

In town hall broadcast, Sanders declares his readiness to work with Trump on trade war agenda

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In a town hall event broadcast Monday by CNN, Bernie Sanders praised Donald Trump for bucking the political establishment. He also stressed his willingness to work with the far-right president-elect in implementing an economic nationalist agenda that will pit American workers against their fellow workers in China, Mexico and other countries.

The main thrust of Sanders' remarks was to assure the incoming administration that he and his Democratic Party allies will do nothing to seriously oppose Trump's right-wing policies. The former challenger for the Democratic presidential nomination, who presented himself as a "socialist" and opponent of the "billionaire class" during the primaries, only to endorse and campaign for the corrupt personification of the establishment, Hillary Clinton, emphasized his rejection of the obstructionist and hostile posture adopted by the Republicans toward the Obama presidency.

At one point, Sanders declared, "Donald Trump did something extraordinary. Trump took on the Republican establishment, took on the Democratic establishment, took on the media establishment and he ended up winning the election to become the president of the United States."

At another point he said, "I will work with Mr. Trump. I will work with anybody who wants to work together to develop a trade policy which tells corporate America they have to look beyond their greed."

This offer of collaboration was addressed to a multi-billionaire speculator who has stacked his cabinet with fellow billionaires, corporate CEOs, ex-generals and ultra-right stooges of the US financial oligarchy. Trump has pledged to drastically slash corporate taxes and income taxes for the wealthy, and has appointed fascistic ideologues who oppose public education, Medicare and Social Security, the minimum wage and all forms of

business regulation. So much for telling corporate America to "look beyond their greed!"

With these remarks, Sanders thoroughly discredited his principal justification for supporting Clinton and exhorting his primary voters, particularly young workers and students, to do the same: the claim that a Trump victory would be a catastrophe that had at all costs—including electing the Wall Street crony Clinton—to be prevented. What's more, he praised Trump for doing what he was not prepared to do—oppose the political establishment.

These remarks highlighted a performance that thoroughly exposed Sanders' unscrupulousness and political bankruptcy.

It should be pointed out that the congressional Republicans, on behalf of their far-right agenda, decided to seriously fight Obama despite the fact that Obama had routed his Republican opponent, John McCain, winning both the popular and electoral vote by wide margins. In contrast, Sanders mentioned only in passing the fact that Trump lost the popular vote, never hinting that this deprived the incoming president of a political mandate to impose the far-right policies he has mapped out. In fact, Trump lost by nearly three million votes—the biggest popular vote deficit in US history for a candidate who won the electoral vote.

At the same time, Sanders branded Trump as a "pathological liar" who ran a campaign "whose cornerstone was bigotry." He made no attempt to reconcile these charges with his offer to work with the new president.

(As in his other post-election appearances, Sanders dropped the term "working class," reverting to the "middle class" mantra more acceptable to the Democratic Party, into whose congressional leadership the supposed

“independent socialist” has been elevated.)

Sanders said nothing during the program to warn his audience about the incoming Trump administration, which will be the most right-wing in American history. His suggestion that this administration is capable of carrying out policies that “improve the lives of the American people” is designed to politically disarm the working class.

Through all of his opportunist political gymnastics, one constant has been Sanders’ support, stretching back decades, for American imperialism. During his primary campaign, he repeatedly declared his support for the Obama administration’s wars of aggression in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria and defended Obama’s program of drone assassinations.

On Monday night, asked about the claims—completely unsubstantiated—of the CIA, FBI and other US intelligence agencies that the Russian government hacked Democratic Party emails in order to swing the election in Trump’s favor, Sanders said the agencies were “virtually unanimous and the evidence is overwhelming.” He underscored his support for the warmongering propaganda campaign against Moscow, stating, “And, we should be clear, this is not just the first time they’ve done it, and I suspect they’re working on other efforts as well in other countries around the world.

“This was a way for them to help elect the candidate of their choice, Mr. Trump. And, I think it was also an effort to try to undermine, in a significant way, American democracy. So, I think the evidence is very clear that Russia did play a very harmful role, unacceptable role, and it’s something that we have got to deal with. I think what Mr. Trump appears to be saying is that, no, it’s not true, it’s not accurate, he doesn’t trust the intelligence committees, and, I think that is an unfortunate position to hold.”

Far more than his populist rhetoric, such statements demonstrate the real orientation of Sanders’ politics. His support for imperialist intrigue both at home and abroad brands him as a political supporter of the American ruling class and an enemy of the working class in the United States and internationally.

Sanders reiterated his support for Trump’s national chauvinism, blaming foreign workers for job losses and poverty in the United States. In response to a question on whether he would work with Trump to “bring jobs back” to the United States, Sanders declared, “Absolutely. And it’s an area where, you’re right, Trump and I talked about many of the same issues.”

He continued: “I don’t think you can be a great nation if you’re not producing a lot of what we consume. We can’t get everything from China and Mexico. You know, occasionally you’ve got to buy a product made in the United States of America. So I will work very hard, not only with regard to NAFTA, but with regard to PNTR [Permanent Normal Trade Relations] with China, to transform our trade policy.”

Sanders, even more than Trump, is an experienced defender of economic nationalism, a central element of his politics for a quarter century. One of his first pieces of legislation in Congress was a bill that he co-sponsored to restrict China’s trade status on the fraudulent grounds of “human rights.”

Time after time, Sanders collaborated with right-wing Republicans to put forward legislation seeking to curtail trade with China, calling on the US to withdraw from the World Trade Organization (a position substantially in line with Trump’s pick for US trade representative), and attacking the federal work visa program in the name of protecting “American jobs.” For all of his hand-wringing over Trump’s bigotry, it was Sanders who was praised by the racist, anti-immigrant talk show host Lou Dobbs as “one of the few straight talkers in Congress” for his nativist opposition to immigration programs.

Neither Sanders’ nor Trump’s promotion of “American First” nationalism has anything to do with protecting American workers. It is designed to disorient, immobilize and divide the working class in order to carry out further attacks on wages, jobs and living standards.

Economic protectionism and national chauvinism have been the stock-in-trade of the trade union bureaucracy, which has used them to justify union-management “jointness” and the imposition of endless wage- and job-cuts, speedup and concessions on US workers, designed to slash labor costs and increase the profits and competitiveness of US-based corporations.

Sanders’ performance in the CNN town hall was yet another exposure, if another one was needed, of his boundless cynicism and political opportunism.



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