

Jacobin Magazine on the selection of Kamala Harris: Stick with the Democrats!

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15 August 2020

In response to the selection of Kamala Harris to be Joe Biden's running mate in the 2020 elections, *Jacobin* magazine is doubling down on its message to workers and youth: Stay the course!

In an article titled "Joe Biden Has Found His Neoliberal Match in Kamala Harris," posted shortly after the announcement was made, author Branko Marcetic has much to say about Harris' right-wing record. "Even in a party that embraced Biden- and Clinton-style tough-on-crime policies, Harris stands out for her cruelty," Marcetic writes. And later, "Harris's callousness toward the poor and powerless has been matched only by her sympathy for the rich and powerful."

Marcetic adds: "Watching Harris cackling like a cartoon villain about prosecuting parents of truant school kids is one of the more bone-chilling things you're likely to see in politics." Indeed, this is true. Harris is a despicable figure.

However, for Marcetic such statements are only preliminary to reasserting the inevitable conclusion to which *Jacobin* and its co-thinkers in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) always arrive: promoting the lie that with enough pressure, these figures can be pushed to the left.

He writes near the end, "Both Harris, and to a lesser extent, Biden, have shown a limited but encouraging propensity to gesture leftward under pressure. The current unprecedented conditions, coupled with the still small but growing power of the US left, mean the next four years aren't necessarily doomed to be a repeat of the Obama years."

Let us pass over without comment the fact that Marcetic and his co-thinkers said the same thing about Obama before he came to office, and that the Marcetics of the past said the same thing about countless Obamas, Bidens and Harrises of yesteryear.

But we might be permitted to ask: Is there any figure the Democrats could nominate that *Jacobin* and the DSA would not claim could "gesture [!] leftward under pressure"? If they selected Genghis Khan, *Jacobin* would perhaps find something positive to say about the role he played in uniting the tribes of Northeast Asia. Or perhaps Donald Trump himself, (who, it should be noted, donated to Harris' campaign in 2016), if he were to jump political ship again and run on the Democratic ticket, would be discovered to have some saving grace.

Political gymnastics in the service of the Democratic Party

The aim of organizations like *Jacobin* and the DSA is always to maintain the political domination of the Democratic Party. Whether it is the idea that the Democratic Party is the "lesser evil," advocating

for its reform, or "pressuring" its representatives to the left, the goal is the same: to block what they fear the most—an independent working class mobilization.

As the Democratic Party moves further to the right, the task of these figures becomes all the more challenging. They must attempt to maintain their political credibility among young people who are disillusioned with the Democratic Party while at the same time keeping workers and youth tied hand and foot to the political establishment. They are constantly calibrating their message based on what is necessary to sell it.

Marcetic himself, for example, took a very different attitude toward Harris' record just three years ago when she was first considering her presidential run.

In his article: "The two faces of Kamala Harris," Marcetic gave a glowing review of Harris' tenure before pointing out some more "problematic" aspects of her career.

He wrote at the time: "It's undoubtable that there are many things in Harris' history to be encouraged by, from her pursuit of corporate polluters and her implementation of policies to prevent recidivism in the past, to her more recent steadfast opposition to the Trump administration and her support of progressive legislation in the Senate."

Marcetic then returned to the central theme: "Harris has shown the capacity to be moved leftwards when pressured by activism. This is no small thing."

It is notable that *Jacobin* chose to send this earlier more glowing assessment of Harris out to its email list, rather than Marcetic's most recent piece. Perhaps it felt Marcetic's more recent piece was a little frank in its assessment.

Marcetic, however, has much experience in such dirty tactics. One of the crudest expressions of this can be found in relation to his assessment of Biden. He penned a recent article headlined, "I literally wrote the case against Joe Biden. But I've got some free advice for him." The article urged Biden to adopt a "left" program in order to win the support of young people.

"If Biden and Democrats of his generation," Marcetic writes, "could cravenly sell out their principles for political expediency and pretend to be something they're not once, they can do it again, only for the good. For the first time in a long time, the direction things are heading mean the politically expedient thing is also *the right thing* to do."

Marcetic hopes that workers and youth will believe that Biden, a right-wing standard-bearer of the Democratic Party for 50 years, can be counted on to change course "for the better" because Biden once made a politically calculated shift (to the right) over four decades ago.

