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05.08.2019

CNN's Attempted Hit Job on Sanders and Warren



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I was unable to watch all the CNN Democratic presidential candidates' debate last Tuesday night, but every time I looked in it was stuck on one of the three following themes:

#1. Conservative CNN “moderators” and absurdly marginal corporate Democrat pseudo-candidates like John Hickenlooper and John Delaney attacking the mildly social-democratish neo-New Deal progressive Bernie Sanders and the leftish liberal Elizabeth

Warren as too “radical,” “socialist,” and too “extreme.” Listening just to corporate lackeys like Delaney, Hickenlooper, and CNN’s Jack Tapper and Don Lemon, you’d think Sanders was a Bolshevik and Warren was a Menshevik transplanted from revolutionary Russia 102 years ago — this for advocating elementarily civilized measures (supported by most U.S.-Americans) like Medicare for All (M4A), free public education, and green jobs.

Why are clowns like Delaney and Hickenlooper on the stage despite having essentially no popular support in their pretend bids for the Democratic presidential nomination? They are there for one reason: to assault Warren and especially Sanders because Warren and particularly Sanders are seen by establishment party and media elites as threats to critical features of corporate rule.

#2. Consistent corporatist framing of Single Payer health insurance (M4A) as an authoritarian, big brother assault on people’s supposedly beloved existing private health insurance rather than as what it would really be: a great social, democratic, and human rights victory for the common good over the nation’s parasitic and super-expensive for-profit insurance, drug, and hospital syndicates. As the left historian and journalist Terry Thomas wrote following the Tuesday night debate:

“...the purpose of [CNN] spending so much time on health care was because they desperately wanted to destroy this single-payer business, or at least make it appear to be just another empty promise from politicians who have no intention of doing anything. So a plan designed to provide EVERYONE with affordable health care was pilloried and then actually framed as a program to take health insurance away from people.”

#3. Attempted divide-and-conquer: efforts to enlist Warren in the destruction of the “radical socialist” Sanders and to divide progressive voters between Sanders and Warren.

It could hardly be more obvious that CNN (like MSNBC, which held the first two Democratic debates earlier this summer) wants to pave the way for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination of one of the leaders of the Democrats’ “Wall Street primary” so far: the ridiculous right-wing corporatist Joe Biden, the mass-incarcerationist fake-progressive Kamala Harris, and the neoliberal wonder-boy Pete Buttigieg (a younger and gayer Tony Blair).

In service to this project, establishment Democrats and their corporate cable news talking heads demonize social-democratic policies like Single Payer as excessively radical,

expensive, and idealistic. They seek to cultivate divisions between the party's leftmost voters and candidates. And they describe the top three corporate-Democratic candidates (Biden, Harris, and Buttigieg) in favorable terms as "moderates." It's a misnomer. As Norman Solomon explains:

"As a practical matter, in the routine lexicon of U.S. mass media, 'moderate' actually means pro-corporate and reliably unwilling to disrupt the dominant power structures. 'Moderate' is a term of endearment in elite circles, a label conferred on politicians who won't rock establishment boats. 'Moderate' sounds so much nicer than, say, 'enmeshed with Wall Street' or 'supportive of the military-industrial complex.'...In the corporate media environment, we're accustomed to pretty euphemisms that fog up unpretty realities — and the haze of familiarity brings the opposite of clarity...If Joe Biden is a 'moderate,' the soothing adjective obscures grim realities....How are [Biden] policies really 'moderate' when they perpetuate and increase extreme suffering due to vast income inequality? Or when they support U.S. wars causing so much death and incalculable anguish? Or when they refuse to challenge the fossil-fuel industry and only sign onto woefully inadequate measures in response to catastrophic climate change?...Biden's record of words and deeds is 'moderate' only if we ignore the extreme harm that he has done on matters ranging from civil rights and mass incarceration to student debt and the credit card industry to militarism and war."

Much the same applies to Harris and Buttigieg, who have much shorter policy records but who would hardly be cashing in on the big money election funding market if there was any substance behind their progressive posturing. "In keeping with timeworn rhetoric from corporate Democrats," Solomon notes, "Harris repeatedly said during the [Wednesday night CNN Democratic-presidential] debate that she wants to guarantee 'access' to healthcare — using a standard corporate-friendly buzzword that detours around truly guaranteeing healthcare as a human right."

A related function of the debates is to dilute the relevance of policy altogether since most U.S.-American citizens back the supposedly radical-Left (actually moderately social-democratic and progressive-populist) policies and roughly egalitarian societal vision advanced by Sanders. Here the aim is to divert voters from serious matters of public policy and focus them instead on comparatively trivial matters like candidate looks, age, color, size, gender, ethnicity, age, stage performance — especially the ability to rapidly spit-out pithy one-liners and put-downs — and the like.

Sanders and Warren did very well under the circumstances. Functioning like a smart tag-team, neither of them took the divide-and-rule bait. Both ably shot down claims that their policy ideas are “too radical” for voters and a general election. Both deftly reminded the audience of the terrible prices U.S.-Americans pay for the nation’s for-profit health care system.

They also scored the best one-liners of the night. Responding to the corporate candidates’ apparent belief that the world’s richest nation can’t afford elementarily decent and allegedly “radical” and “extremist” things like quality free health insurance for all and green jobs programs to help save life on Earth, Warren memorably asked “Why go through the trouble of running for president and then talk about what we can’t do and can’t fight for?”

Sanders offered a simple four-word comment after the ridiculous stooge John Delaney intoned that “I’m the only one on this stage who actually has experience in the health care business. And with all due respect, I don’t think my colleagues understand the business.”

“It’s not a business!” Sanders said, to great applause. As Bernie Sanders knows very well, of course, American health care is unfortunately a big business that values profits over people in the U.S. But as everyone listening understood, Sanders’ point was that health care needs to be grasped as a human right, not as a business. Imagine that.

AUGUST 2, 2019