

Sanders promotes Democratic Party at rallies opposing Republican attack on health care

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Over the weekend, Senator Bernie Sanders spoke at rallies in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Columbus, Ohio; and Charleston, West Virginia, opposing the Senate Republicans' health care bill.

The rallies each had an attendance of about 2,000 people, according to media reports. MoveOn.org sponsored all the rallies and local "progressive," pseudo-left and trade union groups sponsored in individual cities. The Kanawha Valley chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) cosponsored the Charleston rally, while the Service Employees International Union District 1199 cosponsored the Columbus rally.

The Better Care Reconciliation Act is the Senate version of the House Republicans' American Health Care Act (AHCA), passed last month to "repeal and replace" the Obama administration's health care legislation, commonly known as Obamacare. Both the Senate and House bills call for savage attacks on health care for working people, including the ending of Medicaid as a guaranteed government benefit program.

Medicaid is the government health insurance program for the poor and disabled jointly administered by the federal government and the states. It currently covers some 69 million people, nearly 20 percent of the US population. It was established in 1965, along with Medicare, the government health insurance program for the elderly. Enactment of the Trump administration measure will lead to the destruction of one of the three bedrock social programs dating from the 1930s and 1960s, the other two being Social Security and Medicare. Those programs will become the next targets for privatization and dismantling.

Senate Republicans plan to pass Better Care before the July Fourth Independence Day recess, setting the stage for negotiations between the Senate and House of Representatives and President Donald Trump's signing into law of a final version.

There is immense popular opposition to the attack on health care embodied in the legislation, which would slash Medicaid by over \$800 billion and provide tax cuts for corporations and the wealthiest Americans totaling more than \$700 billion. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that the House version would strip 23 million people of health insurance. Enactment of the measure would constitute one of the largest and most blatant redistributions of wealth in American history.

A poll by NBC News and the *Wall Street Journal* revealed the depth of popular opposition to the House bill, which is similar to the Senate version. Only 16 percent of Americans thought the AHCA was a "good idea," while 48 percent thought it a "bad idea." Even among Republicans it had only 34 percent support, with 17 percent opposed.

Earlier this year, as the House bill was moving through that chamber, town hall meetings around the country addressed by Republican congressmen saw constituents denounce and shout down politicians backing the bill. In some cases, congressmen had to flee meeting halls under police protection.

Health coverage for tens of millions of working people has already been eroded by Obamacare, which slashes health costs for corporations and the government while increasing out-of-pocket costs and reducing benefits for consumers. Now Trump and the Republicans are going significantly farther in denying people access to health care.

Sanders and his faction within the Democratic Party are well aware of the explosive anger in the working class and among broad sections of the middle class over the attack on health care. That is why, under conditions where the Democratic Party establishment is pleading with the Republicans for a reactionary "compromise" and is too petrified of the potential for mass political unrest to call for public protest, Sanders is seeking to get ahead of the

situation and make sure that social opposition is channeled once again behind the Democratic Party, where it can be stifled and dissipated.

At the beginning of his Pittsburgh speech, Sanders stressed the reactionary character of the Republican bills: “Let me be as clear as I can be—this so-called ‘health care bill’ passed in the House last month is the most anti-working-class piece of legislation passed in the House of Representatives in the modern history of this country. And the Senate bill in some respects is even worse.” He went on to describe the legislation as a “massive transfer of wealth from working families to the very, very rich.”

But the perspective Sanders advanced was anything but a call for mass social and political protest. Instead, the stated goal of his rallies was “to put pressure [on] senators in those states—specifically, Senator Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, Senator Rob Portman of Ohio and Senator Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia—and Senate Republicans at large to vote against the legislation.”

The bankruptcy of this approach is underscored by the fact that Toomey was part of the 13-senator “working group” that drafted the Republican bill in secret. In his speech, Sanders addressed Toomey directly, pleading with him to vote “no.”

This is an attempt to derail and demoralize working-class opposition by diverting it into futile efforts to pressure the bribed political representatives of big business. It is of a piece with Sanders’ endorsement of Hillary Clinton, the favored candidate of Wall Street and the CIA, in the 2016 elections, and his so-called “political revolution” to “transform” the Democratic Party.

Sanders and other speakers promoted his bill for “Medicare for all.” The Vermont senator knows full well that such a measure will never be passed by Congress, having no chance of acceptance by either of the two capitalist parties. Moreover, Sanders supports Obamacare, which involves a \$700 billion cut in Medicare spending. He backed Clinton for president, despite her explicit opposition to an extension of Medicare to the entire population.

Just two weeks ago in his keynote speech to the “People’s Summit” in Chicago, Sanders touted the California Senate’s passage of a single-payer health care bill as evidence of the supposed success of his “political revolution” in shifting the Democratic Party to the left. On Friday, however, California Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon, a Democrat, effectively killed the bill, blocking it from coming to a vote in the state’s lower legislative chamber.

Even if Medicare for all were implemented nationally, it would be woefully inadequate to meet the needs of working people. The program has already been significantly privatized, and Medicare recipients are forced to pay private insurers for expensive supplemental insurance plans to cover essential medical services and prescription drugs.

Perhaps the point most underscored by the rallies is how bare-bones health coverage already is for working-class Americans. Most of the speakers—including health care professionals and spokespeople for Planned Parenthood and other organizations—spoke about the ongoing health care crisis in the United States, including the opioid epidemic, inadequate access to mental health services, difficulties in accessing contraceptives, and the high rate of uninsured and underinsured Americans. Nevertheless, the speakers generally argued that Obamacare was a progressive “step in the right direction.”

This proved a difficult circle to square for the speakers, especially Sanders. After all, if Obama’s Affordable Care Act was a progressive reform, why are working class people facing such a health care catastrophe?

Both the Obamacare status quo and the Republican proposals entail immense suffering for workers and a further decline in their standard of living. The only way to guarantee adequate health care for everyone is the socialization of health care: the removal of profit considerations and the placing of the health care industry under public ownership and the democratic control of the working class.

This can be achieved only through a complete political break with the Democratic Party and all of its promoters, including Sanders, and an independent political movement of the working class for socialism.



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