

Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez use “left” demagoguery to channel opposition to Trump behind Democrats

Isaac Finn
22 October 2019

On Saturday, Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders held a rally of roughly 25,000 people in Queens, New York, the largest campaign event so far in the campaign for the Democratic nomination, and the first since Sanders was hospitalized for a heart attack in early October.

Sanders was joined on stage by New York Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who formally endorsed Sanders for president at the rally. Other speakers at the event included filmmaker Michael Moore, Mayor Carmen Yulín of San Juan, Puerto Rico, national co-chair of Sanders’s 2020 campaign Nina Turner, and Tiffany Cabán, who narrowly lost a race for the Democratic nomination for Queens District Attorney.

The turnout certainly demonstrated widespread support among young people and workers for a struggle against Wall Street and the Trump administration. But Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders, despite the usual references to “political revolution,” confined their remarks to urging people to vote and making demagogic promises to implement massive social reforms following Sanders’ entry into the White House. They were entirely silent on the actual movement of the working class against Wall Street and the Trump administration—the growing strike wave led by autoworkers and public school teachers—which frightens the Democrats just as much as the Republicans.

In her remarks, Ocasio-Cortez said: “One of our top priorities is not just defeating Donald Trump, but defeating the system of which he is a symptom ... We need a United States that really, truly, authentically is operated, owned, and decided by working and all

people in the United States of America.” She denounced “endless wars,” and called for a Green New Deal and building of public housing.

Sanders, picking up on many of the same themes, called for a “political revolution” to “sweep Donald Trump out of office, and bring the change that this country has long needed,” claiming that his campaign was “about creating an economy and a government that works for all of us, not just the 1 percent.” He also put forward a similar anti-militarist stance, stating, “If we can spend \$750 billion a year on the military, you know what, we can cancel all student debt in America with a modest tax on Wall Street speculation,” adding that the US should “not have to spend more than the next 10 nations combined on defense spending.”

The latter comment provoked chants of “End All Wars! End All Wars!” from the crowd.

Neither Sanders nor Ocasio-Cortez noted that the Queens congresswoman had voted for the Pentagon budget that provides a record \$750 billion in military spending—a vote that completely contradicts their phony pledges to oppose militarism and endless wars.

Despite the calls to drive Trump out of office, neither Sanders nor Ocasio-Cortez made any reference to the ongoing impeachment inquiry against Trump, which is based entirely on claims that he is putting his personal political interests ahead of US national-security interests.

Nor did they—or any other speaker—mention Syria, although congressional Democrats and the media have whipped up hysteria against Trump’s order for US troops to pull out of that country.

Earlier in the week Sanders had criticized Trump’s decision to move US troops out of Kurdish-controlled

regions of Syria, stating, “You don’t turn your back on allies who have fought and died alongside American troops. You just don’t do that.”

So much for ending “endless wars.”

Sanders made his usual litany of empty promises to transform healthcare, education, housing, and employment. He vowed, “We will take on the greed of the insurance companies and drug companies, and pass a Medicare for all, single-payer plan. And, now let me thank, and give a special thanks ... to congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez for helping our country recognize that climate change is an existential threat to our planet, and that we must implement a program consistent with the goal of the Green New Deal.”

He also promised to establish programs that will help create “nearly 10 million new apartments and homes” and “eliminate homelessness in America,” “end environmental racism,” “end private prisons and detention centers,” and “end the epidemic of gun violence.” He claimed he would “provide legal status to 1.8 million young people eligible for the DACA program, and expand that program to their parents,” on his first day in office.

All these pledges, apparently, could be accomplished without any challenge to the actual property relations of capitalism: the landlords, insurance companies, oil companies, gun manufacturers, defense contractors and giant banks can all be left in possession of their trillions in unearned wealth, taken from the working class.

Sanders returned multiple times throughout his speech to the issues facing teachers. He claimed that his administration is “going to honor our teachers, not the hedge fund managers.” Later, he returned to the subject, declaring, “I want to thank teachers all over the country, that have literally taken money out of their own pockets in order to buy the school supplies the kids need. We believe in our teachers and under our administration, we are going to have the best public education system in the world.”

He claimed that his administration would also facilitate a massive expansion in union membership. He declared, “In our first four years, we are going to double the number of workers in this country that belong to unions.” He had previously described the past 45 years as a “class war waged against the working families of this country by the billionaire class and corporate elite.”

But remarkably, Sanders and all the speakers at his event were completely silent on the reemergence of the class struggle over the past years. As Sanders gave his address, over 30,000 teachers in Chicago were on strike, a continuation of the wave of teacher strikes that swept the US last year, and 48,000 autoworkers at GM were on strike, marking the first national auto strike since 1976. While the plight of Puerto Rico was raised by multiple speakers at the rally, there was complete silence over the mass protests that swept the island last summer and forced the then-governor Ricardo Rosselló out of office.

These omissions are a reflection of the concerns by the “progressive” and “socialist” sections of the Democratic Party that fear mass opposition could emerge against both political parties and their corporate backers. As Ocasio-Cortez expressed in her remarks, her faction is advocating for a “mass mobilization of working-class people at the ballot box,” and not strikes or protests.

Sanders in calling for a fight against the “Republican establishment, Democratic establishment ... [and] the whole damn 1 percent,” neglects to mention that he has caucused and worked with the Democratic establishment for decades. Since 2016, after endorsing Hillary Clinton for president, he joined the Senate Democratic leadership team.

Beyond all the bluster against the 1 percent, Wall Street, and Republican and Democratic establishment, Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez are primarily concerned with keeping mass opposition contained within the Democratic Party.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact