

Sanders surges in polls amidst attacks from media, Democratic Party establishment

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With the Iowa caucuses Monday formally initiating the Democratic Party presidential selection process, polls indicate a continued rise in support for Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

A *Washington Post* poll found Sanders and former Vice President Biden in a statistical tie in the state, while the *New York Times'* polling indicates that Sanders now leads the field, followed by Biden, Elizabeth Warren, Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar.

A national poll released yesterday by NBC News and the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Sanders' support among Democratic primary voters is at 27 percent, up six percentage points from December, while Biden had fallen to 26 percent, down two percentage points. Warren follows at 15 percent, Michael Bloomberg at 9 percent and Buttigieg at 7 percent.

The growth in support for Sanders comes in the midst of a campaign by top officials within the Democratic Party and from major media outlets against his candidacy. Indeed, several comments in the media have noted with concern that attacks on Sanders from these sources seem to have had the opposite effect than intended.

Following denunciations of Sanders by former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and a scurrilous attack by Warren earlier this month, the *New York Times* took a different tack on Monday. In an article titled "Bernie Sanders and His Internet Army," the *Times* portrayed Sanders' online supporters as violent and sexist "Bernie Bros." The article was virtually devoid of facts, relying instead on Clinton and Obama surrogates in addition to rival campaign advisors for salacious quotes in which Sanders was made responsible for fostering a "toxic culture" in his campaign.

The hatchet job noted that Sanders has 10 million followers on Twitter--more than Warren, Biden, Buttigieg and Klobuchar combined. It added ominously and without substantiation, "A sizable number could be automated

bots or fictitious accounts. Federal prosecutors have detailed coordinated efforts by Russian nationals to interfere in the 2020 elections, with an emphasis on two candidates—Donald J. Trump and Mr. Sanders—whom the Russians hope to bolster while denigrating their opponents."

Thus the *Times* invokes the manufactured claims about massive Russian interference in the 2016 elections to bolster the manufactured claims that Sanders' followers are similarly "manipulating" the elections.

Similar articles have appeared elsewhere. The *Washington Post* wrote that the distribution of images and posts critical of Warren by Sanders used "a popular new mass-posting technique that allows ordinary Americans to operate with rapid-fire speed reminiscent of Russian bots or trolls in 2016."

Media reports indicate that Biden and Klobuchar have discussed collaboration in the Iowa caucuses to counter support for Sanders in precincts where one or the other candidate is not viable. Biden staffers have also floated the possibility of a Klobuchar vice presidential nomination if she were willing to agree to the deal.

The party establishment has a fall-back plan in the form of billionaire former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg. In a revealing interview on MSNBC's Morning Joe, Steven Rattner, a longtime Wall Street insider and head of Obama's wage-cutting Auto Task Force, who manages the investments of Bloomberg's \$58 billion fortune, explained the "centrist fall-back option" that a Bloomberg candidacy presented.

"Biden is either going to win in Iowa and New Hampshire... Or he's not going to do well there, in which case there needs to be a viable centrist alternative in order to stop Bernie Sanders."

Measures have also been taken to establish control over the 2020 Democratic National Convention Platform Committee, which has been packed with figures hostile to

Sanders. Some of the more well known names include Randi Weingarten, president of American Federation of Teachers; John Podesta, former chair of Hillary Clinton's campaign; and former North Dakota Senator Heidi Heitkamp.

The vice chair of the Platform Committee is Jake Sullivan, a fixture in Democratic Party foreign policy circles for over a decade. Sullivan served as national security advisor to Biden and also advised the Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama campaigns.

The hostility to Sanders from dominant sections of the Democratic Party establishment is motivated not so much by Sanders himself, who is a known quantity, having functioned as a loyal adjunct of the Democratic Party for decades, but by the sentiments driving the popular support for his campaign. Sanders has directed his appeal to opposition to social inequality and war, presenting himself as the voice of opposition to Wall Street, the military-industrial complex, the giant corporations and the political establishment, Republican and Democratic.

The Democratic Party does not want to run an election on the basis of these issues, and is fully prepared to scuttle a Sanders campaign by whatever means necessary.

The hostility toward Sanders is all the more significant given the actual content of his program and his role. Sanders is not a socialist and his reform proposals would fit comfortably within the mainstream of bourgeois politics 50 years ago. On foreign policy, Sanders has consistently declared his support for the military actions of the Obama administration and voted for the war in Serbia under Clinton and the war in Afghanistan under Bush.

Sanders has, moreover, remained shamefully silent on the persecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, a principal target of the Democrats' anti-Russia campaign, as well as the jailing of Chelsea Manning.

The campaign against Sanders exposes the bankruptcy of his own policy of "transforming" the Democratic Party, a party of Wall Street and the intelligence agencies, backed by privileged sections of the upper-middle class that form the political base for the politics of racial and gender identity.

From the beginning, the aim of Sanders' "political revolution" has been to channel social and political opposition into the Democratic Party. This is the task he carried out in 2016 when, after losing to Clinton in the Democratic Party primaries—which the Democratic National Committee sought to rig in favor of Clinton—Sanders went all out to convince his supporters to

back Clinton, the widely despised candidate of the banks and the military.

Early in the current presidential race, in February 2019, Sanders explained his intentions clearly at a CNN Town Hall: "The truth is that more and more people are disenchanted with both the Republican and Democratic plank. And especially young people. They are registering as Independents or not affiliated folks. And I think as somebody who was an Independent, we can bring them into the Democratic Party."

The party that Sanders wants to "bring them into" is a party that is thoroughly opposed to any appeal to the issues that are actually animating broad sections of workers and youth. Its opposition to the Trump administration has been based entirely on divisions within the ruling class over foreign policy, reflecting the concerns within dominant sections of the military and intelligence apparatus that Trump has not pursued sufficiently aggressive measures against Russia.

All of this demonstrates that the development of a political movement against social inequality, war and dictatorship—and the Trump administration—must break free of the stranglehold of the Democratic Party, and therefore of the Sanders campaign. It is not to Sanders' maneuvers that workers and youth must direct themselves, but to the development of the class struggle, in the US and internationally.

The growth of social opposition in the working class must be guided by a revolutionary socialist and internationalist perspective and leadership. The Socialist Equality Party is running candidates in the US presidential elections, Joseph Kishore and Norissa Santa Cruz, to fight to build this leadership.

For more information and to get involved in the SEP campaign, visit socialism2020.org.



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