

The end of the Sanders campaign: The political lessons

Tom Hall
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With his support for the nomination of Hillary Clinton at the Democratic National Convention, the campaign of Bernie Sanders has come to an ignominious end. What could be added that would be a more devastating political exposure of his role than Sanders' own statements and actions over the past week in Philadelphia?

On Monday, Sanders berated his own delegates, who booed him at an event outside the convention hall, defending his endorsement by declaring, "This is the real world we live in." By this he meant a "real world" that excludes any opposition to the two candidates put forward by the Democratic and Republican parties, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Sanders' "political revolution" against the "billionaire class" has turned out to be a defense of the status quo and the two-party system.

In his speech to the convention later that night, Sanders heaped praise upon his former opponent in the primary campaign, portraying the candidate, whom he had criticized for her intimate ties to Wall Street, as a progressive ally of working people. He also praised the Obama administration, which has overseen the greatest transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich in American history.

Sanders continued his political striptease on Tuesday night during the nominating process, when he rose from the floor to call for suspending the roll call vote, in favor of declaring Clinton the nominee by acclamation.

Nothing remains of the Sanders campaign except hollow slogans and deceitful phrases. But this outcome was neither unforeseeable nor unforeseen. It fully confirms the analysis made by the *World Socialist Web Site* since the announcement of his campaign last year. From the beginning, we warned that Sanders, a capitalist politician who falsely claimed to be a

socialist, was seeking to corral opposition behind the Democratic Party and its policy of war and social reaction.

To cite only some of the most important statements produced over the past year, the WSWS wrote:

- "The major political function of Sanders' campaign is to divert the growing social discontent and hostility toward the existing system behind the Democratic Party, in order to contain and dissipate it. His supposedly 'socialist' campaign is an attempt to preempt and block the emergence of an independent movement of the working class." ("Is Bernie Sanders a socialist?", July 16, 2015)

- "To say that the support for Sanders is an expression of deep social anger is very different from saying that the Sanders campaign itself articulates and represents this anger. Sanders does not speak for the working class, but for a section of the ruling class and political establishment that views the growth of social opposition with fear and is seeking some way of containing it... Sanders aims not to create a 'revolution,' as he asserts in his campaign speeches, but to prevent one." ("The political role of the Bernie Sanders campaign" February 11, 2016)

- On Sanders' own program, the WSWS pointed in particular to his support for imperialist war, including his declaration that the United States "should have the strongest military in the world" and his pledge to continue the Obama administration's program of drone assassination. "The most obvious contradiction in his promotion of a so-called political revolution, replete with railings against the billionaires and their corruption of American politics, is the fact that this revolution curiously stops at the water's edge. On the issues of foreign policy, there is virtually nothing to distinguish Sanders from Clinton, or virtually any other

politician of the ruling establishment.” (“Sanders in the Democratic debate: A ‘political revolution’ that stops at the water’s edge,” January 19, 2016)

- Sanders’ support for imperialist war was closely bound up with his promotion of national chauvinism and economic nationalism. “Sanders lines up squarely with the trade union bureaucracy and sections of the Democratic Party in seeking to divert working class anger over layoffs and unemployment along nationalist channels, which serve to pit American workers against their class brothers and sisters around the world.” (“Bernie Sanders, the Democratic Party and socialism” October 15, 2015)

The WSWS’s explanation of the political role and significance of the Sanders campaign was based on a class analysis and on historical experience. Sanders’ actions in the 2016 elections were entirely in line with his previous political record. He has long used his “socialist” label and nominal independence in as a cover for a pro-capitalist program that is little distinguished from the Democratic Party mainstream. His evolution—from his days as a student radical in the 1960s to the business-friendly mayor of Burlington, Vermont in the 1980s, to a long-standing congressional ally of the Democratic Party—is bound up with a broader shift to the right of an entire social layer of middle-class protesters who have been integrated into the political establishment.

From the “populist” campaign of William Jennings Bryan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, through the campaigns of Jesse Jackson and Dennis Kucinich in the 1980s and 1990s, the Democrats have used “outsider” campaigns to provide themselves with political credibility and contain opposition. This is to say nothing of the fact that Sanders himself pledged at the start of his campaign to back the eventual Democratic Party nominee.

From the beginning, the Sanders campaign has been backed by a whole host of political enablers in the pseudo-left, who sought to promote illusions, either by actively campaigning for him or by criticizing him on tactical grounds, while solidarizing with his politics. Like Sanders, the groups that operate around the Democratic Party and the trade unions are opposed to the emergence of an independent movement of the working class and direct all of their efforts to prevent it.

Groups like Socialist Alternative, Solidarity, the

International Socialist Organization, the Young Democratic Socialists and the Green Party are meeting in Philadelphia at the Socialist Convergence conference at the same time as the Democratic convention. Without giving any political accounting for what they themselves wrote yesterday, they are moving on to build the next political trap for the working class, in the Green Party campaign of Jill Stein, who scarcely a month ago offered Sanders her spot on the Green Party ticket.

Conclusions must be drawn from this experience. None of the immense social tensions and anger, which found reflection in support for the Sanders campaign, will go away. No matter who wins the elections in November, the coming period will bring explosive class struggles.

The central political lesson is the need to break irreconcilably from bourgeois politics in all of its forms, whether right-wing or nominally left. Now is the time to build a genuine socialist movement, based on the principles of internationalism, anti-imperialism and social equality. The political independence of the working class is a burning necessity.

It is on this perspective that the Socialist Equality Party’s presidential campaign of Jerry White and Niles Niemuth is built. We urge all workers and youth who are outraged by the betrayal of Sanders to support the campaign, join the Socialist Equality Party and make the decision to take up the fight for genuine socialism.



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