

Sanders, trade union officials promote economic nationalism at Washington, DC rally

Nick Barrickman
18 November 2016

On Thursday, Vermont Senator and former Democratic Party presidential candidate Bernie Sanders appeared before a crowd of several hundred workers, young people and trade union members on the north lawn of the US Capitol Building in Washington, DC. The event, billed as a “Rally for Social and Economic Justice and Equality,” was organized by the trade unions and various organizations tied to the AFL-CIO and the Democratic Party.

Despite organizers’ claim that the rally was intended to “promote a people’s agenda stepping up grassroots mobilizations for economic and social justice and equality as the incoming Trump administration takes office,” the event offered no way forward for workers seeking to defend themselves against the attack on democratic rights and living standards being prepared by a Trump administration.

In the wake of the US presidential elections, tens of thousands of youth, professionals and working class people have taken to the streets protesting the election of Trump. High school students have staged mass walkouts throughout the country in recent days.

Speakers at the event made few direct references to Trump, instead seeking desperately to bolster illusions in the Democratic Party. In various trade union functionaries’ speeches, Trump’s election victory was portrayed as something potentially beneficial. Numerous speakers touted the president-elect’s right-wing nationalist opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) deal, a view that is shared by the trade unions.

In the social media description of the event, the organizers declare “months of protests by labor and progressive organizations... culminated in the opposition

to the trade deal by all three leading Presidential candidates.”

This perspective was captured most grotesquely by former-Communications Workers of America president and representative of Sanders’s “Our Revolution” organization, Larry Cohen. Jumping up and down hysterically, Cohen declared, “we need to celebrate in dark times. This is a victory!”

Several trade union representatives declared that “progressives” and the “labor movement” needed to “stick together” going forward. This was stated without a hint of irony under conditions where the trade union apparatus in multiple industries has organized the isolation and sellout of strikes by sections of the working class throughout the US.

Sanders began his speech by reminding audience members “not to forget” that Trump had lost the popular vote to Hillary Clinton. “Trump won for a number of reasons,” Sanders said, noting the various aspects of the economic and social crisis in America.

“The future of the Democratic Party must be rectified [and] it is time for a new direction,” said Sanders. He said he supported the nomination of Minnesota Democrat Keith Ellison as the new chair of the Democratic National Committee. Sanders himself has been recently elevated to the leadership of the Democratic caucus in the US Senate.

The claim that the Democratic Party is capable of being moved to the left is disproven by the results of Sanders’s own failed presidential run. After gaining the support of millions with his calls for “political revolution” against the “billionaire class,” Sanders pivoted to backing Clinton, the chosen candidate of Wall Street and the military-intelligence agencies.

Sanders said nothing of his attempts to present the Wall Street servant Clinton as the continuation of his “political revolution against the billionaire class” in his speech.

Sanders sought to stoke illusions in the new administration, declaring demagogically “people thought Trump would stand up to the establishment... He won’t, but we will.” Sanders stated that Trump had been “dangerously wrong” on issues such as climate change, before urging the president-elect to pay more attention to “the scientific community” and less to “the fossil fuel industry.”

The notion that a Trump administration can be pressured to adopt “progressive” policy positions is to sow fatal illusions about the real character of a Trump presidency. A hint of what Trump is preparing to do was given just days before, when Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke, an avid Trump supporter and prospect for a top position in his cabinet, accused anti-Trump protesters of causing “riots” and advocated for the use of “ALL non lethal force” against them.

Despite the event’s claim to promote “an agenda for stepping up grassroots mobilizations,” not a single speaker bothered to make a reference to the mass anti-Trump protests occurring in cities throughout the US. The refusal of the Democratic Party and trade union establishment to support the protests is of a piece with efforts to legitimize the Trump “transition to power” while containing popular hostility to the election’s outcome.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Jessica, who had attended the event. “I was a Sanders supporter during the primaries. I honestly think if he had won [the election] America would not be in the situation we are in right now,” she said.

Speaking of the anti-Trump protests sweeping the country, Jessica said “I think people should be protesting. I think we have a duty to [protest].” When asked why she thought the Democratic Party was attempting to play down the significance of Trump’s election, Jessica said, “Trump always complained during the election that the system was rigged, but it turned out to be rigged for him.”

The author also recommends:

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[17 November 2016]



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