World Socialist Web Site

Sanders surges in polls amidst attacks from media, Democratic Party establishment

By Jacob Crosse
1 February 2020

With the Iowa Caucuses Monday formally initiating the Democratic Party presidential selection process, polls indicate a continued rise in support for Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

A Washington Post poll found Sanders and former Vice President Biden in a statistical tie in the state, while the New York Times polling indicates Sanders now leads the field, followed by Biden, Elizabeth Warren, Pete Buttigieg, and Amy Klobuchar.

A national poll released yesterday by NBC News and the Wall Street Journal reported that Sanders' support among Democratic primary voters is at 27 percent, up six percentage points from December, while Biden had fallen to 26 percent, down two percentage points. Warren follows at 15 percent, Michael Bloomberg at 9 percent, and Buttigieg at 7 percent.

The growth in support for Sanders comes in the midst of a campaign from top officials within the Democratic Party and from major media outlets against his candidacy. Indeed, several comments in the media have noted with concern that attacks on Sanders from these sources seems to have had the opposite effect as intended.

Following denunciations of Sanders from former Hillary Clinton and a scurrilous attack from Warren earlier this month, the New York Times took a different tact on Monday. In an article titled “Bernie Sanders and His Internet Army,” the Times portrayed Sanders’ online supporters as violent and sexist “Bernie Bro’s.” The article was mostly devoid of facts, instead relying on former Clinton and Obama surrogates, in addition to rival campaign advisors, for salacious quotes in which Sanders was made responsible for fostering a “toxic culture” in his campaign.

The hatchet job noted that Sanders has 10 million followers on Twitter, more than Warren, Biden, Buttigieg, and Klobuchar, combined. It added ominously and without substantiation, “A sizable number could be automated bots or fictitious accounts. Federal prosecutors have detailed coordinated efforts by Russian nationals to interfere in the 2016 elections, with an emphasis on two candidates—Donald J. Trump and Mr. Sanders—whom the Russians hope to bolster while denigrating their opponents.”

Thus the Times invokes the manufactured claims about massive Russian interference into the 2016 elections to bolster the manufactured claims that Sanders’ followers are similarly “manipulating” the elections.

Similar articles have appeared elsewhere. The Washington Post wrote that the distribution of images and posts critical of Warren by Sanders used “a popular new mass-posting technique that allows ordinary Americans to operate with rapid-fire speed reminiscent of Russian bots or trolls in 2016.”

Media reports indicate that Biden and Klubuchar have discussed collaboration in the Iowa caucuses to counter support for Sanders in precincts where one or the other candidate is not viable. Biden staffers have also floated the possibility of a Klobuchar vice president nomination if she were willing to agree to the deal.

The party establishment also has a fall back plan in the form of billionaire former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg. In a revealing interview on MSNBC’s Morning Joe, Steve Willet, CEO of Willett Advisors LLC, an investment management company and Bloomberg surrogate, explained the “centrist fall back option” that a Bloomberg candidacy presented.

“Biden is either going to win in Iowa and New Hampshire… Or he’s not going to do well there, in which case there needs to be a viable centrist alternative in order to stop Bernie Sanders.”

Measures have also been taken to establish control over the 2020 Democratic National Convention Platform committee, which has been packed with figures hostile to Sanders. Some of the more well-known names include...
Randi Weingarten, president of American Federation of Teachers; John Podesta, former chair of Hillary Clinton’s campaign; and former North Dakota Senator Heidi Heitkamp.

The Vice Chair of the Platform Committee is Jake Sullivan, a fixture in Democratic Party foreign policy circles for over a decade. Sullivan served as National Security Advisor to Biden and also advised the Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama’s campaigns.

The hostility to Sanders from dominant sections of the Democratic Party establishment is motivated not so much by Sanders himself, who is a known quantity, but by the sentiments driving support for his campaign. Sanders has directed his appeal to opposition to social inequality and to war, presenting himself as the voice of opposition to Wall Street, the military-industrial complex, the giant corporations and the political establishment, Republican and Democratic.

The Democratic Party does not want to run an election on the basis of these issues and is fully prepared to scuttle a Sanders’ campaign by whatever means necessary.

The hostility toward Sanders is all the more significant given the actual content of his program and his role. Sanders is not a socialist, and his reform proposals would fit comfortably within the mainstream of bourgeois politics forty years ago. On foreign policy, Sanders has consistently declared his support for the military actions of the Obama administration and voted for the war in Serbia under Clinton and Afghanistan under Bush.

Sanders has, moreover, remained shamefully silent on the persecution of WikiLeaks’ founder Julian Assange, a principal target of the Democrats’ anti-Russia campaign.

The campaign against Sanders exposes the bankruptcy of his own proclaimed intentions to “transform” the Democratic Party, a party of Wall Street and the intelligence agencies, backed by privileged sections of the upper middle class that form the base of the politics of racial and gender identity.

From the beginning, the aim of Sanders’ “political revolution” has been to channel social and political opposition into the Democratic Party. This is the task he carried out in 2016 when, after losing to Clinton in the Democratic Party primaries—with the assistance of the underhanded tactics of the Democratic National Committee—Sanders went all-out to convince his supporters to back Clinton, the widely despised candidate of the banks and the military.

Early in the current presidential race, in February 2019, Sanders explained his intentions clearly in a CNN Town Hall: “The truth is that more and more people are disenchanted with both the Republican and Democratic plank. And especially young people. They are registering as Independents, or not affiliated folks. And I think as somebody who was an Independent, we can bring them into the Democratic Party.”

The party that Sanders wants to “bring them back into” is the same party that is thoroughly opposed to any appeal to the issues that are actually animating broad sections of workers and youth. It has waged its entire opposition to the Trump administration on the basis of divisions within the ruling class over foreign policy, reflecting the concerns within dominant sections of the military and intelligence apparatus that Trump has not pursued sufficiently aggressive measures against Russia.

All of this only demonstrates that the development of a political movement against social inequality, war, and dictatorship—and the Trump administration—must break free of the stranglehold of the Democratic Party, and therefore of the Sanders campaign. It is not to these maneuvers that workers and youth must direct themselves, but to the development of the class struggle, in the US and internationally.

The growth of social opposition in the working class must be guided by a revolutionary socialist and internationalist perspective and leadership. The Socialist Equality Party is running candidates in the US presidential elections, Joseph Kishore and Norissa Santa Cruz, to fight to build this leadership.

For more information and to get involved in the SEP campaign, visit socialism2020.org.