

Socialist Alternative: Charlatanry and lies in support of Sanders’ “political revolution”

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3 May 2016

Bernie Sanders is shifting into the next phase of his mission on behalf of the American ruling elite, seeking to corral the millions of youth and workers who responded to his campaign and direct them behind the war criminal and Wall Street stooge Hillary Clinton. In parallel, the various pseudo-left organizations that have promoted Sanders are seeking to adjust their tactics to better perform their assigned task of blocking the development of a genuinely socialist movement of the working class.

Socialist Alternative has been the most unrestrained of all these groups in integrating itself into Sanders’ campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. Now, with Sanders’ effective concession to Clinton, it is desperately seeking to revive illusions in his bogus “political revolution.” The organization and its chief spokeswoman, Seattle City Councilor Kshama Sawant, have launched a petition drive asking the Vermont senator to run either as an independent or on the Green Party ticket alongside Green presidential candidate Jill Stein, and to found and lead a new “left” party, which they describe as a “fighting, working-class political alternative.”

Socialist Alternative’s position involves a mass of howling contradictions and outright lies. There are two basic fictions. First, that Sanders, who has allied himself with the Democrats for his entire 26 years in the US Congress and sought to become the party’s presidential candidate, is somehow a genuine “independent” whose socialist pretensions should be taken for good coin. Second, that his campaign, in the words of a statement by Sawant published April 27 on the group’s web site, “actually represents” the workers who have donated to it, and that a party he founded and led would be “a party for the millions, not the millionaires.”

From the onset of its virtual dissolution into the Sanders campaign, Socialist Alternative has sought to obscure or deny certain basic facts: that Sanders pledged at the outset of his campaign that he would support the eventual Democratic candidate; that he has explicitly defended capitalist private ownership of the banks and corporations; and that he has repeatedly praised and held up as a model the Obama administration, which has overseen a record growth of social inequality.

Now that Sanders has essentially conceded the nomination to Clinton, Socialist Alternative is promoting another fiction: that independent working class-politics is simply a matter of an organizational break with the Democratic Party. There are all sorts

of parties that are nominally independent of the Democratic Party and are nevertheless bourgeois parties that defend American capitalism and US imperialism—the Green Party being one of them.

Real working-class political independence is a question of program, history and the class interests objectively represented by the organization. To claim that a politician such as Sanders, who has for decades loyally supported one of the two main parties of Wall Street and the Pentagon, and proven his utility in diverting social discontent into harmless channels, can become the leader of a genuine workers’ party is to engage in the political equivalent of alchemy. Those who promote such ideas are liars and con artists, not socialists.

It is worthwhile examining in greater detail what Socialist Alternative actually writes. The April 27 statement by Sawant begins with gross a distortion of reality. She states: “Despite all the obstacles thrown in the path of Bernie Sanders by the corrupted American electoral system, his campaign has made an enormous impact.”

What obstacles? It would be more accurate to say Sanders has been accorded the red carpet treatment. He has had widespread media access, has been invited to participate in numerous nationally televised debates, and has been the target of notably little redbaiting, from either party. Genuine socialist candidates, who oppose the capitalist system, its two major parties and American imperialism, are confronted with impossible hurdles, legal and otherwise, merely to obtain ballot status. They are all but blacked out by the media and regularly excluded from election debates.

Socialist Alternative, however, wants to portray Sanders as an insurgent outsider battling the system in order to mask its own de facto support for the Democratic Party.

That Sawant and her organization, for all their talk of independent “left” and even “socialist” politics, back the Democrats emerges clearly from the manner in which she promotes Sanders. She denounces the Democratic establishment not on any principled socialist basis, but for making it more difficult to defeat the Republicans in the general election. She writes: “Rather than support the candidate who is best positioned to stop Trump and the Republicans,” namely Sanders, they are backing Clinton.

For all its criticism of Clinton, Socialist Alternative is already lined up behind the “anyone but Trump” mantra that will be a major aspect of her right-wing campaign. Its web site prominently

features a graphic with the slogan, “Stop Trump.”

If there is any doubt about this, consider the following passage: “If electing a Republican is really Bernie’s main concern, there is no reason he could not at least run in the 40 + states where it’s absolutely clear the Democratic or Republican candidate will win, while not putting his name on the 5-10 closely contested ‘swing states.’”

