

Graham Platner and the fraud of “working-class” Democratic politics

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The campaign of Graham Platner, the Democratic nominee for US Senate in Maine, is collapsing under the weight of a new sexual assault allegation, exposing not merely the personal degradation of the candidate but the political forces that manufactured and promoted him as a “working-class” tribune.

On Monday, *Politico* published an interview with Jenny Racicot, who accused Platner of raping her in 2021. Racicot repeated the allegation later that night in an interview with CNN’s Jake Tapper. Platner has denied the allegation. Within hours, leading Democrats who had tolerated or excused months of earlier revelations, including his Nazi-linked Totenkopf tattoo and history as a soldier and mercenary for US imperialism, rushed to call for him to withdraw.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Chair Kirsten Gillibrand called on Platner to withdraw, with the DSCC declaring it would not fund the Maine Senate race if he remained the nominee. California Rep. Ro Khanna and other endorsers withdrew support as well.

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who had been Platner’s most prominent national booster and appeared with him under the fraudulent “Fighting Oligarchy” banner, waited longer than others, but by Tuesday he posted on social media that he “recommended that he step aside.”

Under Maine election law, if Platner withdraws by July 13 the Democrats can select a replacement by July 27, a procedure that is now clearly being prepared.

The debacle confirms what the *World Socialist Web Site* explained from the beginning. After Platner won the June primary, the WSWS wrote that while the vote expressed real anger over inequality, “Platner’s promoters—large sections of the Democratic Party and the trade union apparatus, most avidly its so-called

‘progressive’ wing—present him as a genuine representative of the working class. He is nothing of the sort.”

Platner’s “working-class” identity was from the beginning a political marketing product. His supposed credentials for this position were the fact that he was a veteran, “oysterman,” and rural Mainer, combined with his vulgarity, tattoos, profanity and anti-billionaire demagoguery. But this had nothing to do with the working class as a social force.

In fact, Platner is a small businessman, a former Marine, Army soldier and Blackwater/Constellis contractor, and a loyal Democrat. His social background and career belong not to the proletariat but to the upper-middle-class layers around the Democratic Party.

However, Platner’s manufactured persona was politically useful to Democratic-aligned consultants, the trade-union apparatus, Sanders/DSA operatives, and liberal media figures searching for a way to repackage the Democratic Party after its catastrophic loss of working class legitimacy.

Platner’s own platform exposes the right-wing character of the campaign. On immigration, he combines denunciations of Trump’s “mass deportation machine” with the demand for “strong border security.” On the Pentagon, he does not call for an end to imperialist war or the dismantling of the military machine. “Send me to Washington and I will work tirelessly to rebuild the American military,” his campaign website declares.

Platner’s position on Gaza followed the same pattern. After issuing limited criticisms of Israel’s crimes, he marked the second anniversary of October 7 by adopting the language of Schumer and the Zionist establishment, writing that “ Hamas launched a horrific

terrorist attack against the people of Israel” and calling for “ALL the hostages” to be released and “this war” to end.

The Totenkopf tattoo emblazoned on his chest for nearly two decades was never a secondary issue. It was politically diagnostic. Platner acquired the Nazi-linked death’s-head tattoo while serving in the Marines. The self-declared history buff, who attended private school and George Washington University, claimed ignorance, even though the infamous symbol is associated with the SS and Nazi concentration camp guards, and earlier reporting cited a former acquaintance who said Platner had referred to it as his “Totenkopf.”

The Totenkopf tattoo did not merely expose Platner. It exposed the social and political forces that manufactured him. A movement genuinely rooted in the working class would seek to educate, elevate and politically clarify workers. The Democratic Party and the DSA milieu instead seek to promote backwardness, mimic the vulgarity of Trumpism, and keep social anger trapped inside a bourgeois-imperialist party.

Upon the tattoo revelation, Sanders, Khanna and the pseudo-left rushed to defend Platner as a “working-class candidate,” supposedly unfairly maligned by “the corrupt campaign-finance system,” in the words of Sanders.

The most important question is not why Platner collapsed, but why he was promoted in the first place, and by what social forces. Sanders held events with him under the “Fighting Oligarchy” banner. Ro Khanna defended him after the Nazi tattoo revelation. *Jacobin*, the unofficial press organ of the DSA, published repeated defenses, including one by David Sirota that stated that the debate over whether Platner was sufficiently “working class” had ignored that he “enlisted in the military for multiple combat tours for his country.”

“Progressive” commentator Krystal Ball declared herself more “ride or die” for him after the Nazi tattoo revelation. The United Auto Workers bureaucracy, led by DSA darling Shawn Fain, likewise waved away Platner’s record and Nazi tattoo and presented him as someone who had “chosen to stand with the working class.”

Joining the UAW, DSA and “progressives” in boosting Platner’s campaign were Michelle Goldberg of the *New York Times* and David Remnick in the *New*

Yorker. Goldberg wrote that Platner was “nothing like the edgelord caricature” she encountered online, called him “largely convincing” in person, and compared his campaign energy to Obama. In another column for the *Times* she favorably compared Platner to a “Democratic version of the Tea Party,” writing that voters were seeking “to upend a system that they believe has failed them.”

The WSWS proceeded on an entirely different basis. It began from the class character of the Democratic Party, the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, the Sanders operation and the imperialist state. In dozens of articles, it exposed the character of the Platner campaign and warned of the debacle it would produce.

Platner is a hybrid of two Democratic Party types. One is the “CIA Democrat” identified by the WSWS in 2018. The other is the Fetterman model: the affluent, college-educated right-wing politician costumed as an authentic representative of the working class through dress, mannerisms and regional branding. Platner combined both: the veteran/mercenary credentials of the national-security Democrat with the vulgar, rough-hewn affect of the pseudo-populist.

Ten years ago, Hillary Clinton referred to Trump voters as the “basket of deplorables.” Now the ruling class manufactures “deplorable” personas to market to workers. Both express the same contempt for the working class.

Thousands of people donated money, volunteered time, attended meetings and placed their hopes in a campaign that was presented to them as a vehicle for fighting oligarchy, war and corruption. That energy was directed into another attempt to refurbish the Democratic Party, one of the two parties of American capitalism, imperialist war and dictatorship.

The responsibility for this political fraud rests above all with Sanders and those around him, including Khanna, *Jacobin*, the DSA milieu and the AFL-CIO bureaucracy. It is an important political lesson for workers and young people in Maine and across the country.



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