a party that has the courage to take on Wall Street, the pharmaceutical industry, the fossil fuel industry and the other powerful special interests that

dominate our political and economic life.”

Sanders’ portrayal of Clinton as a “progressive” ally of working people to “take on Wall Street” is absurd. She is a time-tested defender of the status quo, a stooge of Wall Street and corporate America going back to her days in Arkansas, when she sat on the board of directors of Wal-Mart. As first lady, senator from New York and Obama’s secretary of state, Clinton has supported right-wing economic policies at home and war abroad.

Sanders did not try to explain the contradiction between his presentation of Clinton as a partner in “transforming the Democratic Party” and the campaign’s criticism, which the Vermont Senator has been downplaying in recent weeks, of Clinton’s incestuous financial ties to the banks and major corporations.

A major demand of his campaign, which Sanders repeated at debates and in his public appearances, was that Clinton release the transcripts of speeches she gave to private audiences of corporate executives and Wall Street bankers, for which she was paid hundreds of thousands of dollars. These criticisms have been thrown down the memory hole.

Sanders makes no attempt to explain how he will accomplish the political alchemy of transforming the Democratic Party, which together with the Republican Party is the means through which the ruling elite asserts total political domination over every facet of American society, into “a party of working people and young people.” As he has done throughout his campaign, the Vermont senator also made no criticism of the Obama administration, which has overseen the largest transfer of wealth in US history and has helped create all the social ills that he listed in the beginning of his remarks.

It is worth remembering in light of the fact that Sanders is now serving as the chief promoter of illusions in the Democrats that until he formally registered as a Democrat in order to participate in the primaries, Sanders had spent his entire political career, dating back to the early 1970s, as either an Independent or third party candidate. If the Sanders of yesterday were to be believed, his decision to remain formally independent from the Democrats was because he did not have confidence in the capacity of that party to accept his program of “democratic socialism.” Suddenly, however, Sanders has shifted his position

without giving any accounting of his own former political history.

In reality, Sanders’ nominal “independence” was always a political fraud, designed to provide himself with “left” or “outsider” credentials, while he caucused with the Democrats and voted with them more than 95 percent of the time. His decision to end this charade is due not to the Democrats demonstrating a greater receptiveness to social reform. Rather it is due to the Democrats’ need, under conditions of growing social opposition and deep alienation to the entire political process, for the political cover that his campaign could provide.

Sanders concluded his speech with a call for his supporters to seek “political engagement” at the state and local level, either running for office or volunteering in the campaigns of Democrats in order to oust local Republican officeholders. “I have no doubt that with the energy and enthusiasm our campaign has shown that we can win significant numbers of local and state elections if people are prepared to become involved,” he declared.

Through this mechanism, Sanders seeks to integrate the infrastructure of his campaign, and the popular support it has attracted, into a more or less permanent formation of Democratic Party volunteers and functionaries devoted to combating the party’s flagging electoral fortunes in many parts of the country. Undoubtedly, this statement is also in part an inducement to layers of the pseudo left that coalesced around his campaign, many of whom are meeting this weekend in Chicago at the so-called People’s Summit. He is essentially telling them that there will be positions available for them.

The winding down of Sanders’ campaign has forced some of the essential political content of his “political revolution” to extrude through his campaign’s fog of left-sounding rhetoric. No small number of people will begin to see through Sanders’ increasingly shopworn facade and view his pivot towards an open embrace of the Clinton campaign with contempt.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact