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Clinton Campaign, Media Rush to Declare Clinton the Democratic Nominee

With frontrunner's poll numbers falling in California

Par Barry Grey
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The Associated Press reported late Monday night that Hillary Clinton had secured a sufficient number of additional superdelegates to clinch the Democratic Party presidential nomination. The AP report was immediately picked up and featured prominently by the Washington Post and the New York Times, despite the fact that the AP did not identify the superdelegates newly declaring for Clinton.

It had previously been reported that Clinton intended to declare herself the presumptive Democratic nominee immediately following the vote in Tuesday's New Jersey primary election, where opinion polls show the former secretary of state holding a double-digit lead over her challenger, Senator Bernie Sanders.

It had also been reported that President Barack Obama would officially endorse Clinton this week, possibly on Wednesday when he travels to New York for a fundraising event. There were reports that Obama had telephoned Sanders to discuss his plans to endorse the former first lady, senator and secretary of state.

These developments amount to a coordinated push by the Democratic Party establishment and sections of the media to proclaim Clinton the victor in the hotly contested primary campaign in advance of the California primary election on Tuesday, which could deliver the favored candidate of Wall Street and the military/intelligence establishment a stunning defeat at the hands of Sanders, whose campaign continues to gain popular support.

It had been reported that Clinton would not wait until the votes were counted in California, the country's most populous state, where the polls close later than in New Jersey due to the three-hour time zone difference with the US east coast. Polls in California show Clinton's one-time double-digit lead over Sanders evaporating amidst a record surge in newly registered voters, most of them younger than 45, a demographic that has consistently backed Sanders by a two-to-one margin.

Media outlets, including the Democratic-leaning MSNBC, were also expected to proclaim Clinton the victor as soon as the New Jersey results were announced.

The haste to preemptively crown Clinton as the Democratic presidential candidate is reflected in numerous press commentaries portraying Sanders' continuing push for the nomination as a Quixotic exercise in futility—or a fifth column boost to the presumptive Republican nominee, Donald Trump. Just in the past two days, the *New York*

Times published pieces headlined “Bernie’s Last Stand” and “Bernie Sanders’ Chances of Winning Have Faded, but His Rallies Haven’t,” and the *Washington Post* carried an article titled “Doing great too late.”

All three top elected officials in California, Democratic Governor Jerry Brown and Democratic senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, have endorsed Clinton and called on Sanders to end his campaign.

The rush to declare Clinton the presumptive nominee, even as Sanders publicly pledges to continue fighting for the nomination up to and perhaps during next month’s Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, is a measure not of political strength on the part of the Clinton campaign, but rather immense weakness and crisis. Clinton, the overwhelming choice of the Democratic Party establishment, continues to see her popular support erode in favor of Sanders, who has based his campaign on an appeal to popular anger over social inequality and Wall Street criminality.

After lopsided victories over the weekend in the Puerto Rican primary and the Virgin Islands caucuses, Clinton was, in fact, only 26 elected delegates shy of reaching the 2,383 figure needed to clinch the nomination, a number she is certain to obtain in New Jersey. However, neither she nor Sanders will have a sufficient number of elected and therefore pledged delegates and will have to rely on the votes of superdelegates, who are free to change their allegiance when they make their choice at the convention itself.

The 712 superdelegates are appointed by the Democratic National Committee and consist of elected officials, Democratic Party operatives and party leaders, including former office-holders. As of last weekend, 547 of these denizens of the party establishment had publicly announced for Clinton, while only 46 had come out in support of Sanders.

Over the weekend, Sanders denounced plans to declare Clinton the presumptive nominee and reiterated his stated intention of fighting to convince Clinton superdelegates to switch to his campaign on the grounds that polls show him defeating Trump decisively in the general election, while for the most part they indicate a dead heat in a contest between Clinton and Trump.

Sanders has been counting on an upset victory in California, the biggest trove of delegates at 548, to fuel already percolating concerns over the viability of a Clinton candidacy. Widely despised by young and lower-income voters as a corrupt personification of the status quo and a warmonger, Clinton has failed to generate any significant enthusiasm for her bid to follow her husband into the White House.

One measure of the immense political weakness of Clinton’s campaign is its refusal to debate Sanders in advance of the final round of nominating contests, including California, New Jersey, New Mexico, Montana, South Dakota and North Dakota on Tuesday and Washington, DC on June 14. Clinton reneged on a previous agreement to debate Sanders one more time before the end of the primaries because she and her advisers concluded such an event could only cost her more votes.

Sanders, who has won 46 percent of the elected delegates, has taken 16 of the last 25 primary contests and triumphed in major industrial states such as Michigan and Wisconsin. He has held some two dozen rallies in California, attracting large and enthusiastic crowds, dominated by young voters. His campaign estimates it will have addressed some 250,000

people by primary election day in California.

Clinton canceled scheduled appearances in New Jersey in order to return to California in an attempt to avoid a crippling defeat. However, she has limited her appearances to small, vetted media events, knowing she could not attract large audiences. Her campaign has made clear that regardless of the outcome in California, Clinton will declare herself the presumptive nominee.

There is an element of desperation in the effort to declare a *fait accompli*, along with a large measure of arrogance and contempt for the voters and for democratic procedures. The not-too-veiled message is that the plutocracy has chosen its candidate and the people should just reconcile themselves to the choice, no matter how much they might hate her. There is barely concealed annoyance at having even to go through the motions of an election.

Behind this is fear within the ruling class over the social opposition that has found an expression, for the present, in popular support for Sanders, who has benefited beyond his own wildest expectations from his self-promotion as a "democratic socialist." There is also frustration within the Clinton camp that Sanders' continued presence hinders the frontrunner from pivoting as far and as rapidly to the right as she would like in preparation for the general election.

Nevertheless, Clinton has made a sharp turn to the right since the fascistic Trump's emergence as the presumptive Republican nominee. She has largely dumped her semi-populist rhetoric—a response to the challenge from Sanders—and openly directed her appeal to disaffected Republican voters and campaign contributors, wealthier suburbanites, and, above all, Wall Street and the military/intelligence establishment.

When she rushed back to California last week, her first major appearance was a speech on foreign policy in San Diego in which she denounced Trump for being soft on China and Russia and too unreliable and unpredictable to competently pursue US imperialist interests internationally. In an appearance on CNN's "State of the Union" program on Sunday she continued in the same vein, warning that Trump "violates Republican and Democratic agreement about how to be strong in the world, how to present ourselves, how to protect our allies and our friends, how to take on our rivals when necessary."

These statements give a small indication of the ferocious militarism that would characterize a Clinton administration, continuing and expanding the war-making of Obama and Bush.

Nor would a Sanders administration be fundamentally different. If he were to come to power, Sanders would quickly drop his reformist pretenses and continue the same basic policies as his predecessors, both domestic and foreign. He has repeatedly in the course of the primary campaign declared his support for Obama's war policies, including drone assassinations.

The political function of the Sanders campaign from the outset has been to serve as a lightning rod for social discontent and preemptively block it from taking an independent form, channeling the working class and youth instead back behind the Democratic Party, the oldest capitalist party and historic graveyard of social protest in the United States. He has repeatedly made clear that he will campaign for the Democratic nominee.

Sanders' stated intention of contesting the Democratic nomination up to and even during

the July convention is determined by his conscious aim of promoting illusions that this party of American imperialism can be reformed and made responsive to the needs of working people. He is concerned that too brazen a capitulation to Clinton will arouse disgust and anger among his supporters and damage the Democratic Party.

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Articles Par : Barry Grey

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Contact média: media@globalresearch.ca