#FeelTheBe…trayal?

written by Bryant William Sculos | February 28, 2016

A while ago, I wrote a piece here that, among other things, argued that if Bernie Sanders were to lose the Democratic primary he should *not*, as he has promised several times to do, support Hillary Clinton for President. Many people on the Left, most recently Chris Hedges in an article for *Truthdig*, have argued that this promise makes Sanders a wolf-in-sheep's clothing for the Left, and that he will inevitably betray the movement supporting him and the ideals he has campaigned on. For Hedges and others, this promise (along with running as a Democrat) is precisely why the Left should not be supporting Sanders and his campaign at all. While I disagree with Hedges that we should not support Sanders because of this promise, we should absolutely be wary of the likely possibility that he will keep this terrible promise; Sanders if anything has a tendency to keep his word. This is what he is known for, after all—being the rare honest politician.

This is precisely why the position of organizations like Socialist Alternative (SA) is one of critical, distanced, but involved support for the *movement* that is being built around the Sanders' candidacy. SA wants to build a genuine Left political movement and is hoping to use the energy spawned through the Sanders' campaign to help accomplish that. They are not unqualified supporters of the candidate himself, nor should any of us be. However, as the election season moves forward and Sanders and Clinton make greater strides to distinguish themselves from each other (or as Clinton attempts to co-opt Sanders' rhetoric…), there is reason to believe or at least hope that Sanders will renege on his promise.

Sanders will need political cover to justify his decision to go back on his word, if indeed he loses—which is becoming increasingly unlikely as time goes on and the American people see just how conservative and status-quo-oriented Clinton's platform truly is. Regardless, we can certainly understand that given the political climate of the US and the electoral process, it was certainly reasonable for Sanders to run for the Democratic nomination despite never being a member of the Party before he announced his candidacy. He needed the perception of legitimacy and publicity that comes from being a candidate from a major party. If Sanders loses, and if he wants to maintain his own perceived legitimacy and integrity, he will need new information and cause to go back on his word.

A recent decision made by the DNC may well have just opened the door for Sanders to legitimately avoid supporting a Clinton candidacy for President should he lose the primary. The DNC has decided to lift the short-lived ban on federal lobbyists contributing to the Party. This policy was enacted during the 2008 Obama campaign, but now, federal lobbyists will be able to openly donate to the Democratic Party—as if they are actively attempting to be more corrupt. The justification from the DNC is that by abolishing the prohibition they will be able to compete more effectively with the Republican Party, which has no such restriction. Talk about a race to the ethical bottom…and why

should we be surprised at all?

While Sanders has come out against the policy, starting a petition, and calling on the DNC to reverse this decision, it has largely been ignored. He has not made it a campaign issue (at least not yet, but maybe he will surprise us). This should be the straw that broke the camel's—or in this case, the promise's—back.

This decision, besides being just one more abrogation of the farce that is the democratic process in this country, is a slap in the face of everything that Sanders has campaigned on in regard to campaign finance reform. If Sanders does lose, he should cite this decision and the corporate funding of the DNC as his political cover to either run as an independent candidate or support Jill Stein.

What happens if Sanders wins though, given the corporate funding that comes with being a major party nominee in the U.S.? We still have yet to hear from Sanders on what he will do with respect to the funding mechanisms that support the DNC if he does in fact win the nomination. That was true even before this new offense to the dignity of the American political system. Will he require the DNC to cease its use of corporate financing and Super PACs? We just don't know right now, but it is an important question that needs to be asked—and answered.

This is where we see the importance of an organized Left putting pressure on Sanders, whether he wins or loses. The Left needs to pressure Sanders whether he wins or loses. If he wins, he needs to be pressured to compel the DNC to immediately cease its acceptance of corporate and lobbyist donations. If he loses, I cannot see how he could, in good conscience, support Hillary Clinton, no matter who the Republicans nominate or what might be at stake with the potential Supreme Court vacancy. If Sanders does lose, this decision by the Democratic Party to openly allow lobbyists to make campaign contributions, is one more reason Sanders can point to for why he will *not* be supporting Hillary Clinton. It will likely take pressure from the Left to make this happen as well.

I am just pessimistic enough to think that Sanders will keep this loathsome promise he needed to make, but never should have intended to keep. We should all hope to be wrong though. Chris Hedges is certainly not wrong to be upset about the likelihood that Sanders will betray the people who supported him and his platform, but this is precisely why being a part of the movement supporting him is so important. Where else could the pressure on him to renege on his promise to the DNC come from?

[This article was not written in consultation with Socialist Alternative and should not be construed to represent the official position of that organization.]

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