

Sanders, Strategy and "The Left": Behind the Fist Pump

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Bernie Sanders's dropping the hammer on Clinton's cozying up to the vile genocidaire Henry Kissinger was one of the fist pump moments of the campaign. That's recognized by pretty much everyone now, so I don't need to say much about it here.

What does seem to be worth mentioning is what it shows about Sanders's campaign strategy. And make no mistake—he has a larger strategy and it is a successful one, obviously. One core element of it appears to be to inject into the discourse Clinton's transparently indefensible positions while making sure that when he does so these are a) factually irrefutable b) not entirely dissonant with conventional wisdom c) entered at sufficiently spaced intervals to that they don't overwhelm the capacity of the media (both social and conventional/corporate) to assimilate the factual basis of the charges.

What I have in mind includes but is not limited to the following: 1) attacking Hillary's position on Iraq (entered during the first debate). 2) targeting Hillary's Wall Street connections, particularly the Goldman Sachs speaking gigs, which he did in the second debate. 3) Now the attack on Kissinger. Notice that in every instance, Clinton was caught completely off guard and had essentially no response. As Sanders understands, that's an inherent liability with being an establishment hack: you assume everyone agrees with you (as Noam has shown for years) collapsing when you are confronted by facts which challenge the conventional wisdom, ending up looking clueless and ridiculous (e.g. C: "Who advises you? S: It ain't Henry Kissinger, that's for sure.")

Also, in every instance, claims which previously would have been written off as conspiratorialist ravings now have the chance to get a footing. This is partly because they are being uttered by a legitimate presidential contender but also because they are quickly reinforced evidentiary support provided by Sanders's team which then makes the social media rounds. That was most conspicuous with the immediate response to Clinton's denial that her receipt of Wall Street cash had ever influence her votes: Sanders's team knew they had an ace in the hole—the paragraph from Elizabeth Warren's book and her appearance on Bill Moyers, and it's easy to imagine them salivating when they played it.

In any case, it is clear that Sanders has a strategy along these lines and that he is implementing it beautifully. Not to belabor the obvious, had Sanders been listening to "the left" who was constantly criticizing him for his failure to attack Clinton, all this would have been put immediately on the table: at his campaign announcement he would have denounced Clinton (and the Democratic Party), as Wall Street stooges, apologists for mass murder, mass incarceration, environmental pillage, etc.

He chose a different strategy, and, to reiterate, it was obviously the right one.

So can “the left” finally go back to its dog eared copies of the *Grundrisse* admitting that its history over the past decades is a painful, *prima facie* demonstration that it has not the slightest idea of how to operate in the real political world, having shown itself utterly incapable of building mass constituencies for a left program.

Sanders does. That is why he is where he is and why his “left” critics are yet again reprising their role as the dogs frantically barking while the caravan passes by.

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