

# Sanders launches his campaign with a blast of demagoguery

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Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders kicked off his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination with rallies on Saturday in Brooklyn, New York and on Sunday night in Chicago. At both rallies, he delivered speeches presenting a Sanders presidency as the most ambitious effort to reform American society since the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt, more than 80 years ago.

Sanders' speech was an exercise in political demagoguery, because there exists no relationship between even the limited reforms he envisages and any realistic strategy for their implementation.

Sanders promised to "finally create an economy and a government which works for all of us not just the 1 percent." He continued, clearly referring to the presidency of Donald Trump, "The underlying principle of our government will not be greed, hatred, and lies.... It will not be tax breaks for billionaires, and efforts to throw millions off the health care that they currently have. This campaign is going to end all of that."

Sanders claimed that under his administration, "We will no longer tolerate the greed of corporate America... greed which has resulted in this country having more income and wealth inequality than any other major country on earth."

The candidate outlined a series of socioeconomic reforms, including guaranteed health care for all under a single-payer plan; a \$15 an hour minimum wage; creating 13 million decent-paying jobs through a program to rebuild US infrastructure; quality, affordable childcare; tuition-free public colleges and universities and a reduction in student debt; raising Social Security benefits; and transforming the energy system away from fossil fuels as part of an effort to fight climate change.

These proposals will no doubt attract considerable popular support, just as Sanders did in the 2016 campaign, when he received more than 13 million votes in Democratic primaries and caucuses.

Missing from his speech were the words "capitalism," "private property," "profit system," "imperialism" and the notorious S-word, "socialism."

Sanders invokes a "political revolution." But this "revolution" will supposedly be achieved under the leadership of the Democrats, the oldest modern capitalist party, and will not touch the institution of private property that is the bedrock of capitalist inequality.

Revolutions, fundamentally, involve the transfer of political power from one class to another. However, Sanders does not call for the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalists. Instead, the septuagenarian will give speeches and the citadels of the ruling elite will presumably crumble like the walls of Jericho.

Does Sanders really believe that in America, the heart of world reaction, the world's most ruthless capitalist oligarchy will simply give way to this "political revolution" and hand over trillions of dollars in social benefits to the working class, without a shot fired?

No, he does not. And therein lies his dishonesty. In New York, Sanders invoked his own biography, declaring, "I know where I came from." By rights, he should have acknowledged where he has ended up: from humble beginnings, he has become an expert in demagoguery and a purveyor of illusions.

Sanders appeals to the deeply-felt sentiments of hundreds of millions of workers and young people. He works to channel these sentiments into a political program that cannot achieve anything he promises.

In 2016, Sanders endorsed Hillary Clinton, who had been repeatedly exposed as a Wall Street stooge,

betraying the aspirations of his supporters and setting the stage for the fascistic Donald Trump to become president.

Once again, as he begins his campaign for the presidential nomination in 2020, Sanders is attempting to divert all political opposition into the blind alley of the Democratic Party, even as this party itself opposes him and has no intention of implementing anything he proposes.

Sanders' speech draws heavily on the "Second Bill of Rights" proposed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his State of the Union Address in 1944. Seeking to appease the militancy of a working class that would not accept the return of Depression-era conditions when World War II came to an end, Roosevelt declared:

"We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. 'Necessitous men are not free men.' People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made.

"In our day these economic truths have become accepted as self-evident. We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all—regardless of station, race, or creed."

Roosevelt proposed a series of vaguely-defined economic reforms that included the "right" to "a useful and remunerative job," the "right to earn enough," the "right of every family to a decent home," the "right to a good education," and the "right to adequate medical care."

But, even at the zenith of the United States' power, at the very end of World War II, Roosevelt's vision of a somewhat more humane version of American capitalism was dead in the water. Roosevelt died in April 1945, and the war was followed by a wave of political reaction that culminated in McCarthyism. Twenty years were to pass before, in the mid-1960s, President Lyndon Johnson's administration, under pressure from the mass civil rights movement and riots in major American cities, introduced his Great Society program. This was a heavily watered-down version of Roosevelt's "Second Bill of Rights," whose reforms fell far short of the social democratic measures that were commonplace in Western Europe.

In any event, the brief episode of capitalist reformism during the Kennedy-Johnson years soon gave way to

the vicious social counterrevolution over which both Democratic and Republican presidents have presided for the past 40 years. The result has been the degeneration of the United States into an oligarchical society, characterized by staggering levels of wealth concentration in the richest 10 percent, while the remaining 90 percent experience economic hardship and outright poverty.

Sanders never gives a single explanation for how any of this came to pass. The policies he is denouncing are those that have been the stock-in-trade of the Democratic and Republican parties for decades. And these policies have been, and are, characteristic of capitalism throughout the world in a period of relentless assaults on the working class.

Sanders has no explanation for any of this because there is only one explanation: The one Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels gave in the *Communist Manifesto*: that *capitalism* impoverishes the masses for the enrichment of the capitalists. That *capitalism* is the cause of war, inequality and every social evil Sanders claims to oppose.

But Sanders does not support ending capitalism. He is appealing to the aspirations of his supporters only to betray them.

Socialism can be achieved only through the mass mobilization of the working class to conquer state power, as part of a revolutionary movement of the international working class, and to carry out the expropriation of the capitalist class and the establishment of public ownership over the means of production. This is the perspective that the Socialist Equality Party fights for.



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