

Sanders begins campaign to drag his supporters behind Biden

Patrick Martin
12 March 2020

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders addressed the national media Wednesday afternoon, appearing in public for the first time since his devastating defeat in Tuesday's primaries.

His remarks were the beginning of an effort by Sanders to corral workers and young people behind the right-wing campaign that former Vice President Joe Biden will wage in the general election, including suggestions to Biden about the type of "left" noises he needs to make in order to pull the wool over the eyes of Sanders' own supporters.

The appearance was a remarkable demonstration of Sanders' prostration before the Democratic Party, a political instrument of the billionaires, which he has demagogically criticized in his two campaigns for the presidency.

He began and ended his remarks by declaring that nothing was more important than defeating Donald Trump in the presidential election, a formula whose meaning is clear: all-out support for the presumptive Democratic Party nominee, former Vice President Biden.

Sanders suppressed any criticism of the Democratic frontrunner in his own remarks, while repeatedly referring to him as "my friend." He said nothing about Biden's vote for the war in Iraq, or his support for the banks against consumer protection laws, or his role in writing repressive laws that led to the mass incarceration of African Americans.

While not officially conceding, Sanders made no reference to any future primary contests, including those in Florida, Ohio, Illinois and Arizona next Tuesday, which will select 577 delegates to the Democratic national convention. Instead, he focused entirely on Sunday's televised debate in Phoenix, Arizona, where he and Biden are set to be the sole

candidates on the stage under rules set by the Democratic National Committee.

Sanders claimed that exit polls of primary voters showed they supported his policies on issues like health care, student loan debt and the environment, but rejected him as a candidate. "While our campaign has won the ideological debate, we are losing the debate over electability," he said. He added that he disagreed that Biden was more likely to defeat Trump, but continued, "that is what millions of Democrats and independents today believe."

It would be more accurate, however, to say that the Democratic Party leadership, having decided on Biden as its preferred candidate, has carried out political blackmail against Sanders' supporters, telling them, in effect, that if Sanders is nominated, the party will sabotage his campaign and ensure a sweeping Trump victory.

This campaign began in South Carolina, where Representative James Clyburn and the black Democratic establishment, a reactionary upper middle class layer, engineered a massive victory for Biden, using racial appeals to win support among black voters. After Biden won 10 of 14 contests on Super Tuesday (March 3), he went on to win four of the five on March 10, while taking a narrow lead in Washington state, the sixth contest. In nearly every contest, the African-American vote provided Biden's margin of victory, or turned a narrow win into a landslide.

Sanders is capitulating to the pressure from the Democratic Party leaders and even making himself their instrument. He spoke, not as a political opponent of Biden's, but as an adviser, giving the future nominee tips on the best way to swindle Sanders' own supporters, and the working class as a whole, with false promises on universal access to health care, a reduction

in student loan debt, measures to curb police violence, and so on.

That is why he couched his remarks as a challenge to Biden to address various issues at Sunday's debate in Arizona, which will be conducted without a live audience because of the coronavirus emergency. He was clearly concerned that some Democratic Party power brokers, like Clyburn, might be successful in their efforts to have the debate canceled outright on the grounds that Biden is now the de facto nominee.

This would disrupt his efforts to convince his own supporters that the Democratic Party remains the political avenue to which they must be confined. As one media commentator explained the likely scenario, Sanders' goal is to lay out a number of supposed political contrasts with Biden in the debate, then, when Biden sweeps the March 17 primaries, tell his supporters that the voters have chosen Biden's right-wing program and everyone must get behind it in the name of unity against Trump.

Sanders pointed out to the party leadership that he has the support of a large majority of younger voters, not just those in their 20s, but 30- and 40-year-olds as well. "Today I say to the Democratic establishment, in order to win in the future you need to win the voters who represent the future of our country and you must speak to the issues of concern to them. You cannot simply be satisfied by winning the votes of people who are older."

Significantly, Sanders made no mention of foreign policy in his remarks, which previewed the issues he will raise in Sunday's debates. He will not attack Biden for his support for the war in Iraq, and for the Obama-Biden administration's intervention in Syria, Yemen, Libya, Ukraine and other countries laid waste by American imperialism.

This political intervention is all the more important under conditions where Biden is setting an explicitly right-wing course for the general election campaign. As the *New York Times* put it in its summary of the Democratic nomination contest:

In a sense, Mr. Biden is offering something of a 2016 do-over, coated in patriotism and wishful thinking: Remove Mr. Trump. Prove that the country does not represent his values. And let the work of repair begin, dooming the

45th president to history's amnesia, eventually...

It is a pitch that shares some elements with Mrs. Clinton's in 2016, centered often on Mr. Trump's character and behavior. Mr. Biden and his team seem convinced that the reality of Mr. Trump's tenure will yield a different outcome this time ...

On foreign policy, one line in Biden's brief victory speech on Tuesday night should be considered, when he pledged to "make clear to our adversaries that we will stand fast at restoring world order. That is the American responsibility."

In other words, a Biden administration would represent an effort to restore US imperialism's world position through NATO, the US-Japan alliance and other efforts to mobilize support against Russia, China and other targets of Washington. Sanders' statement Wednesday amounts to his enlisting in this reactionary, war-mongering campaign.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact