

Sanders tells supporters: It is “irresponsible” not to campaign for Biden

Joseph Kishore—SEP candidate for US president
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In the days after formally ending his campaign and endorsing Joe Biden, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders has intensified his efforts to drag his supporters into backing the right-wing standard bearer of the Democratic Party establishment.

In an interview with the Associated Press published on Tuesday, Sanders slandered as “irresponsible” any of his supporters who do not campaign for Biden. “Do we be as active as we can in electing Joe Biden and doing everything we can to move Joe and his campaign in a more progressive direction?” he asked. “Or do we choose to sit out and allow the most dangerous president in modern American history to get reelected?”

There is widespread anger and opposition among workers and youth to Sanders’ craven capitulation to Biden in a livestreamed event on Monday. Sanders’ response is to declare: “I believe that it’s irresponsible for anybody to say, ‘Well, I disagree with Joe Biden—I disagree with Joe Biden!’—and therefore I’m not going to be involved.”

As he did in 2016, but now under much more explosive social and political conditions, Sanders is exchanging his “political revolution against the establishment” for the thin gruel of “lesser evil” politics.

A few points in reply to Senator Sanders.

First, support for Biden means support for the social interests that he represents and the program that he is advancing. Biden, who was first elected to the US Senate from the state of Delaware in 1972, has spent nearly four decades as a faithful servant of the ruling class. He has an extensive record of support for war, austerity, capital punishment, and mass incarceration.

The present catastrophe caused by the coronavirus pandemic is the consequence of policies pursued by the ruling class and its representatives, Democratic and Republican alike, for decades, with Biden playing a critical role. Endless resources have been funneled into the stock markets and the military, while social infrastructure has been dismantled and inequality driven to record highs.

As a member and then chairman of the Senate Foreign

Relations Committee, Biden was one of the principal proponents of the US bombing of Yugoslavia (1999) under Clinton, and the US invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) under Bush. He voted for the Patriot Act and the expansion of illegal domestic spying after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, boasting that the legislation was modeled off a bill he had drafted in 1995.

Biden also voted for the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act in 1999, a milestone in the deregulation of the banks, vastly increasing the ability of giant financial institutions to engage in speculation and plunder. In 2005, Biden aggressively campaigned for the overhaul of consumer bankruptcy laws, making it much harder for working class families to escape debt burdens.

As vice president under Obama, Biden oversaw the bailout of the banks in 2008-09 as well as the wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen. This was in addition to the continued occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and the vast expansion of drone assassinations as an instrument of US foreign policy.

Amidst all of this, nothing was done to prepare for a pandemic, despite repeated warnings from scientists and epidemiologists. The Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are responsible for the destruction of health care infrastructure and the criminal lack of stockpiles of ventilators, face masks and other critical equipment.

Second, Sanders would like everyone to forget what happened in 2016 and after. The channeling of all opposition behind Clinton, the widely despised candidate of Wall Street, provided Trump with the opportunity to posture as the only candidate opposed to the status quo. Sanders played a critical role in this by enthusiastically campaigning for Clinton, as he will now do for Biden.

Following Trump’s election, the Democrats’ initial response was to pledge to collaborate with Trump on key elements of ruling class policy. Obama declared that the contest was an “intramural scrimmage” between two sides on the same team. Sanders himself said that he was “prepared to work with” Trump on economic policy.

And for the past three and a half years, the Democrats have sought to channel all opposition to Trump behind the anti-Russia campaign, declaring that the main threat to the American people was Vladimir Putin.

As for Sanders' claim that he is going to move the Democratic Party and the Biden campaign in "a more progressive direction," this is simply an exercise in cover-up—putting lipstick on a pig.

Sanders is urging his followers to continue to vote for him in primaries in order to help him amass delegates for the Democratic Party convention to create "leverage" to "shape the party platform." Even within the framework of electoral politics, this argument is absurd. What "leverage" would Sanders have given that he has already pledged his unconditional allegiance to Biden and his determination to support him in whatever way possible?

More importantly, there are no significant differences between Sanders' program and Biden's. As Sanders was at pains to stress in his endorsement video, the two disagree only "a little."

Sanders' subservience to the interests of the ruling class was demonstrated in his vote for the grossly misnamed "CARES Act," the massive handout to the rich rammed through Congress in late March with a unanimous vote in the Senate. The act provides hundreds of billions of dollars in bailouts to corporations and finances the trillions of dollars that have been handed over to Wall Street.

Having engaged in plunder and thievery on an unprecedented scale, the ruling class is now campaigning for a rapid return to work, a campaign to which Biden recently added his support.

Sanders—along with Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others—is playing an auxiliary role as powerful factions of the ruling class coalesce behind a Biden campaign.

The *Washington Post* published an editorial yesterday, "The anti-Trump coalition is forming. The left and right must join," arguing that now that Biden has obtained the support of Sanders, he should work on winning over "those further right" to join as well. The newspaper counseled Biden not to make too many empty gestures to Sanders supporters in order to "leave space on his right for patriotic Republicans," including "those who care about a strong national defense."

Right-wing neo-conservative Trump critic Max Boot published an opinion piece in the *Post* earlier this week titled "Republicans who don't like Trump have no excuses: Endorse Biden." Boot said that he would have voted for Sanders, "but a lot of my fellow former Republicans wouldn't have. Now that Joe Biden is going to be the Democratic nominee, the choice is easy."

Boot went on to urge top Republicans who have been critical of Trump's foreign policy to join in the "coalition," including: former president George W. Bush; former vice president Dick Cheney; former Trump defense secretary Jim Mattis; and former Trump homeland security secretary H.R. McMaster.

The Democratic Party, which did everything it could to undermine the Sanders campaign as the Vermont senator was winning early caucuses and primaries, is now embracing him. The *New York Times* notes in an article published yesterday, "The Democratic Establishment Suddenly Loves Bernie Sanders." It states, "When he was winning primaries, many in the Democratic Party were wary of the Vermont senator. Now, he's a friend, chess-playing companion and [in the words of Obama] 'American original.'"

The Democratic Party was in fact never concerned about Sanders. He is a known quantity. After channeling opposition behind Clinton in 2016, he was rewarded with a position in the Democratic Party leadership caucus in the US Senate. Now, he is no doubt angling for a position in an administration led by Biden, or whatever right-wing candidate the Democrats end up choosing.

What has concerned the ruling class, rather, is the social anger of workers and youth that found a temporary and distorted expression in support for the Sanders campaign, under the mistaken belief that he represented opposition to inequality and capitalism.

This social anger has not gone away, whatever Sanders and the Democrats might hope. Amidst the expanding health care, economic and social crisis brought on by the ruling class' response to the coronavirus pandemic, it must and will find a genuinely socialist and revolutionary form.



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