

Socialist Alternative's Kshama Sawant stumps for Sanders at New York rally

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About 1,200 people assembled in lower Manhattan's Foley Square on Saturday and then marched to Union Square in support of Democratic Party presidential aspirant Bernie Sanders. The rally was far smaller than the event three days earlier at Washington Square Park, where the candidate spoke and drew an audience of tens of thousands.

Speakers at the Saturday rally, advertised on the Sanders campaign web site and held just a few days before the hotly contested New York primary between Sanders and Hillary Clinton, included a number of trade union bureaucrats. Officials from the Communications Workers of America, whose members are now on strike against the telecom giant Verizon, addressed the crowd. Also speaking was a representative from the New York State Working Families Party, the organization that functions, with union support, as a pressure group in the orbit of the Democrats, and which has endorsed Sanders.

The most politically notable speaker, however, was Seattle City Council member Kshama Sawant, a leading member of the pseudo-left organization Socialist Alternative. Sawant and Socialist Alternative have sought to give a "left" cover to the Democratic Party, particularly since her initial election in 2013. She has appeared at Democratic Party fundraisers and in 2015 ran for reelection to the city council in open alliance with Seattle Democrats.

Sawant's remarks on Saturday underscored the integration of Socialist Alternative into the Sanders campaign and the Democratic Party. The Seattle "socialist" did not use the term socialism in relation to Sanders' campaign. Just as significantly, she made no criticism of Sanders' foreign policy positions, nor did she say a word about the military moves of the Obama administration for confrontation with Russia in Eastern

Europe or with China in the South China Sea.

Sawant chastised Hillary Clinton as an establishment candidate, but went on to boast that "Hillary and the corporate establishment are feeling the pressure because of our movement." The message could not be clearer: the goal is to pressure the Democrats, to prevent a break by the working class with this capitalist party.

Sawant's specialty is to dress up the alliance with the Democrats in some fraudulent "left" rhetoric. "Wouldn't it be incredible," she said, if Sanders won the New York Democratic primary?

If he did not win, however, it would be because "the Democratic Party is hostile territory for our agenda." She added: "If he is blocked by the Democratic Party establishment, he should run all the way as an independent or Green." She urged the audience to sign a Socialist Alternative petition calling on Sanders to form a third party for the general election.

Exposing her own phony call for "independence," Sawant went on to say that an "independent" Sanders party would not contest the ten "swing" states in the November election. Thus, after Sanders' current race for the nomination, he would continue his pressure campaign on the Democrats by running in states where he would not affect the outcome of the vote!

The Sanders campaign is seen by pseudo-left groups like Socialist Alternative not only as a means of heading off a genuinely independent movement of the working class against the capitalist system, but also as a way of facilitating their own entrance into the capitalist establishment—at levels higher than that of Seattle City Council.

The break from the Democratic Party is not simply one of organization; it is a programmatic and class question. As the bitter experiences with Syriza in

Greece and similar “left” bourgeois parties have demonstrated, the pseudo-left is prepared to come to the rescue of capitalism via new political formations that chain the working class to the capitalist system. Socialist Alternative would gladly play this role in the US.

The complete faith in the bourgeois political establishment that emanated from Sawant on the podium was not shared by many of those who attended the rally. Like many of those who are supporting the Sanders campaign, they expressed opposition to soaring collage debt, rising inequality, unaffordable rent and the inability of millions to access health care. Sanders’ role is to try to keep this social anger contained within the Democratic Party and the capitalist system.

Emma, a college student from St. Lawrence University in upstate New York who was at the New York City rally, was asked what motivated her to support Sanders. “I like the way he is addressing health care. It’s important. Obamacare requires people to have health insurance but many can’t afford it. Two people in my family have had to struggle with heroin addiction. Sanders is going about trying to get universal health care, different than establishment politicians.”

Kris Blessing traveled from Maryland to the New York City rally. The University of Maryland student told the WWS, “I came here for the rally. I really want to be part of the revolution. This is the first election I’ve felt is part of a bigger cause. The cause is income inequality, environmental issues, racial equality and really the first presidential candidate who has spoken out on almost every war.”

When the WWS pointed to Sanders’ support for the Obama administration’s war policy in the Middle East and its provocations against China and Russia, Kris expressed deep concern. “In the past, Sanders has stood up against wars, but he hasn’t spoken out enough on wars beyond the war in Iraq. That includes Libya and the decisions leading to the Syrian refugee crisis.

“I think as to being non-confrontational and non-imperialist, Bernie Sanders is better than Hillary. I don’t want Hillary with her finger on the button. I think Hillary is terrible. She is so ready and willing to intervene militarily overseas it is very scary. She would intervene overseas whenever the wind blows that way. But I never heard Bernie criticize the Obama administration’s war policies against Russia or China.

“I think it is a conspiracy that we don’t hear what is happening in China. It is not mentioned because there would be a lot of big rallies like this against that war drive.”

Michael is a student at Essex County College in New Jersey and a dispatcher for a taxi company. He explained, “I came to support Bernie Sanders and spread the word. I support his plans to fight for a \$15 minimum wage and tax the rich. He has no Super Pac and takes no money from the corporations.

“I consider Sanders a partial socialist,” Michael said. “He doesn’t want a full socialist country, but he has some socialist policies I support.” When asked what those were, he answered, “In terms of health care, he wants it for everyone, but I can’t think of any others.” After further consideration, he pointed to shortcomings in Sanders’ health care policies, “I think the pharmaceutical companies and insurance companies should be nationalized. I have Medicaid, and I take many medications, but the problem is the pharmaceutical companies are not well regulated in this country, and as a result, the prices of medicines are too high. Beyond regulation, the pharmaceutical companies should be nationalized, and that would be a more socialist solution.

“I don’t like that Sanders says he wants the banks to break themselves up, and the government doesn’t have a role in it. I don’t think Sanders spoke well about the banks in his rebuttal to Hillary on the banks in the recent debate.

“I believe all basic human needs should be available to all and provided by the government. I would include healthcare, education, housing and energy. This could be full socialism, although there could be more.”



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