Pete Buttigieg's town hall debacle: A Democratic Party "golden boy" unmasked

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Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg was exposed as a political hack and apologist for police violence Sunday when he faced jeers from a crowd of angry residents at a town hall meeting in South Bend, Indiana. The meeting was called to address a recent police murder in the working-class city where Buttigieg is mayor.

But after leaving the campaign trail in South Carolina, where the Democratic Party had a series of major events for the presidential candidates, Buttigieg could not quell popular anger over the June 16 police shooting of Eric Jack Logan, an African-American father of five, by a white police officer, Sgt. Ryan O'Neill.

Workers in South Bend expressed outrage over the fact that O'Neill had not turned on the dashboard camera in his police vehicle, nor the body camera that he was wearing, when he shot and killed Logan after a 911 call about a man supposedly breaking into vehicles in an apartment complex parking lot. O'Neill claimed that Logan came at him with a knife when he approached him.

Buttigieg sat in front of a crowded town hall filled with residents, mainly African-American and working class, and without a hint of empathy delivered the platitudes usual for such occasions: promising to hire an independent investigator for the case, to take racist police officers off the streets of South Bend, and to insure that body cameras would be turned on.

Clearly, he convinced no one. For nearly the entire meeting, Buttigieg was shouted down by angry residents who called him a "liar" and said, "I don't believe you!" It was a long way from the CNN Town Hall and rapturous welcomes by Rachel Maddow, and poll numbers putting him in fourth place among Democrats and rising.

The jeers were well merited. O'Neill, who shot Logan, had a history of complaints against him, and Buttigieg refused to fire another hated police officer during his tenure as mayor, Aaron Knepper, after he stormed 18-year-old DeShawn Franklin's home in 2012 and punched and tased the high school student in a case of mistaken identity. To show how much he cared about aiding victims of police brutality, under Buttigieg the teen was awarded just $18 after he filed a lawsuit.

As he stammered his way through the question and answer session, the presidential candidate seemed lost. He laid the blame for the shooting on himself. "The effort to recruit more minority officers to the department and the effort to introduce body cameras have not succeeded and I accept responsibility for that," he said. "We have tried but not succeeded to increase diversity in the police department and we need help."

How this record of futility at best and complicity at worst, in overseeing a city of 100,000, qualifies Buttigieg to seek the presidency might seem a mystery. And indeed, there is speculation in the media that his presidential candidacy may be over barely months after it began.

Buttigieg emerged at the beginning of the 2020 presidential race as something of a political phenomenon—the openly gay, 37-year-old mayor of a small, deindustrializing city, with a background as a naval intelligence officer in Afghanistan. He was built up by the media and sections of the Democratic Party establishment, which saw his appeal to younger voters as a potential weapon against Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, the two main "left" challengers to Vice President Joe Biden.

"Mayor Pete," as he was dubbed by fawning media commentators, was supposedly "progressive" because of his sexual orientation and his marriage to another gay man. But following in the footsteps of Madeline Albright, Colin Powell, Hillary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice, he demonstrated that gay men, like women and African-Americans, can be ruthless defenders of American imperialism.

Speaking at Indiana University on June 11, Buttigieg

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said that he would make sure that the US would be prepared to fight future wars—which would devastate the working class at home and abroad, not to mention threaten nuclear conflagration with either Russia or China. “Our military capabilities exist for a reason,” he said. “[W]e stand ready to use force.” Five days later, that pledge was acted on by Officer O’Neill, and Erick Jack Logan paid the price.

The bourgeois press has by and large, as can only be expected in cases of police violence, painted the crisis of police violence and Buttigieg’s debacle in South Bend as a purely racial issue. However, any person who can go to YouTube to view a video clip of the crowd mercilessly heckling the shamefaced mayor will see that regardless of skin color, it was the working class showing that it had had enough of the Democratic Party’s political baloney.

What happened to Buttigieg in South Bend would be the fate of virtually any Democratic or Republican politician who came face-to-face with an angry working-class crowd reacting to one or another of the daily outrages perpetrated by American capitalism—police murders, plant shutdowns, environmental disasters, health crises. These are hollow people, representatives of political parties and a political system that can no longer disguise how rotten it has become.

The working class must tear itself away from the entire framework of the corporate-controlled two-party system. Workers and young people can only advance their struggle against police violence, attacks on jobs, wages and social conditions, and the growing danger of war and fascism by breaking with the Democratic Party and building an independent political movement of working people to fight for a socialist program.

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