

A revealing episode: Sanders applauds Trump during speech before Congress

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In a revealing moment during Donald Trump's speech before Congress on Tuesday, the cameras panned toward Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who could be seen applauding after Trump declared, "We must restart the engine of the American economy, making it easy to do business in the United States, and much, much harder for companies to leave our country."

The episode says much about Sanders' politics and the role assigned to him. Anyone with the slightest degree of political principle, let alone a genuine socialist, would have boycotted the speech, denounced Trump's fascistic rantings, and warned of the grave danger his government poses to basic democratic rights.

However, Sanders is no socialist. Instead he gave a carefully calculated applause for Trump's economic nationalist policies—which mean in practice a massive handout to corporations and a further intensification of the assault on the jobs and social programs of the working class.

The incident was not, moreover, an isolated event. During the Democratic Party primaries, Sanders won widespread support among workers and young people by calling for a "political revolution" against the "billionaire class." After losing in the primaries, he turned quickly to insisting that his supporters had to back Hillary Clinton, who he previously criticized as the candidate of the status quo, to prevent the disaster of a Trump administration.

After Trump's election, Sanders pivoted again, saying that he was willing to "work with" Trump to implement nationalist economic measures. He is doing what he can to legitimize the new government and perpetuate the lie that it will do anything to improve the conditions of the working class. Sanders has also been

elevated into the leadership of the Democratic Party in the Senate, where he is working closely with minority leader Chuck Schumer, the senator from Wall Street.

Sanders' applause was entirely in line with this record.

The Vermont senator followed up this performance with a video reply to Trump's speech posted on Facebook, which has been viewed more than 5 million times. He continued in his efforts to legitimize the Trump administration and derail growing opposition to the new government.

Most striking was Sanders' complete silence on Trump's demonizing of immigrants, his lying claims that "illegal immigrants" from Mexico were responsible for the social crisis in America, and his demands for an unrestrained war against "Radical Islamic terrorism."

Instead, Sanders deliberately downplayed the extreme right-wing character of the new administration. He suggested that Trump—who has brought openly fascistic figures like Stephen Bannon into the highest echelons of power—could be pressured to change through mass pressure.

"When you analyze a speech sometimes what somebody does not say is more important than what they do say," Sanders proclaimed in words that just as well be used against Sanders himself. He then provided a list of things Trump did not mention—threats to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, income and social inequality, climate change, corporate-control over the political system—as if anyone should be surprised given that Trump leads the most right-wing government in the history of the United States.

Sowing further complacency, Sanders said, "I urge President Trump to keep your promises and tell the American people you will not cut Social Security and

Medicare.” He praised Trump’s infrastructure plans but said his spending proposals were “the wrong way.” Instead of proposing tax cuts for corporations, Sanders said, Trump should make corporations hoarding billions in off-shore tax havens “pay their fair share.”

“If Trump really wants to take on the pharmaceuticals,” Sanders added, the president should support measures like the one he had just proposed in the Senate, which would allow American citizens to import lower costing medicines from Canada.

As for Trump’s proposal to increase the military budget by \$84 billion, Sanders did not warn that this would escalate the danger of World War III against Russia and China, but only said that it would increase “bureaucratic waste” by the military brass. “We do not need to greatly increase Pentagon spending,” Sanders said, suggesting he would support smaller increases or current spending levels, as he did repeatedly during the eight years of the Obama administration.

Sanders was silent on Trump’s reactionary narrative, penned by Bannon, that economic decay and social desperation are not caused by capitalism and the vast transfer of wealth from the working class into the hands of the corporate and financial aristocracy. He has echoed Trump’s lie, which Trump repeated Tuesday, that “we have exported our jobs and wealth to foreign countries” and that “America’s great companies and workers have been taken advantage of” by unfair trade deals that keep American imports out of foreign countries.

As the WSWS noted throughout the 2016 elections, Sanders’ own economic nationalist policies mirror those of Trump.

The Democratic Party is keenly aware of seething social discontent, not only against Trump, but also against the policies of the ruling class that both Democrats and Republicans support. The Democrats do not want any opposition to emerge to the wealth and property of the ruling class and the capitalist system itself.

It is Sanders’ job now to try to contain this anger, channeling it behind the electoral efforts of the Democrats for 2018 and the geo-political agenda of dominant sections within the military-intelligence apparatus. That is the meaning of Sanders’ embrace of economic nationalism, the corollary of which is militarism.

Concluding his reply Tuesday night, Sanders pointed to the growing opposition to Trump throughout the country. Urging those who have attended protests to keep showing up, to call Congress to defend Obamacare, and to push the Republicans back, he said, “Only together when millions of people stand up for economic justice, for social justice, for racial justice, for environmental justice, only then can we create a political revolution that will turn this country around.”

The last year has demonstrated the bankruptcy of the type of pragmatic and opportunist politics peddled by Sanders.



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