

Sanders' political stunt over \$2,000 stimulus checks fails

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A political stunt by Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders is set to end in predictable futility this weekend when the Senate gives final approval to a record \$741 billion military spending bill, overriding the veto issued by President Trump last week.

The Senate will pump this record sum into the coffers of the Pentagon, fueling an American war machine directed against the population of the entire planet, without taking up the \$2,000-per-person stimulus payment on which Sanders has been demanding a vote.

Sanders announced Tuesday that he would object to taking up a measure to override Trump's veto until after Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell agreed to hold a vote on the \$2,000 payment passed by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives Monday night.

He presented himself as holding hostage the defense override vote—critical to the Pentagon and the gigantic US armaments industry—until after the Senate Republican agreed to take up larger economic relief checks to American workers. It turned out, however, that this mock-heroic stance was a trivial parliamentary maneuver that only delayed the NDAA vote by a few days.

McConnell contemptuously refused to hold a vote on the \$2,000 economic relief check, claiming that most people did not need it. He then set the Senate machinery in motion for a veto override on the military spending bill. When the first procedural motion came before the Senate on Wednesday evening, the vote was 80-12 to begin consideration, with the vast majority of Democrats, as well as Republicans, siding with McConnell over Sanders.

If Sanders continues to object to an immediate override vote, a second procedural vote to limit debate to 30 hours will take place, followed by a pro-forma

session and a final vote to override Trump's veto on Friday, January 1. The massive Pentagon authorization bill, including tens of billions for nuclear bombs and additional warships, Stealth fighter jets and other weaponry, will become law over Trump's veto.

Of course, Trump was not opposed to this gargantuan funding level, only to a few secondary matters where he chose to make an issue as part of his overall effort to develop a mass fascist movement in America. He opposed the retitling of US military bases named after Confederate generals, in order to appeal to racists nostalgic for the glories of Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee. And he demanded that the NDAA include a provision attacking Facebook and Twitter for imposing mild restrictions on his ability to spew lies and incite violence on social media.

In this entire process, Sanders has demonstrated the bankruptcy of his perspective that the Democratic Party can be transformed, through political pressure from below, into an instrument for progressive change. His grandiose claims of "political revolution" through the Democratic Party have been reduced to this: a failed effort to get a \$1,400 increase in relief aid for working people, which a majority of Democratic senators, let alone Republicans, were unwilling to support.

Sanders spoke on the Senate floor Wednesday about the mass suffering inflicted by the coronavirus pandemic and the economic catastrophe produced by it. He pointed out to McConnell that his home state of Kentucky has 10 of the 25 poorest counties in America, where \$2,000 checks might stave off evictions, foreclosures and outright hunger.

McConnell, a multimillionaire many times over, both through marriage into a wealthy family and a 36-year career in the Senate, could care less about starving and homeless people in Appalachia. But the same is true of

his Democratic counterparts, like Joe Manchin in neighboring West Virginia, defender of the coal bosses, and Mark Warner of Virginia, a telecommunications mogul before entering politics.

In taking up the \$2,000-per-person check, moreover, the Democrats in both the House and Senate went into action only after Trump declared, for his own demagogic purposes, that the \$600-per-person payment contained in the coronavirus relief bill he signed into law on Sunday was “too small.” The Democratic leadership in the House seized on the opportunity to embarrass Senate Republicans, particularly the two Georgia senators who face runoff election contests January 5.

The implied bargain in Sanders’ posturing is thoroughly reactionary. If the Republicans would agree to send \$2,000 checks to hungry and dispossessed American workers, he would drop his obstruction of the massive military budget that arms American imperialism for war with China, Russia, Iran or any other country targeted by the military-intelligence apparatus.

As far as the Pentagon budget is concerned, Sanders’ position is completely unprincipled. He does not oppose imperialism or even utter the word. He defends the “national interest” of Wall Street just as much as the most rabid Republican rightist. His disagreements are only tactical—which countries should be targeted and when—and reflect concerns that diverting too many resources into the military could aggravate social tensions within the United States and endanger the capitalist social order, which he supports and defends.

None of these considerations have stopped the pseudoleft supporters of Sanders from glorifying his actions as intransigent and transformational. The website of *Jacobin* magazine, the semi-official voice of the Democratic Socialists of America, published an effusive commentary, written by David Sirota, a former press spokesman for the Sanders campaign, under the headline, “Bernie Sanders Is Fighting for a \$2,000 Check for You on the Senate Floor.”

Sirota contrasted the inaction of “Senate Democrats” with Sanders, who he claimed “is pledging to filibuster a Pentagon veto override to provide real help for millions of Americans struggling to survive.” The Vermont senator was supposedly “flipping the script” by using the Republicans’ own “hardball” tactics

against them, by taking the military budget hostage. He was, in Sirota’s words, “pulling a McConnell on McConnell.”

The *Jacobin* writer went on to praise Sanders for carrying out a tactic he had used many times before in congressional maneuvering. “He reached across the aisle to find an unlikely Republican ally (in this case Sen. Josh Hawley) to forge a left-right coalition...” Aside from concealing the unpleasant reality that Sanders’ real “ally” in this effort was Trump, Sirota’s adulation was premature. Only hours after his article appeared, the Senate voted to move ahead with the military veto override, dismissing Sanders’ objections.

Neither Sanders nor his pseudoleft supporters breathe a word about what is really required to defend the lives and livelihoods of working people against the pandemic: not a small one-time payment, but full income support for all workers in nonessential occupations to allow them to stay home until the disease is brought under control.

In playing court jester in the latest spat between Trump, McConnell and the Democratic leadership in Congress, Sanders is only demonstrating his future role under the Biden administration. He will do everything possible to build illusions in the possibility of progressive reform by a government that will deepen the attacks on working people in America and around the world.



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