

Sanders in the Democratic debate: A “political revolution” that stops at the water’s edge

Bill Van Auken
19 January 2016

The Democratic Party’s fourth presidential debate, and the last to be held before the upcoming Iowa primary vote, saw Senator Bernie Sanders, who calls himself a “socialist,” go on the offensive against his main rival, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton, mouthing a series of demagogic slogans about social inequality, the domination of politics by big money, and the need to “invest in jobs and education, not in jails and incarceration.”

In a pointed reference to Clinton’s intimate ties to Wall Street, Sanders, asked what separated his politics from hers, declared, “The first difference is I don’t take money from big banks. I don’t get personal speaking fees from Goldman Sachs.”

Some 12.5 million people watched Sunday night, making it the third most viewed Democratic debate in history. No doubt, among them were many who back Sanders precisely because of his self-described “socialism” and who tuned in to see him oppose the right-wing and corrupt politics of Clinton.

While he clearly played to these sentiments, he more or less barked out his talking points on cue, his populist phrases backed by no serious analysis. Behind the well-worn rhetoric, what was evident was an intellectual vacuity and a lack of any deeply rooted principles that would prevent Sanders from acting as a faithful political servant of the ruling oligarchy.

The most obvious contradiction in his promotion of a so-called political revolution, replete with railings against the billionaires and their corruption of American politics, is the fact that this revolution curiously stops at the water’s edge. On the issues of foreign policy, there is virtually nothing to distinguish Sanders from Clinton, or virtually any other politician

of the ruling establishment.

How is it possible for a political system which, according to Sanders, is “rigged” in favor of the top 1 percent to play a progressive and democratic role on the world stage? To ask the question is to answer it.

Washington’s foreign policy is no less determined by the interests of the ruling corporate-financial elite than its domestic policy. US foreign policy is conducted to further the profit interests of US-based banks and corporations, and American militarism, which generates vast profits for big business, is directed at resolving the crisis of the capitalist system by violently redividing the world.

The attitude taken by Sanders, and every other candidate and politician, toward the questions of war and US imperialism’s role in the world is the touchstone for understanding the real character of their politics.

Most of the corporate media’s coverage of Sunday’s debate, while going on at length about verbal jousting over gun control, health care, campaign finances and other domestic issues, skipped over entirely the questions posed to the candidates on US foreign policy, the “war on terrorism” and the US intervention in Iraq and Syria.

This was no accident, as there were no confrontations to report on this front between Sanders and his opponents, Clinton and former Maryland governor Martin O’Malley. None of them voiced any opposition to the global eruption of American militarism, the drone assassination program, or the successive campaigns for regime-change from Libya, to Syria to Ukraine.

Clinton postured as the most qualified to occupy the

position of “commander-in-chief” based on her “many hours in the situation room, advising President Obama.” This record includes her role in orchestrating the right-wing 2009 coup in Honduras, which plunged that country into unprecedented repression and violence, contributing to the waves of refugees heading to the US border.

She was a principal advocate of the US-NATO war for regime-change in Libya that killed tens of thousands and threw the North African country into a state of permanent civil war. She famously gloated over the lynch mob murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, boasting, “We came, we saw, he died.” And she was among those who pushed hardest for Washington to arm and finance the so-called rebels as proxies in the war for regime-change in Syria, which gave rise to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Sanders said not a word about this bloody and criminal record. In response to Clinton’s defense of the Obama administration’s and her own policies, he declared, “I agree with most of what she said.” Asked whether their policies in Syria had contributed to the growth of ISIS, he answered flatly, “No.” Obama, he said, “is doing the right thing” in the Iraq-Syria war.

At the same time, he called for “fundamental changes in the priorities of the Defense Department.” He cited the Pentagon’s \$600 billion budget not to call for this vast expenditure to be eliminated or even reduced, but rather—in response to a question about so-called “home-grown” terror attacks—for it to be redirected to fighting “international terrorism.” The logic of this position is that the violence and repression of the US military should be unleashed within the US itself.

Among his sole innovations was a call for reactionary oil monarchies like those ruling Saudi Arabia and Qatar “to start putting more skin in the game” in the prosecution of the US-instigated wars in the region.

But in whose interests are these wars being fought? Is it in any way credible that Sanders is going to lead a “political revolution” to rein in the “handful of billionaires who control economic and political life in this country,” while supporting a foreign policy elaborated by the same political establishment they control?

For more than 15 years, Washington has waged wars of aggression in the name of a “war on terrorism” that have claimed the lives of over a million people, while

turning many millions more into refugees. It has used the same phony pretext to carry out an unprecedented assault on democratic rights at home and carry out extrajudicial executions by means of drone missile strikes abroad.

Sanders accepts and defends the lies that serve as justification for US policy. He, like his opponents for the presidential nomination, seeks to conceal the fact that Al Qaeda and ISIS are the creation of US imperialism, forged as reactionary Islamist proxy forces to wage Washington’s wars for regime-change first in Afghanistan and then in Libya and Syria.

While posturing as an opponent of the domination of the billionaires at home, Sanders, no less than any of the other candidates, Democratic and Republican alike, leaves no doubt that he will defend their interests and fight for their dominance abroad. In the final analysis, his political perspective, like that of the Democratic Party as a whole, is nationalist and deeply reactionary.

Sanders’s positions on war and the international policies of US imperialism make it clear that he is no socialist, whatever his pretensions.

The struggle for socialism and the struggle against war are inseparable. They can be waged only through the building of an independent revolutionary movement based upon the working class and armed with an internationalist perspective.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)