

Bernie Sanders announces 2020 presidential campaign

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Senator Bernie Sanders made the expected announcement Tuesday on Vermont Public Radio and in a video posted to YouTube that he will seek the Democratic Party nomination for president in the 2020 election. Sanders is the 10th Democratic candidate to announce a campaign or exploratory committee, with at least 16 others actively considering a run for president.

In 2016, Sanders attracted widespread support from workers and young people based on his pledge to fight against social inequality. Mass audiences turned out to listen to his denunciations of economic inequality and his call for a “political revolution” against the “billionaire class.” To the shock and horror of the Democratic Party establishment and the surprise of the candidate himself, Sanders won more than 13 million votes, pulling off upset wins against Hillary Clinton in primaries in the Rust Belt states of Michigan, Indiana and Wisconsin.

Even as he was gaining popular support, emails published by WikiLeaks showed that the Clinton campaign was working with the Democratic National Committee to undermine Sanders’ campaign and ensure that Clinton, widely hated by workers and youth for her pro-war and pro-business policies, would be the party’s nominee.

Despite this damaging exposure, Sanders played his assigned part, endorsing Clinton at the party’s convention and instructing his supporters to vote for the preferred candidate of Wall Street and the military/intelligence establishment. This was the outcome of his “political revolution.”

There have been significant transformations in social and political life since Sanders’ first election campaign. The past two years have seen an upsurge of working class struggle in the United States and internationally. Strikes in the US were at a 32 year high in 2018. The

wave of teachers’ strikes that began last year in West Virginia returned to that state this week, and thousands of teachers are set to strike in Oakland, California. More than 33,000 teachers went on strike in Los Angeles last month, and 5,600 Denver teachers walked out last week. Opposition among auto workers in the US and Canada to plant closings and concessions is growing as contract talks are set to begin later this year.

Tens of thousands of maquiladora workers are rebelling against their unions and striking in Mexico, the yellow vest protests against the Macron government are continuing in France, and major strikes have erupted in Britain, Germany, Hungary, India, South Africa and other countries.

The ruling class is terrified that this growing wave of class struggle will intersect with a socialist program and perspective.

This is the significance of the fascistic speech delivered by Trump on Monday, following his remarks in the State of the Union address. “The twilight hour of socialism has arrived in our hemisphere,” Trump proclaimed to an audience at a Florida university, only days after declaring a state of emergency to mobilize the military to build a wall along the US-Mexico border in defiance of Congress. Trump’s assault on core democratic and constitutional rights is a declaration of war on the working class and all opposition to the dictates of the corporate and financial elite.

Whatever Trump may hope, it is not socialism’s “twilight hour,” but rather the opposite. The struggles of masses of workers and young people are bringing them into direct conflict with the ruling class and the capitalist system.

Sanders is not the representative of this insurgent working class movement. As the WSWs wrote in February 2016, when polls were registering his

growing support in the early stages of the Democratic Party primaries: “He is rather the temporary beneficiary of a rising tide of popular opposition that is passing through only its initial stages of social and class differentiation.” The WSWS explained that Sanders was the response from within the ruling class to this movement. His function was and remains to serve as a lightning rod to channel social opposition back behind the Democratic Party.

Notably excluded from Sanders’ opening campaign statement was any mention of “capitalism,” “socialism,” “fascism,” “imperialism,” “internationalism,” “equality” or “working class.”

He declared Tuesday that his campaign is “about transforming our country and creating a government based on the principles of economic, social, racial and environmental justice,” but he said nothing about how this could be achieved through the vehicle of the Democratic Party.

The fundamental fraud promoted by Sanders, along with individuals such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, is that the Democratic Party can be pushed to the left and made a force for progressive change. Articulating this political fiction, *Jacobin* editor and leading Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Bhaskar Sunkara proclaimed in a column for the *Guardian* newspaper on Tuesday that “Sanders started a revolution in 2016. In 2020, he can finish it.”

The claim that Sanders is driving the Democrats to the left is belied by the facts. For the past two years, the Democrats have focused their opposition to Trump on questions of imperialist foreign policy, in particular, the demand for more aggressive military action in the Middle East and against Russia. They have served as the mouthpieces for dominant sections of the military and intelligence apparatus in demanding an escalation of internet censorship in the name of combating “fake news.” Far from opposing this right-wing agenda, Sanders has lent it his support.

The Democrats have responded to Trump’s fascistic attacks on immigrants by providing more than one billion dollars for “border security,” while supporting a massive increase in funding for the military. They have facilitated the administration’s attacks on social programs and the enactment of trillions of dollars in tax cuts for the rich.

The Democrats have relentlessly promoted identity

politics, including through the #MeToo witch hunt, which serves to divide the working class while undermining basic democratic rights such as due process and the presumption of innocence. Sanders’ mere association with opposition to economic inequality has brought rebukes from within his own party, which intends, as in 2016, to make racial, gender and sexual politics the basis for a right-wing campaign directed at mobilizing privileged sections of the upper-middle class behind Wall Street and the military.

There has been no shortage of experiences with “progressive” and “pro-worker” Democrats, and they always end in disaster. The Democratic Party is the graveyard of all progressive social movements. Sanders is once again seeking to lead the working class and young people into a political dead end.

The abolition of social inequality and the dictatorship of the rich, and opposition to the danger of war, fascism and authoritarianism, will not be achieved by tinkering around the edges, through minor reforms that are themselves impossible to achieve within a capitalist social structure dominated from top to bottom by an obscenely rich and parasitic oligarchy. The interests of the working class can be secured only through a fundamental, revolutionary reorganization of social and economic life in the United States and internationally.

Social equality and genuine democracy can be established only through the establishment of socialism. This requires the creation of organs of working class power, the expropriation of the rich, and the transformation of the giant corporations into publicly controlled utilities. Nothing can be won without a frontal attack on the capitalist system itself.



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