These figures must take workers and youth for fools. *Jacobin* and

the DSA will employ any and every dirty and unprincipled maneuver in the book. Anything to prevent the independent mobilization of the working class.

Bernie Sanders' 2020 presidential run: the lessons

The clearest refutation of the basic claim of *Jacobin* and the DSA that popular pressure from below can transform the Democratic Party into an instrument of progressive change—and even socialism—is the political trajectory of Bernie Sanders, the candidate whom they endlessly promoted as the “best shot” for change.

Only last winter, *Jacobin* published an edition of its magazine under the headline, “I, President of the United States and How I Ended Poverty: A True Story of the Future,” with Sanders on the cover. A more recent issue published shortly before Sanders declared his campaign over bemoaned, “If the movement coalescing behind Sanders fails to win this time, there’s no guarantee it can be resuscitated under a new banner. In fact, it’s just as likely that we’ll be left adrift for years, if not decades.”

But as Marcetic’s column makes clear, *Jacobin* is perfectly willing to take up the tattered and filthy banner of “Biden/Harris” with the appropriately worded reservations to cover their nakedness.

Over the last four months, as the country has faced the worst health, economic, political and social crisis in its history, Sanders completed his abandonment of the so-called “political revolution” and embraced Joe Biden.

It should come as no surprise that after Biden’s announcement that Harris would be his vice presidential pick, Sanders quickly offered his endorsement, tweeting, “Congratulations to @KamalaHarris, who will make history as our next Vice President. She understands what it takes to stand up for working people, fight for health care for all, and take down the most corrupt administration in history. Let’s get to work and win.”

The last six months of the Sanders campaign have been an object lesson in Democratic Party politics. The last act of the Sanders campaign was the senator’s vote for the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act on March 25, which he hailed on the Senate floor as a boon to workers. In reality, the bill was a boondoggle for corporate America that allowed for the Federal Reserve to funnel \$4 trillion to keep the stock market afloat and cover any losses suffered by major corporations.

On April 8, as coronavirus cases in the US were reaching their first peak and hospitals were being overwhelmed, Sanders announced that he was dropping out of the race, and he held his groveling online discussion with Biden on April 13, in which he endorsed his campaign. He followed this with an interview with the Associated Press in which he slandered as “irresponsible” any of his supporters who failed to campaign for Biden.

The next month Sanders’ political team issued a threat to his delegates: they would be removed from their positions if they criticized Biden or other Democratic Party leaders.

In response to the massive multi-racial and multi-ethnic protests against police brutality, Trump attempted on June 1 to carry out a coup involving the mobilization of active-duty troops to put down the protests and establish a presidential dictatorship. Sanders was silent. When he did finally address the situation, he called for police officers to receive a pay raise.

Not Democratic Party politics, but the fight for socialism!

The golden rule of *Jacobin* is not to discuss past failures. No lessons can be learned or conclusions drawn from any experience. It seeks to close workers’ eyes to the reality of the situation: that the crisis confronting mankind requires a direct challenge to capitalism and its state apparatus.

Since the ending of Sanders’ campaign, the DSA has held dozens of “call-in” meetings and even published a book, all with the aim of urging workers and young people not to leave the Democratic Party. “Eventually,” it explains, such a break will be needed, “but not now.”

For all of those youth and workers who are genuinely seeking fundamental change in society, the necessary lessons must be learned. There is no way forward with the Democratic Party!

Instead of pinning one’s hopes for the one-thousandth time on the idea that the next “progressive” Democrat might be different, workers and youth must orient themselves to the only social force capable of carrying out genuinely progressive change: the working class.

Across the United States, workers in dozens of industries are beginning to organize independently. Thousands of teachers, education workers, parents and students are mobilizing to oppose the unsafe reopening of schools amid the pandemic, which rages out of control in the US. It is to these struggles that workers and youth must orient.

Instead of settling for the so-called “lesser evil,” workers and youth must decide to fight on the basis of principle, not pragmatism.

The fight to stop the pandemic and secure the rights of the working class will require the political mobilization of the entire working class against both corporate-controlled parties and the capitalist system they defend.

The Socialist Equality Party is spearheading this fight. We are running our own presidential campaign, with Joseph Kishore and Norissa Santa Cruz for president and vice president of the United States. We are running to bring our socialist program and international perspective to the widest possible audience of working people and young people, both in the United States and worldwide. We call on all workers and young people to join this campaign and support this fight.



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