

#MeToo provocation against Bernie Sanders organized by CNN and Elizabeth Warren

David Walsh
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CNN and Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Democrat from Massachusetts, with powerful establishment support, combined to stage a provocation this week aimed at slowing down or derailing the campaign of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders for the Democratic Party presidential nomination.

Through CNN, the Massachusetts senator's camp first alleged that Sanders told her in December 2018 a woman could not win a presidential election, an allegation Sanders strenuously refuted. At the Democratic debate on Tuesday night, CNN's moderator acted as though the claim was an indisputable reality, leading to a post-debate encounter between Warren and Sanders, which the network just happened to record and circulate widely.

This is a political stink bomb, borrowed from the #MeToo playbook, typical of American politics in its putrefaction. Unsubstantiated allegations are turned into "facts," these "facts" become the basis for blackening reputations and damaging careers and shifting politics continuously to the right. Anyone who denies the allegations is a "sexist" who refuses "to believe women."

The Democratic establishment is fearful of Sanders, not so much for his nationalist-reformist program and populist demagoguery, but for what his confused but growing support portends: the movement to the left by wide layers of the American population. The US ruling elite seems convinced, like some wretched, self-deluded potentate of old, that if it can simply stamp out the unpleasant "noise," the rising tide of disaffection will dissipate.

CNN's operation began Monday when it posted a "bombshell" article by M.J. Lee with the headline, "Bernie Sanders told Elizabeth Warren in private 2018 meeting that a woman can't win, sources say."

The article animatedly begins, "The stakes were high when Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren met at Warren's apartment in Washington, DC, one evening in December 2018." Among other things, the CNN piece reported, the pair "discussed how to best take on President Donald Trump, and Warren laid out two main reasons she believed she would be a strong candidate: She could make a robust argument about the economy and earn broad support from female voters. Sanders responded that he did not believe a woman could win."

Lee continues, "The description of that meeting is based on the accounts of four people: two people Warren spoke with directly soon after the encounter, and two people familiar with the meeting." In reality, the story is based on the account of *one individual* with a considerable interest in cutting into Sanders' support, i.e., Elizabeth Warren. As the *New York Times* primly noted, "Ms. Warren and Mr. Sanders were the only people in the room."

The absurd CNN article goes on, "After publication of this story, Warren herself backed up this account of the meeting, saying in part in a statement Monday, 'I thought a woman could win; he disagreed.'" In other words, Warren "backed up" what could only have been her *own account* insofar as she was the only person there besides Sanders!

After a pro forma insertion of Sanders' categorical denial that he ever made such a statement, in which he reasonably observed, "Do I believe a woman can win in 2020? Of course! After all, Hillary Clinton beat Donald Trump by 3 million votes in 2016," Lee plowed right ahead as though his comments were not worth responding to. She carries on, "The conversation also illustrates the skepticism among not only American voters but also senior Democratic officials that the country is ready to elect a woman as president" and, further, "The revelation that Sanders expressed skepticism that Warren could win the presidency because she is a woman is particularly noteworthy now, given that Warren is the lone female candidate at the top of the Democratic field."

This is one of the ways in which the sexual misconduct witch-hunt has poisoned American politics, although by no means the only one. Warren's claims about a private encounter simply "must be believed."

During the Democratic candidates' debate itself Tuesday night, moderator Abby Phillips addressed Sanders in the following manner: "Let's now turn to an issue that's come up in the last 48 hours [because Warren and CNN generated it]. Sen. Sanders, CNN reported yesterday that—and Sen. Sanders, Sen. Warren confirmed in a statement, that in 2018 you told her that you did not believe that a woman could win the election. *Why did you say that?*" (emphasis added).

Sanders denied once again that he had said any such thing. Phillips persisted, "Sen. Sanders, I do want to be clear here,

you're saying that you never told Sen. Warren that a woman could not win the election?" Sanders confirmed that. Insultingly, Phillips immediately turned to Warren and continued, "Sen. Warren, what did you think when Sen. Sanders told you a woman could not win the election?" This was all clearly prepared ahead of time, a deliberate effort to embarrass Sanders and portray him as a liar and a male chauvinist.