Here Sawant puts into Sanders’ mouth the position of her own organization: that a so-called “independent left” Sanders campaign should run only in those states where it will not jeopardize a victory for Clinton and the Democrats.

Sawant goes on to argue that without an independent Sanders campaign, Trump will capture the antiestablishment anger that has erupted onto the surface of the 2016 election campaign. “While Trump might not win the election,” she writes, “support for hard-right populist politics will grow if there is no fighting left alternative offered.”

In fact, as history has demonstrated again and again, the surest guarantee of the growth of right-wing parties and movements is the subordination of the working class to bourgeois “left” politicians and parties. This historical law has been demonstrated most graphically in the recent period in the bitter experience of the Greek working class with the supposedly “left” Syriza party. Throughout Europe, right-wing and neo-fascist parties are gaining strength due to the militarist and socially reactionary policies of the official “left,” supported by its pseudo-left satellites.

A second article, posted on April 28 and titled “Time for Bernie to Launch a New Party for the 99%,” is, if anything, even more grotesque in its opportunism. It completely identifies Socialist Alternative with Sanders, warning that if the Vermont senator “remains loyal to the Democratic Party and backs Clinton in the general election, it would mean the demoralization and disorganization of *our* movement.” [Emphasis added].

In other words, the future of Socialist Alternative’s “working-class movement” depends entirely on the decision of a politician who explicitly defends capitalist property and has functioned for decades as a loyal appendage of the Democratic Party.

The article goes on to urge Sanders to “call a mass conference of his supporters to democratically debate whether to endorse Clinton or continue as an independent.” It praises a petition titled “A Love Letter to Bernie” that “calls on Bernie to turn his two-million-strong donor base into a democratic membership organization that runs ‘democratic socialist candidates’ at all levels of government.”

The article explicitly backs Sanders’ reactionary promotion of economic nationalism and trade war policies, hailing his demand to “stop job-killing free trade agreements.” This nationalist component to Socialist Alternative’s politics is by no means incidental. It is, on the contrary, central to its enthusiastic support for a capitalist politician and, more basically, capitalist politics.

There is, in the course of these two articles, no mention of a single political development beyond the borders of the United States. Nor is there any mention of Sanders’ foreign policy. This in an election over which looms the explosive growth of militarism and the mounting danger of a third world war.

In its silence on this question of questions, Socialist Alternative

is complicit with both capitalist parties and the corporate-controlled media, which have systematically excluded from the campaign the advanced plans for a far-reaching escalation of the wars in the Middle East and stepped-up aggression against nuclear-armed Russia and China, to be implemented after the November vote, regardless which party emerges victorious.

Sanders’ economic nationalism is part of the growth of militarism and is consistent with his pro-imperialist and pro-war foreign policy. Sanders does not like to speak on foreign policy, but just in the past two weeks, when pressed by an interviewer, he acknowledged that he supports President Obama’s “kill list” and drone assassination program and the administration’s six-fold increase in US troops in Syria.

In January, somewhat embarrassed by Sanders’ remarks in support of Obama’s war policy, Socialist Alternative published a damage-control article titled “Sanders’ Foreign Policy Falls Short: Socialism Means Internationalism.” But in seeking, entirely hypocritically, to distance itself from Sanders’ support for US imperialism, the article revealed the real position of the organization when it declared that Sanders’ defense of American aggression “does not negate the enormously progressive aspects of his campaign...”

As though it is possible for someone to oppose the “billionaire class” at home while supporting its crimes and depredations abroad! Genuine socialists insist that the interests of workers in any country are identical to those of workers in every other country, and that no national contingent of the working class can defend its rights except in a common struggle with workers internationally against their common class enemy.

There is no iron wall between the foreign and domestic policy of the capitalist class. War abroad, conducted to secure for the corporate oligarchy access to resources, markets and cheap labor, is always accompanied by repression and social reaction at home. Sanders’ support for US imperialism overseas exposes as fraudulent his supposed opposition to Wall Street and support for workers within the US.

And Socialist Alternative’s alliance with Sanders and the Democrats, notwithstanding its radical and even socialist phrases, exposes it as a pro-capitalist and pro-war organization of the privileged middle class, hostile to the interests of working people.



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