

Bernie Sanders' interview with the Washington Post: The thin gruel of Democratic Party politics

Genevieve Leigh
12 May 2020

On Monday, Senator Bernie Sanders gave an online interview with *Washington Post* reporter Robert Costa. Costa posed a broad range of questions, including on foreign policy, Joe Biden's vice presidential candidate and cabinet appointments, and the way forward for Sanders' supporters in the 2020 elections.

Sanders repeated his standard calls for Medicare for All and "an economy that works for everyone," while regurgitating the official Democratic Party line on nearly every question and reaffirming his uncritical support for Biden.

Sanders' rhetoric was markedly toned down compared to his presidential campaign. He largely glossed over the unfolding health and economic catastrophe facing millions of workers amid the global COVID-19 pandemic, and made no mention of the corporate bailouts for which he has voted in the Senate.

The purpose of the event, as with all of Sanders' appearances since ending his campaign, was to tamp down the expectations of his supporters and browbeat them into supporting Biden and the Democratic Party.

In the course of the interview, Sanders solidarized himself with the anti-China campaign being whipped up by both the Democrats and the Republicans. He stated that "in terms of the coronavirus," China's record was "very, very problematic, to say the least," and "very wrong." These comments follow a viciously right-wing campaign ad released by Biden in late April in which Biden attacks Trump for "rolling over" to Chinese President Xi and covering up his government's supposed responsibility for allowing the virus to spread to the United States and other countries.

The Biden ad is a clear indication that the Democratic Party, should it win the election in November, will use the worsening health crisis to escalate military tensions with

China. The anti-China narrative is aimed at diverting attention away from the criminally negligent response of the Trump administration and the political establishment as a whole to the coronavirus outbreak.

From the outset, the American ruling class and its political servants were focused on the threat the virus posed not to the American people, but to the stock market. Once the multi-trillion-dollar bailout dubbed the CARES Act was enacted in late March, stanching the market plunge and triggering a record surge over the past six weeks, the official drive began to force workers back to work without any protection from the virus. Any pretense of a coordinated effort to contain the pandemic was largely dropped.

Sanders' support for the concocted anti-China narrative, which has no basis in fact, is highly significant though unsurprising. Sanders has a long record of support for US imperialism in general and for economic nationalism and trade war against China in particular. Throughout his presidential bid, he alternated between overtures of support for Trump's trade war measures with China and attacks on Trump and even fellow Democrats for not committing sufficiently to a conflict with China.

There is no doubt that should Biden win the election, Sanders would play a critical role in whipping up "left" support for a military escalation against China.

The second notable aspect of the interview was Sanders' comments on what "progressive" measures his supporters should expect from a Biden presidency. Costa asked him about his plan to "pressure" Biden on health care "to pursue more than a private option." After first reassuring Costa that he was "strongly supporting Joe," he gave a sense of what he envisioned in terms of "moving Biden to the left" on health care.

"Medicare for All is the direction we have to go," he

said. “I am going to do my best to move Joe in that direction... I think one way we can move in that direction is to lower the age for Medicare eligibility from 65 down to 55.” Sanders concluded by saying he hoped Biden would move “in that direction.”

This mild reform, which has yet to be adopted by the Biden campaign, hardly amounts even to a pretense of a “progressive” policy. To put this proposal in perspective, in 2016 Hillary Clinton was floating a proposal to lower the Medicare age to 50.

In other words, Sanders’ version of a “successful” campaign to pull Joe Biden to the left consists of a “progressive” concession that is even more timid than what the Democratic Party nominee proposed four years ago. And, as Sanders well knows, there is no chance that an administration headed by the veteran Democratic Party operative and vice president in an administration that rejected even the fig leaf of a “public option” as part of its signature pro-market, cost-cutting Affordable Care Act would enact such a measure.

On the contrary, the massive government debt incurred in the corporate bailout being carried out under the cover of the pandemic crisis will inevitably be imposed on the backs of the working class in the form of brutal cuts in health care and other essential services, whichever party wins in November. This is a matter of fundamental class policy for the corporate-financial oligarchy that controls both parties.

In the course of the interview, Sanders sought to obscure his rightward course by repeating some of his boilerplate demagogic slogans. At one point he declared that now is the time to “tell the billionaire class that this economy is going to change and it cannot be based on greed and selfishness.” After capitulating in 2016 to the right-wing Clinton and doing the same in 2020 to the right-wing Biden—under conditions of a far greater crisis and a growing movement of opposition and support for socialism in the working class both in the US and internationally—such hollow words from the windbag Sanders are wearing extremely thin.

It is worth reviewing Sanders’ political trajectory since the onset of the pandemic. He ended his campaign and called for “unity” behind Biden at exactly the moment when the coronavirus began exposing before millions the class character of the Democratic Party and the irreconcilable conflict between the interests of the working class and the ruling class.

His last act before suspending his campaign was to vote for the bailout of Wall Street and the corporations that

passed with the unanimous support of Republicans and Democrats in the Senate. Since then he has pledged his full support for “his good friend” Joe. He has not placed a single demand on the Biden campaign or put forward any significant criticism of his policies.

When Costa asked Sanders to weigh in on who would be best as Biden’s running mate and which “progressive” politicians Sanders would encourage Biden to appoint to his cabinet, Sanders refused to answer. He justified this by saying that the vice presidential choice was a “personal and not ideological one.” In regards to the cabinet positions, he referred Costa to the Democratic Party Progressive Caucus website.

The culmination of the “Sanders experience,” and, in particular, his actions throughout the pandemic, have revealed the absolute bankruptcy of his so-called “political revolution.” More fundamentally, it has exposed once again the futility of the strategy of reforming the Democratic Party peddled by Sanders and the organizations in his orbit, such as the Democratic Socialists of America. In the end, his campaign does not even rise to the level of a movement for significant reform.

There are no doubt many sincere workers and youth who are increasingly disgusted by what Sanders has done and are looking for a more radical and genuinely anti-capitalist alternative.

The only campaign that is seeking to develop a real socialist movement is the campaign of the Socialist Equality Party and its candidates for president and vice president, Joseph Kishore and Norissa Santa Cruz. The SEP campaign does not seek to pressure the Democratic Party or reform the capitalist system. It seeks rather to build a movement of the working class independent of the capitalist parties to put an end to capitalism. It fights for the radical, socialist restructuring of the economy on the basis of social equality and the satisfaction of the needs of the working population, rather than the insatiable greed of the corporate-financial aristocracy.

We call on all workers and young people to join this campaign and support this fight.

To support and get involved in the SEP election campaign, visit [socialism 2020.org](http://socialism2020.org).



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact