

# The end of Sanders' campaign deepens crisis in Democratic Socialists of America

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In the aftermath of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders' abandonment of his campaign, many members and supporters of the Democratic Socialists of America now see through the DSA's cynical and duplicitous role as an accomplice of the Democratic Party.

For years, even preceding the 2016 election, the DSA trumpeted Sanders as the fearless leader of a "political revolution" that would transform the Democratic Party into an instrument of far-reaching social change.

But Sanders has slunk out of the fight for the nomination in a manner that invites contempt. There was nothing of an old fighter's last hurrah. The aged senator did not even offer his supporters a last harrumph. Rather, he meekly accepted the verdict of the Democratic Party machine and sang the praises of his "old friend" Joe Biden. And so, Sanders' political revolution ended not with a final roar of defiance, but with a whimper of unctuous flattery.

With anger building among a substantial number of disillusioned and disgusted DSA members over the prospect of endorsing a Biden candidacy, *Jacobin*, a journal affiliated with the DSA, held an online forum last Wednesday titled "What Bernie accomplished and where to go next." It featured *Jacobin* founder Bhaskar Sunkara, contributors Michael Brooks, Meagan Day and Matt Karp, as well as Amber Frost of Chapo Trap House.

The primary purpose of the forum was to answer the question "Where to go next?" with a definitive: "Nowhere, stay in the Democratic Party." No speaker at Wednesday's forum challenged the article published in *Jacobin* Wednesday morning by Eric Blanc that stated, "We're not yet strong enough to stop using the Democratic ballot line any time soon."

During the forum, Sunkara asserted: "*I'm not talking about a new socialist party or anything.*"

Despite the unrelenting opposition of the Democratic Party to Sanders' candidacy, *Jacobin* is relying on increasingly stretched arguments as to why those who consider themselves socialist should stay within this reactionary organization.

"We shouldn't allow ourselves to draw too simple of a conclusion that the institution of the Democratic Party was too smart for us or too strong for us," argued Day. To those who are upset over Sanders' defeat, Day suggested, "work on some electoral campaign or something like that."

Amber Frost stated her agreement with Day and added, "There is a certain amount of luck, and you should definitely analyze your mistakes, but... you can't actually overestimate the Democratic machine... Clearly, they are not very confident, they did get kind of lucky and we did get kind of unlucky."

These statements are desperate attempts to resuscitate the illusion that the Democratic Party can still be reformed from within. If Sanders merely suffered from "bad luck" in 2016 and 2020, why not try again in 2024? And what about the past century of failed efforts at reforming the Democratic Party? According to the DSA, everyone from William Jennings Bryan to Jesse Jackson apparently suffered from just a bad roll of the dice.

More than any past event, the efforts of the DSA and *Jacobin* to justify remaining in the Democratic Party were aimed at counteracting the growing influence of the *World Socialist Web Site* and Socialist Equality Party, whose criticism of and opposition to the Sanders' campaign are well known to DSA members.

Day worriedly noted that "there's a lot of chatter online right now about where [discontented Sanders supporters] will go. People are looking for a place to go next." Later in the program, she elaborated: "We hear a

lot of grumblings” from those “who tell us that Bernie Sanders is not a socialist and they would like to disabuse us of that notion. This is a running theme, and it’s obviously kind of obnoxious, because whatever is in Bernie’s heart this is obviously the exact way that a socialist should behave in the beating heart of global capitalism.”

Day appealed to “non-sectarian socialists” to unite, while Sunkara explained the futility of breaking with the Democratic Party in opposition to “good sectarians” who “know they are small and marginal.” Frost similarly noted concern over “smug gloating from the armchair revolutionaries.”

When Sunkara and company refer to “sectarians,” they mean individuals who are not cynical, opportunist agents of the Democratic Party. The DSA uses the term “sectarian” as an epithet against Marxists who are politically hostile to and independent of the Democratic Party.

Leon Trotsky wrote in 1935:

Reformists and centrists readily seize upon every occasion to point a finger at our ‘sectarianism;’ and most of the time, they have in mind not our weak but our strong side: our serious attitude toward theory; our effort to plumb every political situation to the bottom, and to advance clear-cut slogans; our hostility to ‘easy’ and ‘comfortable’ decisions which deliver from cares today, but prepare a catastrophe on the morrow. Coming from opportunists, the accusation of sectarianism is most often a compliment.

Trotsky was writing under conditions in which the Left Opposition faced a relatively smaller readership compared with the Social Democratic and Stalinist parties. In recent months, however, the *World Socialist Web Site’s* readership has grown to far exceed that of *Jacobin*, both worldwide and in the United States.

Despite significant institutional support and free advertising in the bourgeois press, *Jacobin* has suffered a substantial decline in readership, indicating a growing revulsion over its opportunist politics among healthier elements among DSA supporters. Sunkara knows his

claim that the WSWS is “small and marginal” is false.

*Jacobin* and the DSA are aware of the critical role they play as a facilitators of Democratic Party politics.

The *Washington Post* recently referenced Vermont Democratic Congressman and Sanders confidant Peter Welch, stating that Welch “sees Sanders as central to Biden’s chances of winning support from a ‘progressive left who don’t particularly support the Democratic Party as an institution but whom we need to get out to vote.’”

The *Post* also cited Washington Democratic Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, noting, “Sanders’ greatest contribution may involve demonstrating the importance of what she called ‘inside/outside politics.’”

Genuine socialism is based on the struggle to develop a movement of the working class that is organizationally *outside* of and consciously hostile to all political parties of the capitalist class. Only in this way is the working class capable of realizing and unleashing its social power.



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