

Socialist Alternative's Kshama Sawant appears with Sanders at Democratic Party rally in Seattle

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Seattle City Councilperson and Socialist Alternative leader Kshama Sawant appeared at a Democratic Party campaign rally August 8 featuring Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. Sanders, who caucuses as a Senate Democrat, is campaigning to become the Democratic presidential nominee for the 2016 general election. Sanders and Sawant were also joined on the platform by a series of Democratic state and federal lawmakers and trade union bureaucrats.

Sawant's role in the event leaves no doubt that Socialist Alternative functions as an agency of the Democratic Party.

"Sawant Gives Socialist Welcome to Bernie Sanders" was the headline of a statement published by Socialist Alternative in advance of the rally. To vouch for the supposed "socialist" credentials of the long-time US congressman and senator and to identify Sawant with Sanders, Socialist Alternative billed the event as one where "socialists share [the] stage."

Sawant was quoted as saying: "It's very exciting to have Sanders join us in Seattle. It's a great opportunity to build the socialist movement to take on the billionaires that are strangling our economy and democracy."

She added, "Sanders stands out from the rest of the presidential candidates in refusing to take corporate money... I appeal to the thousands of supporters who have donated or volunteered for my campaign to join me at the Sanders rally."

In her speech at the event, which nominally marked the 50th anniversary of Medicare, Sawant echoed a series of proposals put forward by the Sanders campaign. She employed Sanders' buzzwords, denouncing the "billionaire class" and calling for a "political revolution."

Her only concrete proposal to address the crisis of health care in America was a modest reform of the Social

Security tax system to "charge rich people the same Social Security tax that everyone else pays," a plan that she called "scrap the cap."

In the same announcement that hailed Sanders as a socialist and offered unstinting support for his campaign, Sawant proclaimed the need to "build a new kind of political organization" that is independent of the Republicans and is "also independent from the Wall Street-dominated Democratic Party."

This may set a new record for political double-talk—in the same breath Sawant hustles votes for the would-be Democratic presidential candidate and calls for a new party independent of...the Democratic Party! Sawant and Socialist Alternative are speaking out of both sides of their mouths, and their supposed support for an independent workers' party has been revealed as a fraud.

Socialist Alternative's cheerleading within the Democratic Party for Sanders is not a new phenomenon. In recent months, their magazine has been transformed into a running advertisement for Sanders.

"Sanders campaign gains momentum," proclaims a headline from the July-August edition of Socialist Alternative's magazine. The article's subhead asks, "How do we build a decisive challenge to corporate political domination?" Sanders quotes are featured throughout and splayed next to photos of the candidate in front of large crowds. The article calls for "building support for Sanders' proposals for a political revolution."

By functioning as campaign staffers for Sanders, Sawant and Socialist Alternative are responding to a deepening crisis of the Democratic Party. In the face of growing disaffection with the Democrats and bitterness among working people and youth over having been duped by Obama, Socialist Alternative is promoting a campaign whose central purpose is to block the emergence of an

independent movement of the working class and channel popular opposition back behind the Democrats.

Sanders himself admitted as much when he was interviewed on Sunday's "Meet the Press" program. Speaking with NBC's Chuck Todd, Sanders noted that the Democratic Party faced a crisis of legitimacy. "Democrats are losing because voter turnout is abysmal," he said, adding, "I think we can change that."

He continued: "One of the real advantages, I think, of me winning the Democratic primary, is that we can get a lot of young people, a lot of working people involved in the political process, getting them out to vote in a way that establishment politicians can't."

In his campaign to prevent the development of an independent movement of the working class, Sanders has the full support of Socialist Alternative, which justifies its adaptation with the argument that it must appeal to the "progressive" and "left" forces that have gathered around Sanders' campaign.

What Socialist Alternative means by "progressive" and "left" is not the working class, but the liberal and supposedly "left" layers of the upper-middle class—like themselves—who obsess over identity and lifestyle politics and who orbit one or another faction of the Democratic Party and trade union bureaucracy.

Socialist Alternative leader Ty Moore put it bluntly when he said at a pseudo-left conference in May that "the key thing is breaking away a base of activists and organizations that make up the left of the Democratic Party and the trade unions."

What's more, he added, "It's not a crime in itself to pressure the Democrats."

Such statements express the insipid political bankruptcy of a privileged upper-middle-class social layer that is entirely hostile to a revolutionary movement of the working class. These layers rush to rub shoulders with Sanders because they see his campaign as a vehicle for advancing their own aspirations to secure positions within the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy.

Accordingly, they do their best to conceal the class chasm that separates Sanders from socialism and aid this agent of the American ruling class and the Democratic Party in his efforts to deceive and hoodwink workers and youth.

An article in the June edition of Socialist Alternative's publication advances what has become the standard pretext for providing political cover for bourgeois politicians masquerading as "left" or even "socialist" partisans of working people. The article states: "Socialists

need to go through this experience [the Sanders campaign] with them, helping to speed up the process of drawing the conclusion that an independent political alternative to the Democrats is needed."

The same exact phrases—"go through the experience with them"—were used to justify the pseudo-left's promotion of Greece's Syriza government and its leader Alexis Tsipras and to assist them in conspiring with the European Union to impose a bankers' dictatorship on the Greek masses.

Make no mistake, the "experience" of a Sanders presidency in the US would be just as disastrous for the working class as the "experience" of the Syriza government has proven to be for workers in Greece.

The fact that Sanders is attracting significant support, particularly from working people and student youth, shows that broad sections of the population are drawn to his proclaimed opposition to social inequality and are interested in a left-wing alternative to the big-business parties.

Far from alienating voters, Sanders' supposed socialism has increased interest in his campaign. This is particularly significant in a country where anticommunism has been the official language of the political establishment for the last century.

Under such conditions, socialists are all the more obligated to clearly explain the irreconcilable chasm that separates Sanders' bourgeois program, thinly masked by left-sounding demagoguery, from the principles and program of socialism. To bring forward the emerging anticapitalist sentiment within the working class and transform it into a politically conscious, independent and revolutionary movement for socialism, Marxists must issue the necessary warnings, disabuse workers of any illusions they have in Sanders, and clarify the basic political, class and historical issues involved in the building of a genuine socialist movement. Central to this task is the fight to break workers from—not keep them hog-tied to—the Democratic Party.

In contrast to Sanders' pseudo-left cheerleaders, this has been and will continue to be the response of the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site*. (See: "Is Bernie Sanders a Socialist?").



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