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Latest presidential primary contests intensify crisis of US two-party system

By Patrick Martin

7 March 2016

Billionaire real estate mogul Donald Trump and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the frontrunners for the Republican and Democratic presidential nominations, suffered unexpected setbacks in state primaries and caucuses held Saturday and Sunday.

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders won three of the four Democratic contests, while Texas Senator Ted Cruz and Florida Senator Marco Rubio won three of the five Republican contests. Even in the two states Trump won, his vote was significantly below poll predictions, indicating that an anti-Trump campaign by Republican Party leaders was having some effect.

All three contests won by Sanders were caucuses where attendance broke previous records. He won in Kansas by 68 percent to 32 percent, in Nebraska by 57 percent to 43 percent and in Maine by a nearly two-to-one margin.

Clinton won the only primary, in Louisiana on Saturday, by a wide margin, 73 percent to 27 percent, thanks to her support among African-American voters, as has been the case throughout the early primary states. Turnout was heavy, with more people voting in the Democratic primary than in the Republican, in a state which Republican presidential candidates have carried in the past four elections.

On the Republican side, Cruz won two caucuses by wide margins, Kansas and Maine. The turnout in Kansas was over 73,000, more than triple the 20,000 who voted in a similar contest in 2008, and the Maine turnout showed a similar jump from 2012.

Trump won the Kentucky caucuses and the Louisiana primary narrowly, with Cruz finishing a close second. Press reports noted that Trump actually lost the Louisiana vote among those who went to the polls Saturday, but won the overall contest because of a huge lead among early voters, cast before last Thursday's Republican debate and the denunciation of Trump by the 2012 Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney.

The result of the weekend voting may amount to no more than a pause for Clinton and Trump, who are still heavily favored in all seven primaries taking place over the next 10 days: Michigan and Mississippi on Tuesday, March 8; and Florida, Illinois, Missouri, North Carolina and Ohio on Tuesday, March 15.

The fascistic character of the Trump campaign is underscored by the candidate's repeated calls for the use of torture methods such as waterboarding "and much more" in the so-called war on terrorism. Trump declared at the March 3 debate in Detroit that as president he would order the military to engage in torture, even after several retired officers said that soldiers should defy such orders as illegal.

On Friday, Trump abruptly reversed himself, saying that he would not order soldiers to do anything against the law. Within a few hours, however, he had reversed himself again, declaring that a President Trump would see to it that Congress changed the laws to permit waterboarding and other forms of torture. "I would want to open up on those laws," he said. "We're not playing on the same field. I didn't flip-flop at all. I abide by the laws, but I would also say that I would want to have those laws expanded."

The candidate's penchant for authoritarianism was on display at several rallies over the weekend. At a rally in Orlando, Florida on Saturday, Trump demanded that his supporters raise their right hand and follow him in reciting a pledge that they would vote for him in the upcoming March 15 primary. The result was press photos of hundreds of people raising their right arms in a *Führer* - style salute.

At another rally, on Friday in New Orleans, Trump looked out over the crowd and pointed at people making noise. When he spotted protesters from Black Lives Matter, he waved to police officers to drag them away, while leading the crowd in chanting "USA! USA!" to drown out their voices. Trump gloated, "This is so cool, don't we love it?" At the same time, he chastised the media for covering the protest. Such ejections, including violent assaults on protesters either by police or Trump partisans, have become a regular feature of his campaign.

Divisions within the Republican Party were underscored by the appearance of Mitt Romney on two Sunday interview programs, where he flatly declared that he would not vote for Trump if he were to become the Republican nominee. Romney reiterated the argument made in his speech Thursday that Republicans should support Kasich in the Ohio primary, Rubio in Florida and Cruz in states where he had the best chance of defeating Trump. The result of such tactical

voting would be to deny any candidate the 1,237 delegates required for nomination, throwing the decision into the convention.

Romney spoke with particular warmth about Cruz in the wake of his victories in Kansas and Maine. But Cruz's policies differ from those of Trump only in minor details: he offers a Christian fundamentalist version of Trump's calls for military violence and all-out attacks on democratic rights of Muslim Americans and immigrants. It is Cruz who notoriously threatened to order "saturation bombing" in Iraq and Syria that would "make the sand glow."

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has pointed out, the support for Trump among sections of lower-income white workers is in large measure the responsibility of the Democratic Party, the trade unions and the rest of what passes for the "left" in official US politics, who have nothing but disdain for the working class and are indifferent to the growth of mass unemployment and social misery.

The truth of this analysis is underscored by a feature report published Saturday in the *New York Times* under the headline, "This Is Trump Country." It details the conditions of life in four areas that voted for Trump in the Republican primary on Super Tuesday by margins in some cases exceeding 60 percent.

These included Buchanan County in southwest Virginia, an Appalachian area devastated by mine closures and mass unemployment, with a median income of \$22,213, less than half the national figure; Fall River, Massachusetts, an old industrial city with a median income of \$29,014, less than half the statewide average; and Atkinson County, Georgia and Macon County, Tennessee, largely rural areas dominated by farming, lumber and small manufacturing, and equally impoverished.

Trump is able to get a hearing in these areas only because he exploits the anger felt by millions, while giving it a reactionary, militaristic and racist expression.

The success of the Trump campaign is not an indication of a more general swing to the right among working people in the United States. On the contrary, Trump's claim to have brought "millions and millions" of new voters to the Republican Party has been repeatedly debunked, most recently in a detailed analysis in the *Washington Post* Saturday, which demonstrated that there were far more new voters supporting the self-styled "democratic socialist" Bernie Sanders than the billionaire reactionary Trump.

The Sanders campaign, however, serves to contain this radicalization among working people and keep them trapped within the confines of the Democratic Party, with the Vermont senator seeking to deliver his supporters to Hillary Clinton if she prevails in the contest for the nomination.