

Netroots conference applauds Democratic Party demagoguery

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The Netroots Nation conference, which opened Thursday in downtown Detroit, was a display of demagoguery and political buck passing, as leading Democrats, including potential 2016 presidential candidates, gave speeches that failed even to mention the social catastrophe taking place outside the Cobo Hall convention center.

The speaker most heralded by those in attendance—largely trade union functionaries, employees of liberal lobbying groups, and the staff of Democratic Party officeholders—was Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, elected in 2012 to the seat formerly held by Edward Kennedy.

Warren has been promoted by liberal publications such as the *Nation* and the *Daily Kos* web site (the initiator of the annual Netroots meetings) as a potential challenger to Hillary Clinton for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination.

A “Ready for Warren” group was established this week to foster her possible candidacy. It distributed convention-style hats and signs for a Warren candidacy before her speech Friday morning. There were chants of “Run, Liz, Run” when she took the stage, although they died out quickly.

Warren was introduced by Democratic Congressman Gary Peters, the party’s candidate for the US Senate seat from Michigan held by the retiring Carl Levin.

He sought to present himself as a son of the working class, citing his mother’s membership in the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), but was silent on his own career in the stock market as an officer at Merrill Lynch and vice president of investments for UBS PaineWebber.

Peters hailed the Obama administration’s bailout of the auto industry in 2009, which resulted in a 50 percent cut in wages for all new-hires and reductions in

retiree health benefits, concluding, “Thank god for President Obama standing up for American workers.”

Warren was a more effective demagogue than Peters, although that is not saying much. She touted her own work in establishing the Consumer Financial Protection Board under the Obama administration, claiming it has resulted in \$4 billion being returned to victims of fraud by the Wall Street banks—a rounding error compared to the banks’ annual profits.

She ran down a litany of issues of interest to her largely middle-class, privileged audience, including consumer protection, environmental regulation, net neutrality, promotion of unions, and equal pay for equal work (the issue that drew the loudest applause). But, significantly, she made no mention of the bankruptcy of Detroit and the measures being imposed to make the people of Detroit pay for the crisis through the slashing of pensions, jobs and wages and the privatization of the Detroit Institute of Art, the water and sewage system, and other public assets.

This silence was particularly remarkable, and obviously deliberate, given the repeated references to water shutoffs in Detroit in the course of the Netroots conference, which adjourned for two hours shortly after Warren’s speech so that those in attendance could join in a protest march against the shutoffs.

The Obama administration has made clear its support for Detroit Mayor Michael Duggan and Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr, both Democrats, who are jointly responsible for the policy of shutting off water each week to at least 3,000 residents who have fallen behind on their bills because of poverty, unemployment and cuts in social assistance.

Warren and her political allies like Peters were anxious not to go too far in their anti-Wall Street pretenses. Warren has steadfastly defended the Obama

administration, which has carried out unprecedented attacks on the living standards and democratic rights of the working class, overseen the closure of schools and mass layoff of teachers while promoting for-profit charter schools, and enacted a health care “reform” that is undermining employer-paid benefits and reducing access to drugs and medical procedures for millions of people.

A supposed crusader against Wall Street abuses, Warren supports an administration that has refused to prosecute a single leading bank executive and guaranteed record stock prices and profits by pumping trillions of dollars into the financial markets.

The other major speaker at Netroots, appearing Thursday afternoon, was Vice President Joseph Biden. He was an unlikely attendee at a conference of supposed “progressives,” given that when he last ran for president, in 2008, he positioned himself on the right flank of the Democratic candidates, especially on foreign policy. He was chosen by Obama as vice president precisely to signal corporate America and the military-intelligence apparatus that a new Democratic administration would be a reliable servant of their interests.

Biden was nonetheless given a hero’s welcome at Netroots for his supposed role in pushing the Obama administration to endorse gay marriage in 2012. At one point during his address, the vice president was interrupted by a group of immigrant rights activists protesting the enormous increase in deportations during the Obama-Biden administration. He claimed to welcome their comments and to “feel their pain,” in the style of Bill Clinton, although he did not address the actual substance of the criticism.

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was invited to address the Netroots meeting, but declined, choosing to speak instead to a conference of financial executives in Boston, where she substituted for former president George W. Bush, who had to withdraw unexpectedly. Nevertheless, the “Ready for Hillary” political action committee was a prime sponsor of the conference and pro-Clinton materials were present in abundance.



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