

Nothing revolutionary about Sanders’ “Our Revolution”

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Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders launched the successor organization to his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination with the rollout August 24 of “Our Revolution.” Despite the pretentious name and the slick video introduction on the group’s web site, there is nothing revolutionary about Our Revolution.

The video invokes “the idealism and the energy and the intelligence of millions of people” and suggests that their actions will be in line with a long tradition of popular struggle going back hundreds and even thousands of years. But according to the perspective laid out by Sanders in his live-streamed speech, this supposedly mighty river of struggle will deposit its waters into the cesspool of the Democratic Party and the Hillary Clinton campaign.

Our Revolution “will focus on three distinct areas of work,” according to email and Facebook announcements: “(1) bringing millions of working people and young people into the political system; (2) inspiring, recruiting and supporting progressive candidates across the entire spectrum of government—from school board to the US Senate; (3) educating the public about the most pressing issues confronting our nation and the bold solutions needed to address them.”

What this means in reality is (1) registering people as Democrats and encouraging them to vote for the Democratic Party; (2) supporting candidates in Democratic Party primaries and Democratic candidates in general elections; (3) conducting propaganda to portray the reactionary capitalist and imperialist politics of the Democratic Party as the solution to the social problems confronting working people.

Every one of the candidates endorsed on the Our Revolution web site is a Democrat, including such longtime party standard-bearers as former Senator Russ Feingold of Wisconsin, who is seeking his old job after being defeated in 2010 by a right-wing Republican;

incumbent Democratic representatives Raul Grijalva of Arizona, Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, Keith Ellison of Minnesota and Marcy Kaptur of Ohio; and a slew of Democratic candidates for Congress and state and local office.

The only even nominally “independent” candidate associated with Our Revolution is Sanders himself, who resumed that purely token status when he returned to his post as a US senator from Vermont. Our Revolution thus reinforces the political monopoly of the two-party system, which enables the American financial aristocracy to control and manipulate the political life of the country.

While only a few hundred people attended the official launch in Burlington, Vermont, Sanders addressed an audience of some 2,600 house parties and over 200,000 Facebook Live viewers. In the four days since, the launch video has been viewed nearly 200,000 times on YouTube. These figures suggest that Sanders continues to attract considerable interest among working people and youth after a campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in which he won 22 states and 13 million votes.

The speech Sanders delivered differed little from the threadbare platitudes of his stump speeches, except that it was even more tame. Not once did he mention the words “socialism,” “capitalism,” “working class” or “capitalist class.” He made no reference to the “millionaires and billionaires” whose political influence he regularly denounced during the primary campaign, but whose support may be required to sustain Our Revolution.

As was the case throughout the primary campaign, Sanders made no mention of the growing threat of war and no criticism of the Obama administration’s foreign policy, including the escalation of US warfare in Syria and Iraq, the widespread use of drone-fired missiles to assassinate those targeted by the CIA and Pentagon, and the continuing military buildup against Russia and China.

The “Our Issues” section of the Our Revolution web site lists 17 subjects, every one of them related to domestic concerns. There is not a single reference to foreign policy or war.

Sanders’ silence on war was all the more striking since that very morning the Syrian conflict was dramatically expanded by the entry of Turkish ground troops, who crossed the border with the aid of US air cover and began to seize Syrian territory.

While making no reference to this ominous development, which increases the risk of direct military conflict between the US and nuclear-armed Russia, Sanders repeated his claim that the Democratic Party platform he negotiated with Hillary Clinton is the “most progressive” in history. That platform endorses the Obama administration’s war with ISIS, including its illegal intervention in Syria, as well as the US-NATO buildup along Russia’s western border and the Obama-Clinton “pivot” to Asia, which will place 60 percent of US naval and air forces within striking distance of China.

Answering critics who note that Democratic Party platforms are routinely ignored by Democratic presidents and their administrations, Sanders said, “If anybody thinks that that document and what is in that platform is simply going to be resting on a shelf somewhere, accumulating dust, they are very mistaken.”

When it comes to the tepid social reforms listed in the platform, Sanders’ statement is false, and he knows it. If Clinton wins the election, the promises of expanded healthcare, a massive jobs program, free college education and a \$15 minimum wage will be unceremoniously scrapped. The platform’s pledges, on the other hand, to build the strongest possible US military and use it in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the Asia-Pacific region will certainly be on Clinton’s agenda.

Sanders made only a single criticism of the Obama administration, and that was Obama’s support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the trade deal that seeks to mobilize Asian, North American and South American countries under US leadership against China—which is excluded from the agreement. Sanders wants an even more nationalistic economic policy, echoing the rabid anti-China chauvinism of Republican Donald Trump.

Of Our Revolution’s 15 original staff members, eight quit after Sanders named his former campaign manager, Jeff Weaver, as president. There were objections to his decision to seek 501(c)(4) status, which allows the group to collect large contributions and keep donors secret.

The entire operation underscores the real political

function of the Sanders campaign from its outset. It was not the political expression of the growing anti-capitalist sentiment of workers and young people in the US, but rather the response of a section of the ruling class to this alarming development. Sanders very consciously offered his services as a political lightning rod, using talk of a “political revolution” against the “billionaire class” to channel mass anger against social inequality and the domination of the political system by Wall Street back behind the Democratic Party, where it could be strangled and dissipated.

Sanders himself was shocked by the mass response to his rhetoric and the entire financial aristocracy was aghast when his claim to be a “democratic socialist” proved to be a powerful point of attraction.

The formation of Our Revolution shows that Sanders seeks to continue his services to the capitalist two-party system. But the conditions of capitalist crisis, unemployment, poverty, inequality and war that fueled the political radicalization of which Sanders was a temporary and initial beneficiary will not go away after the elections. The outcome of the contest between the fascistic billionaire Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, the favored candidate of Wall Street, the Pentagon and the CIA, will be a further lurch to the right and a vast escalation of US military violence internationally.

In the impending mass struggles of the working class, it is critical that the lessons of the Sanders campaign be assimilated. The fight against war and inequality cannot be carried out within the framework of capitalist politics. There is no avoiding a direct assault on the wealth and power of the ruling class. The working class must break free of the Democratic Party and bourgeois politics as a whole and build an independent political movement to fight for workers’ power and socialism.



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