The decision by Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders to drop out of the race for president has produced a crisis in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), removing its threadbare political cover for operating as a faction of the Democratic Party.

The organization threw itself with full force into the Democratic Party before Sanders’ 2016 campaign, expending immense political capital on the promise that Sanders would pressure the 200-year-old capitalist party to adopt left-wing social reforms. After Sanders endorsed Hillary Clinton, the DSA implored its supporters not to give up hope on working within the Democratic Party.

Once again, this strategy collapsed on Wednesday when Sanders pledged his support for Joe Biden, who personifies all the forces of political reaction that the Vermont senator’s supporters thought they were opposing.

In a sign of how little Sanders will end up altering the Democratic Party platform, he referred to Biden, a man who is responsible for war, mass incarceration, mass deportation and vicious attacks on social programs, as “a very decent man.” He signaled to the political establishment that he will whip his supporters into backing the preferred candidate of the corporations and intelligence officials who run the Democratic Party: “Together, standing united, we will go forward to defeat Donald Trump.”

This without raising a single programmatic demand. Sanders comes cheap.

With anger brewing among Sanders supporters and DSA members over the prospect of supporting a Biden candidacy, the DSA’s semi-official publication, Jacobin Magazine, held an online forum Wednesday titled “What Bernie accomplished and where to go next,” featuring Jacobin founder Bhaskar Sunkara, contributors Michael Brooks, Meagan Day and Matt Karp, as well as Amber Frost of Chapo Trap House.

The primary purpose of the forum was to answer the question “where to go next” with a definitive: “Nowhere, stay in the Democratic Party.”

Sanders’ decision to drop out has only strengthened this line in Jacobin and the DSA. No speaker at Wednesday’s forum challenged the article published in Jacobin Wednesday morning by Eric Blanc which stated, “We’re not yet strong enough to stop using the Democratic ballot line any time soon,” despite the fact that Sanders won seven million votes in this year’s primaries to date.

During the forum, Sunkara revealingly asked the other speakers: “What role do we need Bernie to play if we’re going to form a new institution, I’m not talking about a new socialist party or anything.” And yesterday, Jacobin published a lead article by Jedediah Britton-Purdy, who wrote, “Other than the questionable Democratic Party, the Left lacks a movement-building, spirit-sustaining, power-accumulating institutional home.”

With Sanders out of the race, Jacobin is relying on increasingly stretched arguments as to why those who consider themselves socialist should stay in the Democratic Party. There is nothing wrong with running within the Democratic Party, the online forum speakers explained. Sanders and the DSA merely suffered from…a bit of bad luck!

“We shouldn’t allow ourselves to draw too simple of a conclusion that the institution of the Democratic Party was too smart for us or too strong for us,” argued Meagan Day. To those who are upset over Sanders’ defeat, Day suggested, “work on some electoral campaign or something like that.”

Amber Frost stated her agreement with Day and added, “There is a certain amount of luck, and you should definitely analyze your mistakes, but…you can’t actually overestimate the Democratic machine…Clearly they are not very confident, they did get kind of lucky, and we did get kind of unlucky.”
These statements are desperate attempts to resuscitate the illusion that the Democratic Party can still be reformed from within. If Sanders merely suffered from “bad luck” in 2016 and 2020, why not try again in 2024? And what about the past century of failed efforts at reforming the Democratic Party? According to the DSA, everyone from William Jennings Bryan to Jesse Jackson apparently suffered from just a bad roll of the dice.

More than any past event, the efforts of the DSA and Jacobin to justify remaining in the Democratic Party were not-so-subtly aimed at blocking the growing influence of the World Socialist Web Site and Socialist Equality Party. Meagan Day worriedly noted that “there’s a lot of chatter online right now about where [discontented Sanders supporters] will go. People are looking for a place to go next.” Later in the program, she elaborated: “We hear a lot of grumblings” from those “who tell us that Bernie Sanders is not a socialist and they would like to disabuse us of that notion. This is a running theme and it’s obviously kind of obnoxious, because whatever is in Bernie’s heart this is obviously the exact way that a socialist should behave in the beating heart of global capitalism.”

Day appealed to “non-sectarian socialists” to unite, while Sunkara explained the futility of breaking with the Democratic Party as opposed to “good sectarians” who “know they are small and marginal.” Frost similarly noted concern over “smug gloating from the armchair revolutionaries.”

When Sunkara and company refer to “sectarians,” they mean individuals who are not cynical, opportunist agents of the Democratic Party. Sunkara, after all, when asked about the DSA’s policy if Sanders is defeated, told the New York Times in 2019: “I think the mentality has to be to call for people to vote for Joe Biden, especially in swing states.” It is necessary “to avoid a third-party candidacy,” Sunkara added.

Such job-sniffers have nothing to do with socialism. It is entirely justified that Sunkara is widely viewed as a sell-out among the DSA membership.

Last week, in his last major legislative action before dropping out of the race, Sanders quietly voted to provide Wall Street and the corporations with trillions of dollars in bailout money, among the largest wealth transfers in US history. Not a word was spoken of Sanders’ vote. Sunkara, Day, Frost, the DSA and Jacobin support this transfer not despite the class orientation of their politics, but because of it. Jacobin and the DSA are aware of the critical role they are about to play in the transmission belt of Democratic Party politics. Future careers depend on their ability to successfully carry out the maneuver.

The Washington Post recently referenced Vermont Democratic Congressman and Sanders confidant Peter Welch, claiming the congressman “sees Sanders as central to Biden’s chances of winning support from a ‘progressive left who don’t particularly support the Democratic Party as an institution but whom we need to get out to vote.’”

The Post also cited Washington Democratic Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, noting, “Sanders’ greatest contribution may involve demonstrating the importance of what she called ‘inside/outside politics.’”

In other words, the DSA and Jacobin will play the role of using their “socialist” cover to lie to people outside the Democratic Party in order to bring them inside the campaign of arguably the most right-wing Democratic nominee in decades. As Frost’s comments show, Chapo Trap House plays the same role, only its opportunist spokespeople have sleeve tattoos and drink Miller High Life and Pabst Blue Ribbon.

As the SEP’s presidential candidate Joseph Kishore wrote yesterday in the World Socialist Web Site:

“There are no doubt many sincere workers and youth who will be disgusted by what Sanders has done. They must draw the necessary conclusions.

“The only campaign that is seeking to develop a real socialist movement is the campaign of the Socialist Equality Party. The SEP launched its election campaign to fight for genuine socialism, to develop within the working class and among young people a socialist leadership, to fight against war, inequality and authoritarianism, in opposition to the Democratic and Republican parties, the parties of the ruling class.

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

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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