

# The political lessons of Sanders' Super Tuesday defeat

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The massive setback suffered by the Bernie Sanders campaign as a result of former Vice President Joe Biden's victory in 10 of the 14 states casting votes on Super Tuesday contains harsh and inescapable lessons for all those who have been led to believe that the capitalist Democratic Party can be transformed into an instrument of socialist politics. The bankruptcy of this opportunist strategy—which has been the essential premise of the Sanders campaign and of his supporters in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and other pseudo-left organizations—has been totally exposed by the outcome of the primary elections.

In the week leading up to Super Tuesday, the same party that Sanders claims can be captured for socialism mobilized its party apparatus to resuscitate the right-wing campaign of the semi-senile ex-vice president, whose career as a corrupt Democratic Party politician spans more than four decades.

The Democratic Party is the oldest capitalist political party in the world. Its existence stretches back to 1828, and in the course of its long history, it has perfected the art of deflecting popular opposition to inequality through the skilled combination of demagoguery and deceit.

It is the party of Andrew Jackson, the forced removal of the Native Americans, southern secession, Jim Crow segregation, Chinese exclusion, the Palmer Raids and the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Democratic Party is the graveyard of social movements. It disarmed the Populist movement through William Jennings Bryan and suffocated the industrial rebellions of the 1930s through Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the popular front and the American Federation of Labor. It disarmed protests against inequality and the wars in Vietnam and Iraq and subsumed opposition into “left” primary campaigns only to select a nominee each more right-wing than the last for 40 years. This was repeated in 2016, when Sanders told his 13 million

supporters to vote for Hillary Clinton. It is now being repeated again in 2020.

The second lesson from Super Tuesday is that the racial politics actively promoted by the pseudo-left for decades has far-reaching, right-wing consequences. Race was the principal weapon used by the Democratic Party against Sanders last week.

The Democratic Party mobilized the corrupt representatives of the African-American bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie to proclaim that Joe Biden represents the genuine voice of “black America.” From James Clyburn to Al Sharpton, a litany of African-American politicians explicitly stated that racial solidarity—not class—is fundamental.

The Democratic Party is well practiced in the use of race to manipulate social discontentment and suppress class grievances behind its own reactionary aims. It is ironic that the contemporary Democratic Party boosted Biden as a defender of African-Americans in precisely the same states where it oversaw segregation some fifty years ago. It is doubly ironic that Biden just last year praised segregationist senators James Eastland and Herman Talmadge as examples of political “civility” and is responsible for supporting “tough-on-crime” laws that incarcerated hundreds of thousands of black people in the past quarter-century.

Biden won overwhelmingly among older African-Americans in the South, dominating areas with high proportions of regular churchgoers. In North Carolina, where 10 percent of the electorate were black voters over the age of 60, Biden won 66 percent to Sanders' 11 percent. Younger black voters in the South, who are far less conservative than their parents and grandparents, however, were more likely to support Sanders, though youth turnout was down nationally compared with 2016.

Among all Super Tuesday states, Biden fared best among voters who said “race relations” was the most

important issue, defeating Sanders 48 to 22 percent. Sanders dominated among voters who cited “social inequality,” leading Biden 35 to 28 percent.

A similar phenomenon took place among affluent women voters, demonstrating the impact of right-wing feminism. Outside of the South, Sanders received his lowest level of support from white women with college degrees, winning just 20 percent of the vote from this demographic in Massachusetts, 25 percent in California and 18 percent in Minnesota.

The results demonstrate the impossibility of combining identity politics with the struggle for socialism. The former is based on division and the struggle for privilege. The latter is rooted in the fight to unite the working class of the world across races, ethnicities and backgrounds.

The third lesson from Tuesday’s election is that Sanders’ Democratic Party politics produced a decline in youth voter turnout in 2020 versus 2016. This shows that contrary to Sanders’ self-proclaimed ability to mobilize young voters, many young people are looking for far more radical solutions than the Democratic Party has to offer.

Three-and-a-half months remain before the Democratic convention in July. It may be the case that the ruling class decides Sanders has a role to play in the 2020 election.

But even as these lines are read, readers can be sure Sanders is already in discussions with the Democratic Party to determine how he can best serve the party in November. Sanders has withheld serious criticism of Biden after Tuesday’s election and yesterday began running advertisements praising the right-wing Obama administration.

Sanders’ California campaign co-chair Ro Khanna announced that Sanders would be toning down calls for “political revolution.” *Politico* reported that Khanna said Sanders “would appeal more to older voters and mainstream Democrats.” Sanders has already pledged to support whichever right-wing candidate wins the nomination. Just as in 2016, this will only end in tears for Sanders’ supporters.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is running Joseph Kishore and Norissa Santa Cruz for president and vice president. Our intervention is based on the fight to break the stranglehold of the capitalist parties on the working class in the US and internationally.

The experience of Super Tuesday has powerfully vindicated the analysis of the *World Socialist Web Site*. In a February 20, 2019 statement titled “Bernie Sanders announces 2020 presidential campaign,” the WSWS

wrote:

The fundamental fraud promoted by Sanders, along with individuals such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, is that the Democratic Party can be pushed to the left and made a force for progressive change. Articulating this political fiction, *Jacobin* editor and leading Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Bhaskar Sunkara proclaimed in a column for the *Guardian* newspaper on Tuesday that “Sanders started a revolution in 2016. In 2020, he can finish it...”

The Democrats have relentlessly promoted identity politics, including through the #MeToo witch hunt, which serves to divide the working class while undermining basic democratic rights such as due process and the presumption of innocence. Sanders’ mere association with opposition to economic inequality has brought rebukes from within his own party, which intends, as in 2016, to make racial, gender and sexual politics the basis for a right-wing campaign directed at mobilizing privileged sections of the upper-middle class behind Wall Street and the military.

Tuesday’s events confirm this analysis.

Kishore and Santa Cruz are the only candidates fighting to mobilize the working class *independently of* the Democratic Party. The SEP campaign is spearheading the fight to educate the working class and to convince workers and young people that they can unlock their immense social power only by unchaining themselves from the Democratic Party, striving for political independence and entering into international struggle against the entire capitalist system. We urge our readers to follow and become active in our campaign and take the fight for independent socialist politics into the working class on a world scale.



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