

Fourteen Democratic presidential hopefuls campaign at California convention

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In the largest gathering of the 2020 presidential campaign so far, 14 of the declared Democratic candidates attended the California state Democratic Party convention in San Francisco over the weekend. They sought to combine bogus pledges of social reform with attacks on the Trump administration from the right, particularly on trade and on alleged Russian interference into US elections.

Notably absent from the convention was current frontrunner, former Vice President Joe Biden, who instead spent the weekend in Ohio to attend events commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. It was widely understood, however, that Biden, who has adopted a more openly conciliatory posture to the Republicans, wanted to avoid provoking the ire of convention delegates and a potentially embarrassing rebuff.

Aside from the candidate appearances, delegates elected the state party's new chair, Los Angeles County Federation of Labor President Rusty Hicks. Representing over 800,000 workers in over 300 local union chapters, the LA Fed, as it's known, has presided over betrayals of workers throughout the city and the county, most particularly in the healthcare and education fields. Hicks' victory underscores the reactionary role of the unions in reinforcing the political monopoly of the capitalist two-party system and denying the working class any genuine political representation.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi also spoke at the convention. Her comments were interrupted by calls from assembled delegates to impeach President Trump. Many of the Democratic presidential candidates have openly called for impeachment, particularly after comments by former Special Counsel Robert Mueller last week in which he effectively called on the House of Representatives to begin impeachment proceedings.

The two leading presidential contenders, Biden and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, have thus far not called for impeachment, and Pelosi has downplayed suggestions that the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives might take such action, arguing that an impeachment that had no prospects of conviction at trial in the Republican-controlled Senate would only help Trump politically.

At the convention itself, Pelosi implied that Democrats should focus instead on winning the White House in 2020. She

was joined over the weekend by House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff who declared that impeachment proceedings were "destined for failure" without Republican support in the Senate.

Notably, there were no references made to suggestions, included those made by Trump himself, that he might seek to extend his term in office or even refuse to accept the results of the 2020 election.

The presidential candidates who spoke at the convention offered various types of vague reformist pabulum which will be rapidly abandoned once the party's nominee is chosen, along with attempts to outflank Trump on the right, particularly in regard to the party's anti-Russia campaign and the drive for internet and press censorship that goes along with it.

As could be expected, when questions of social inequality became unavoidable, the candidates took pains to couch the issue in entirely racial terms.

Failed Texas Senate candidate Beto O'Rourke declared, "When we talk about justice in this country, it is squarely confronting the consequences of slavery and segregation," he said. "Unless we do that, we will never repair the damage done and we will never stop revisiting these injustices on every successive generation."

Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren is currently competing with Sanders to be the candidate of the fake-left opposition in the Democratic Party. "The racial wealth gap," she claimed, "holds back families generation after generation."

Warren fully supported the Obama Administration's bailout of the auto industry, leading to severe wage cuts and job losses for hundreds of thousands of autoworkers, and eulogized recently deceased US war criminals such as President George H. W. Bush and Senator John McCain.

"The time for small ideas is over," Warren argued in her speech. "Big problems call for big solutions. If we're going to save our democracy, build an inclusive economy, clean up the corruption in Washington, we need big, structural change and yes, I have a plan for that." Warren then outlined that her "plan" involved placing a wealth tax of 2 cents on the dollar for those whose fortunes exceeded \$50 million, a levy on the super-rich that no Congress would ever impose, given the grip of big money on both corporate-controlled parties.

Like many of the other candidates present, Warren offered sops to the trade union bureaucracy, promising that a Warren administration would “make it easier for workers to join a union,” opening more channels through which union bureaucrats could extract dues money from workers and betray their future struggles.

The overall tone of the proceedings, however, was set by opening speaker Kamala Harris, former state attorney general and now US Senator from California, who spoke of the urgent need to continue the Democrat’s reactionary anti-Russia campaign. “Let’s talk about this so-called commander in chief [Trump],” she said. “He parrots Russia’s lies over the word of American intelligence and law enforcement leaders. He denies that Russia interfered in the election of the president of the United States. We need to begin impeachment proceedings and we need a new commander in chief.”

Harris, a multi-millionaire, took a hard line against defendants during her time as district attorney and later California state attorney general, helping to hide exculpatory evidence from defense attorneys. She blocked prosecution of bankers in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, including current Trump Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, and appealed court rulings seeking to end the death penalty.

South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg also spoke at the convention. The young mayor has received considerably favorable coverage in the bourgeois media, largely due to a talent for saying nothing and saying it very well—as well as his record as a special forces operative in Afghanistan.

“We can only look forward,” he said. “Now, if we want to defeat this president and lead the country into a new direction, we’ve got to be ready to transform our country and our democracy into something new and better.”

Buttigieg told the assembled audience that Democrats could not promise to bring the country back to the days of the 1990s and 2000s, as if those decades of war, austerity policies and stagnating living standards were somehow halcyon days for the working class.

Buttigieg also echoed an aspect of the anti-Russia campaign calling for increased cybersecurity and election security, meaning calls for further internet censorship and attacks on government whistleblowers such as Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. “We have to build a campaign on our values, values like freedom, security and democracy. We don’t enjoy security if we fail to confront cyber challenges, election security threats,” he said.

California has moved up its presidential primary from the traditional June date to March 3, the day dubbed “Super Tuesday” by the media, when 13 states will choose more than 1,400 delegates, better than one-third of the total.

More than 400 of those delegates will be from California, divided up among the state’s 53 congressional districts, but candidates must receive at least 15 percent of the total vote in a congressional district to win any delegates from that district.

Based on present polling, only six candidates—Biden, Harris, Buttigieg, O’Rourke, Warren and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders—would pass that threshold.

Sanders was also present at the convention, although the level of excitement for his candidacy has notably diminished since his last presidential run in 2016, when the Vermont senator attracted tens of thousands to rallies around the country in which he railed against the “billionaire class” and the growth of social inequality, only to later fully support the candidacy of Hillary Clinton, the candidate of Wall Street and the Pentagon. A rally Sanders held in the nearby city of San Jose over the weekend was only attended by a few hundred supporters.

While Sanders has consistently polled in second place behind Biden, he has echoed the Trump administration’s condemnation of China and has otherwise joined in the administration’s nationalistic trade war campaign. Sanders’ railing against social inequality has only proven to be so much hot air meant to distract and disorient the growing political opposition among the working class.

In fact, while nearly all of the Democratic candidates took pains to mention the growth of social inequality and many of its attendant miseries, the word “socialism” and “capitalism” were not even mentioned, with the exception of former Colorado governor John Hickenlooper, who railed against any hint of socialism in the 2020 election.

“Socialism is not the answer!” Hickenlooper railed, warning the delegates that they risk falling into a trap set for them by Trump. “If we’re not careful, we’re going to help reelect the worst president in history.” He also cautioned against fighting for universal health coverage. “We shouldn’t try to achieve universal coverage by removing private insurance for over 150 million Americans.”

Such anti-socialist rhetoric, however, does not prevent pseudo-left groups such as the Democratic Socialists of America and Socialist Alternative from working within the Democratic Party and fostering illusions that this party of bourgeois reaction can be utilized to meet the interests of the working class.

Both the Democrats and Trump are desperately seeking to divert social discontent outwards and away from its actual source in the capitalist profit system, and against a foreign enemy. In Trump’s case, the bogeymen are immigrant workers and foreign trade rivals, particularly China. In the case of the Democrats, Russia is the main target. The result of the 2020 election will be fundamentally the same regardless of whether Trump or one of his Democratic rivals emerges victorious: a further accelerated drive towards war, attacks on democratic rights and authoritarian rule.



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