

Sanders backs Trump's "America First" economic nationalism

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Two days after millions of people marched in the United States and around the world to demonstrate their opposition to the anti-democratic and militaristic policies of the "America First" nationalist Donald Trump—a response to the inauguration of a new US president without precedent both in its scale and its international character—Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders solidarized himself with the new president and his virulent economic nationalism.

On Monday morning, Trump signed an executive order withdrawing the US from the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade pact. At the same time, Trump repeated his pledge to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and Canada.

Declaring that these moves would be "great for the American worker," Trump reiterated the claim that "unfair trade" benefiting workers in other countries—not capitalism and the corporations' relentless pursuit of profit—was responsible for the closure of factories and slashing of American workers' wages.

Sanders was quick to congratulate Trump, stating, "For the last 30 years, we have had a series of trade deals—including the North American Free Trade Agreement, permanent normal trade relations with China and others—which have cost us millions of decent-paying jobs and caused a 'race to the bottom,' which has lowered wages for American workers...

"If President Trump is serious about a new policy to help American workers, then I would be delighted to work with him."

Sanders' endorsement of the billionaire demagogue's efforts to posture as a friend of the American worker came three days after Trump delivered an inaugural address whose basic theme could be summed up as "America Über Alles." Trump railed against politicians

who had "made other countries rich" while "the wealth of our middle class has been ripped from their homes and then redistributed all across the world." From now on, he insisted, "the bedrock of our politics will be total allegiance to the United States of America."

The myth of a unified nation, devoid of social classes with mutually antagonistic interests, has always been employed to suppress working class struggle by binding workers to their "own" capitalists under the national banner. Today, as in the past, demands for national unity and the promotion of xenophobia are the antecedents to war and dictatorship.

Trump's criticism of pro-corporate trade agreements has nothing to do with advancing the interests of workers in the US. On the contrary, it is a snare to pit American workers against their natural brothers and allies—workers in Mexico, China and around the world. Globalized capitalism has objectively welded together the workers in all parts of the world in a common production process, in which they are exploited by the same transnational corporations and banks. There can be no successful struggle in defense of jobs, wages and democratic rights in any country unless it is guided by a strategy to unite the workers of all countries against capitalism.

Trump's cabinet of billionaires, ex-generals and arch-reactionaries exposes the counterrevolutionary reality behind his populist posturing. Sanders is lending credibility to a government that is openly moving to destroy every social gain of the last century, from occupational safety and environmental laws, to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

This follows Sanders' vote to confirm Trump's picks for secretary of defense and secretary of homeland security. Retired Marine Gen. James "Mad Dog" Mattis (Defense) is a war criminal who directed the

2004 siege of Fallujah. Retired Gen. John Kelly, who oversaw the notorious Guantanamo Bay detention complex, will supervise the "homeland security" forces that round up and deport millions of immigrants.

Last July, when Sanders pulled out of the Democratic primary race and declared his support for Hillary Clinton, he said that nothing could be more terrible than the election of Donald Trump. The supposed leader of a "political revolution" against the "billionaire class" told the millions of workers and young people who had voted for him that they had no choice but to vote for the favored candidate of Wall Street because the election of Trump would be an unthinkable catastrophe.

Sanders' backing of Clinton gave Trump an open field to present himself as the only "anti-establishment" candidate in the race and exploit popular anger over the growth of social inequality that was overseen by both big business parties and accelerated under Obama.

The capitulation of Sanders was the logical outcome of his opportunist and nationalist politics. His program has never been of a genuinely left-wing, let alone socialist, character. He has for decades functioned as a safety valve for the Democratic Party, a party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus.

Opposed to and frightened of a genuine movement of the working class, Sanders has allied himself with the trade union bureaucracy, which utilizes economic nationalism to suppress the class struggle and justify its complicity in the corporate-government attack on workers' jobs and living standards. Epitomizing the response of the unions to Trump's election, United Steelworkers President Leo Gerard applauded Trump's action on the TPP, saying he hoped it was the start of the "promised, pro-worker, pro-income-growth agenda that prioritizes revitalizing manufacturing." He added that the unions "look forward to working with the current administration."

Once Clinton lost, Sanders, the trade union officials and "progressive" Democrats such as Elizabeth Warren backpedaled from their predictions of an apocalypse and began to cozy up to Trump.

The example of Sanders is a lesson on the nature of middle class "left" politics in America. Such political opportunism is incapable of thinking outside the structure of American bourgeois politics. Any pretense of principled politics is abandoned at the first inkling of

a "coalition." There is one iron rule: absolute opposition to the fight by Marxists for the political independence of the working class and the struggle to make workers conscious of their leading role in the revolutionary transformation of society.

The mass opposition to Trump in the US and around the world is an expression of the common concerns across all borders over social inequality and the danger of fascism and war. It coincides with the growth of the class struggle in the United States, Europe, Asia and around the world, which will only intensify as every capitalist government attempts to shift the burden of the global economic crisis and the rearmament for war onto the backs of the working class.

The development of this opposition into a conscious political movement—not only against Trump, but against the capitalist system that has produced him—requires a decisive break with all forms of opportunist politics.

The way forward for the working class lies not in the hopeless effort to push the Democratic Party to the left or create some type of "left" nationalist politics. All forms of nationalism and chauvinism must be rejected and a mass political movement of the working class built that is completely independent of and opposed to the parties and politics of the capitalist class and based on an internationalist and socialist program.



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