Following the debate, Warren had the audacity to confront the Vermont senator, refuse to shake his hand and assert, "I think you called me a liar on national TV." When Sanders seemed startled by her remark, she repeated it. CNN managed to capture the sound and preserve it for widespread distribution.

The WSWS gives no support to Sanders, a phony "socialist" whose efforts are aimed at channeling working-class anger at social inequality, poverty and war back into the big business Democratic Party. He is only the latest in a long line of figures in American political history devoted to maintaining the Democrats' stranglehold over popular opposition and blocking the development of a broad-based socialist movement.

Nonetheless, the CNN-Warren "dirty tricks" operation is an obvious hatchet job and an attack from the right. Accordingly, the *New York Times* and other major outlets have been gloating and attempting to make something out of it since Tuesday night. The obvious purpose is to "raise serious questions" about Sanders and dampen support for him, among women especially. It should be recalled that in 2016 Sanders led Hillary Clinton among young women by 30 percentage points.

Michelle Cottle, a member of the *Times* editorial board (in "Why Questions on Women Candidates Strike a Nerve," January 15), asserted that the issue raised by the Warren-Sanders clash was "not about Mr. Sanders and Ms. Warren. Not really. And Ms. Warren was right to try to shift the focus to the bigger picture—even if some critics will sneer that she's playing 'the gender card.'"

Cottle's "bigger picture," it turned out, primarily involved smearing Sanders. The present controversy, she went on, "has resurfaced some of Mr. Sanders's past women troubles. His 2016 campaign faced multiple accusations of sexual harassment, pay inequities and other gender-based mistreatment. Asked early last year if he knew about the complaints, Mr. Sanders's reaction was both defensive and dismissive: 'I was a little bit busy running around the country'."

After Cottle attempted to convince her readers, on the basis of dubious numbers, that Americans were perhaps too backward to elect a female president, she continued, again, taking as good coin Warren's allegations, "This less-than-inspiring data—along with from-the-trail anecdotes about the gender-based voter anxiety that Ms. Warren and Ms. [Amy] Klobuchar have been facing—help explain why Mr. Sanders's alleged remarks struck such a nerve. Women candidates and their supporters aren't simply outraged that he could be so wrong. They're worried

that he might be right." The remarks he denies making have nonetheless "outraged" Cottle and others.

The *Times* more and more openly expresses fears about a possible Sanders' nomination. Op-ed columnist David Leonhardt headlined his January 14 piece, "President Bernie Sanders," and commented, "Sanders has a real shot of winning the Democratic nomination. Only a couple of months after he suffered a mild heart attack, that counts as a surprise." Leonhardt downplays Sanders' socialist credentials, observing that "while he [Sanders] would probably fail to accomplish his grandest goals (again, like Medicare for all), he would also move the country in a positive direction. He might even move it to closer to a center-left ideal than a more moderate candidate like Biden would."

On Thursday, right-wing *Times* columnist David Brooks argued pathetically against the existence of "class war" in "The Bernie Sanders Fallacy." He ridiculed what he described as "Bernie Sanders's class-war Theyism: The billionaires have rigged the economy to benefit themselves and impoverish everyone else." According to Brooks, Sanders is a Bolshevik who believes that "Capitalism is a system of exploitation in which capitalist power completely dominates worker power." Accusing Sanders of embracing such an ABC socialist proposition is all nonsense, but it reveals something about what keeps pundits like Brooks up at night.

The *Times* is determined, as the WSWS has noted more than once, to exclude anything from the 2020 election campaign that might arouse or encourage the outrage of workers and young people. The past year of global mass protest has only deepened and strengthened that determination.

The *Times*, CNN and other elements of the media and political establishment, and behind them powerful financial-corporate interests, don't want Sanders and they don't necessarily want Warren either, who engaged in certain loose talk about taxing the billionaires, before retreating in fright. They want a campaign dominated by race, gender and sexual orientation—not class and not social inequality. The #MeToo-style attack on Sanders reflects both the "style" and the right-wing concerns of these social layers.



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