

On eve of Iowa caucuses

Corporate media and Democratic establishment target Sanders

Patrick Martin
3 February 2020

On the eve of the Iowa caucuses, where the first votes will be cast in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, the corporate media and the Democratic Party establishment are mounting increasingly desperate and reactionary attacks on Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

With polls showing Sanders holding a narrow lead over former Vice President Joe Biden and a half dozen other rivals in Iowa, and tied with Biden nationally, the media barrage has become, in all but name, a stop-Sanders campaign.

No less than five separate commentaries, including op-eds and articles purporting to be news reports, appeared in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* alone over the weekend, all of them proclaiming that the nomination of a self-described “democratic socialist” would be a disaster for the Democrats and guarantee the reelection of President Donald Trump.

At the same time, defeated 2016 Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton stepped up her attack on Sanders, while other leading Democratic Party insiders joined the effort. The Democratic National Committee (DNC) announced Friday a rule change in determining eligibility for the debates that would open the door to billionaire Michael Bloomberg, and some DNC members were openly discussing proposed rules changes at the Democratic nominating convention to block Sanders.

The actual outcome of the Iowa caucuses remains highly uncertain, but Sanders continues to draw by far the largest crowds—more than 3,000 for a rally Saturday night in Cedar Rapids—and registers the widest support among youth and working people. One poll showed that among voters under the age of 50, Sanders led with 44 percent. Senator Elizabeth Warren followed with 10 percent, and no other candidate, including Biden, reached double digits.

Sanders was expected to place first in the final *Des Moines Register*/CNN poll, set to be published Saturday night, but the poll was unexpectedly canceled after objections from the campaign of former South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg, which said that some callers in the telephone survey had omitted their candidate’s name.

Perhaps the most open display of media hostility to Sanders came in the Sunday edition of the *Washington Post*—owned by billionaire Jeff Bezos, owner of Amazon and a frequent target of Sanders’ criticism. The front page of the newspaper carried the unsubtle headline, “Sanders and the specter of socialism” The

central thrust of the article was that Trump would make mincemeat of Sanders in the general election by means of red-baiting vilification of “radical socialist Democrats.”

A lengthy commentary inside the newspaper, written by Dartmouth Professor Brendan Nyhan, bemoaned the fact that the Democratic rivals of Sanders weren’t “going negative” on him in the way that Trump inevitably would. Summing up the red-baiting that he claimed the Vermont senator deserved, Nyhan asked:

How many Americans know that Sanders is not just an avowed democratic socialist but a former supporter of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, which wanted to abolish the federal defense budget and supported “solidarity” with revolutionary regimes like Iran’s and Cuba’s? Do people know that he spoke positively about Fidel Castro and the Cuban revolution (“a very profound and very deep revolution”) and even praised the Soviet Union and criticized the United States during a honeymoon trip to the USSR?

Op-ed columnists in the *New York Times* were equally McCarthyite. Timothy Egan argued, under the headline “Bernie Sanders Can’t Win,” that what he called “class loathing” of the billionaires was not a viable electoral appeal. Echoing Nyhan, Egan wrote:

The next month presents the last chance for serious scrutiny of Sanders, who is leading in both Iowa and New Hampshire. After that, Republicans will rip the bark off him. When they’re done, you will not recognize the aging, mouth-frothing, business-destroying commie from Ben and Jerry’s dystopian dairy. Demagoguery is what Republicans do best. And Sanders is ripe for caricature.

Egan’s stablemate at the *Times* Bret Stephens—a neoconservative publicist for US military aggression throughout the Middle East—claimed, under the headline “Bernie’s Angry Bros,” that

online supporters of Sanders were akin to the right-wing mobs assembled by Trump. He wrote that “no other Democratic candidate has so many venomous followers ... The only real analog in US politics today to the Bernie nasties are the Trump nasties. They resemble each other in ways neither side cares to admit.”

On Friday, Hillary Clinton redoubled her attack on Sanders, which began last week in an interview with the *Hollywood Reporter*, in which she indicated she was not committed to supporting the Democratic presidential nominee if Sanders won the contest. She claimed in a much-publicized podcast that many top Sanders supporters had urged support for third-party candidates in 2016 after she won the nomination, although she could give no examples. In fact, all of Sanders’ closest aides followed the senator’s lead in giving groveling support to Clinton, the choice of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, in the general election.

Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller, a Biden endorser, told *Politico* that Sanders as the presidential candidate would be harmful to other Democrats. “I think there’s a concern among some, and I think it’s fairly widespread,” he said, “that if Bernie is the nominee he may well lose and take other Democrats down with him.”

In his final public statement as he withdrew from the presidential race, former Representative John Delaney, a multimillionaire businessman, said he was supportive of candidates like Biden and Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota. “People like Bernie Sanders who are running on throwing the whole US economy out the window and starting from scratch,” he said, “I just think that makes our job so much harder, in terms of beating Trump.”

Former Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley, an also-ran in the contest for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination, issued a vicious diatribe against Sanders that was published in the US edition of the British daily *Guardian*. He described Sanders’ appeal to youth as a “scam” and compared it to Nigerian conmen on the internet.

Echoing Clinton, O’Malley said of Sanders: “He’s a man who never has accomplished anything in public office, who has I believe demonstrated his inability to forge a governing consensus, let alone hold a governing consensus. And I think he’d be an awful choice as our party’s nominee.”

There was even a report by NBC News that former Secretary of State John Kerry, the defeated Democratic presidential candidate in 2004 against George W. Bush, was overheard Sunday on the phone at a Des Moines hotel discussing entering the presidential race himself because of “the possibility of Bernie Sanders taking down the Democratic Party—down whole.”

Kerry reportedly expressed regret that he would have to resign from the board of Bank of America and give up lucrative paid speeches, but could expect wealthy donors to provide backing because they “now have the reality of Bernie.”

What really alarms the Democratic Party establishment and the corporate media is not the prospect that Sanders might lead the party to defeat, but that his capture of the nomination, would contribute—despite the Vermont senator’s own efforts—to a radicalization of American working people and youth that Sanders would not be able to contain.

The response of Sanders himself to this deluge of negative attacks is revealing.

At a Sanders rally Friday night, Representative Rashida Tlaib of Michigan responded to Clinton’s attack by booing the mention of her name. By the next day, Tlaib had been compelled to issue a statement of regret and she was left off the speakers list at the next Sanders rally.

The candidate himself, as one report described it, “went out of his way to be deferential to his opponents,” and reiterated that he would support whoever won the Democratic nomination contest.

“Certainly, I hope that we’re going to win,” Sanders said, “but if we do not win, we will support the winner and I know that every other candidate will do the same. We are united in understanding that we must defeat Donald Trump.”

Despite Sanders’ claims, however, the Democratic establishment is in no way reconciled to the prospect of a Sanders nomination. The rule change on eligibility for future debates announced Friday by the DNC drops the requirement that candidates have a minimum number of contributors, an action that would allow billionaire Michael Bloomberg, who has only one contributor, himself, to qualify. Sanders’ campaign adviser Jeff Weaver denounced the move, saying, “Now, at this late hour, to change the rules to accommodate a billionaire who wants to buy his way into the party would be unconscionable.”

There was a report in *Politico* that members of the DNC have begun privately discussing a change in the convention rules to allow so-called super-delegates—elected officials and members of the DNC—to vote on the first ballot of the presidential nomination. Under current rules, they have no vote on the first ballot, which is reserved to delegates chosen in primaries and caucuses, and can vote only if no candidate has an initial majority and the contest goes to a second ballot. Such a change would be transparently aimed at blocking a first-ballot win by Sanders.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact