

Bernie Sanders tours Michigan to prop up the Democratic Party

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Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders took part in a rally in Ann Arbor, Michigan Friday to support Democratic Party candidate for governor, Gretchen Whitmer. The event was part of his current nine-state tour to promote both nominally “progressive” members of the Democratic Party as well as thoroughly establishment figures like Whitmer in the November midterm elections.

Sanders’ tour is part of a systematic effort to use the broad support Sanders gained in 2016 as a presidential candidate to prop up the militarist and right-wing policies of the Democratic Party.

The event in Ann Arbor on Friday was notable for what it revealed about Sanders’ call for a supposed “political revolution” against the “billionaire class” two years ago.

First, the candidates Sanders chose to promote in Michigan on Friday were of the most thoroughly conformist character, almost entirely oriented to the interests of the rich and the upper-middle class.

One of the speakers was current Congresswoman Debbie Dingell. The multimillionaire Dingell is the financial heiress to the Fisher Body auto fortune and political heiress to the 85-year-old “Dingell dynasty” in the 12th District congressional seat. A former GM auto executive, Dingell, along with her husband John Dingell, has been a staunch ally of the Big Three auto companies and the UAW, which have collectively driven down wages and created miserable working conditions for hundreds of thousands of autoworkers in the area. She is also a fervent proponent of trade war and the right-wing “Russian interference” campaign.

Also speaking were the two US Senators from Michigan, Gary Peters and Debbie Stabenow. Peters made his career in the stock market as an officer at Merrill Lynch and vice president of investments for

UBS PaineWebber, while Stabenow has given key votes to help with banking deregulation and bills attacking immigrant “sanctuary” cities. Both have been reliable supporters of military funding and the financial interests of Wall Street, including the federal budget that increased military spending by \$60 billion last month.

Whitmer’s choice for lieutenant governor, Garlin Gilchrist, spoke as well. Gilchrist is currently the Executive Director for the Center for Social Media Responsibility (CSMR) at the University of Michigan. The CSMR research program, as the WSWS pointed out earlier this year, is being developed to “aid and abet the campaign to carry out Internet censorship” and is seeking a leading role in shaping the policies that will restrict access to information on the internet for tens of millions.

And then there was Whitmer, who spoke only briefly and made very vague statements about “fighting” for clean water, “affordable degrees,” “workers’ rights” and “civil rights.” She is currently being promoted by the *New York Times* as one of the party’s “breakout sensations” because she is “targeting the union vote” and pledges to “fix the damn roads.”

Whitmer, like every other candidate at the rally, studiously avoided any concrete policy proposals and invoked only the most toothless of slogans. The daughter of a former CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and longtime fixture in the state party apparatus, Whitmer did not even try to invoke some of the evening’s vague calls.

After two hours, Sanders finally took the stage. Sanders spoke in favor of the woefully inadequate “fight for the \$15 an hour wage” and the vague slogan of “Medicare for All,” which has been taken up by the Democratic Party establishment. He carefully avoided

speaking about anything related to “billionaire class.” One brief reference to the “criminals on Wall Street” got the loudest applause of the night, but Sanders quickly moved on to other subjects.

At one point in his speech, Sanders spoke about the significance of his upset presidential primary victory in Michigan in 2016: “That victory, and in 21 other states, told the entire world we are not satisfied with status quo politics. Many ideas which I talked about were considered radical, but you know what’s happened in the past three years? Those ideas are now supported by millions!”

Sanders neglected to remind his audience that he immediately threw his support behind the epitome of “status quo politics,” the militarist and right-wing candidate Hillary Clinton, within a month after winning Michigan. Nor did he mention that he has now become a leading figure in this right-wing political party, which has shifted even further to the right since 2016.

The other revealing aspect of the evening was the marked decline in enthusiasm. In February 2016, just ten miles down the road, Sanders drew an overflow crowd of 10,000 people to his rally at Eastern Michigan University. In contrast, the 1,000-person capacity auditorium on Friday was about 90 percent full. The audience was dominated by professionals and party-connected young people, with very few workers.

Also notable was what did not come up even once all night: any opposition to or even mention of the unending wars being waged by US imperialism around the world. After over a dozen speeches from leading Democrats in the state and Sanders, one would have no idea that over 80 percent of the most recent federal budget bill was earmarked for military spending, or that the US is threatening was against Russia and China, with incalculable consequences.

Barely mentioned was anything related to the ongoing and deepening attack on millions of immigrants—including 12,000 detained children—as well as the growing crisis facing young people through drugs and deaths of despair. Needless to say, there was no mention of socialism, despite Sanders’ false association with the term.

The only person warning those who attended of the political trap Sanders was setting for millions of workers and youth was Niles Niemuth, the Socialist Equality Party congressional candidate. Niles, who is

opposing Dingell in the 12th District, and a team of campaigners distributed hundreds of statements to those in line contrasting Sanders’ fraudulent “progressive” politics of the Democratic Party to that of the genuine socialist party, the Socialist Equality Party.

This author also recommends:

Genuine socialism vs. the Democratic Party politics of Bernie Sanders [19 October 21]



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