Sanders provides cover to the Democrats as they refuse to raise the minimum wage

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Last week, US President Joe Biden and the Democratic Party effectively torpedoed a provision in the COVID-19 stimulus package making its way through Congress to raise the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour.

The elimination of the minimum wage increase came as a result of a ruling by Senate parliamentarian Elizabeth McDonough, an unelected official appointed to her role by the Democrats in 2012. McDonough issued an advisory ruling that the wage hike is not allowable in a bill using the budget reconciliation process.

In a thinly veiled attempt to save face, many of the self-proclaimed "progressive" Democrats have sought to present themselves as having their hands tied. The maneuvers prompted widespread disgust among workers and young people who are facing social conditions not seen since the Great Depression.

In response to the growing outrage, Senator Bernie Sanders has staged a series of stunts to cover over the Democratic Party's gutting of its own stimulus bill.

The first, billed as a "Plan B," was a joint effort by Sanders and Senator Ron Wyden from Oregon to introduce legislation that would impose tax penalties on large corporations that do not pay employees $15 an hour. Sanders and Wyden dropped the plan within 24 hours on the basis that the measure would be too difficult to implement and that there would not be sufficient support to include it in the emerging COVID-19 relief package.

The second attempt will be tried in the coming days as the Senate conducts what is known as a "vote-a-rama" on the stimulus bill—a Senate practice in which any senator can introduce an unlimited number of amendments to a piece of legislation after the allotted time of debate on a bill expires. The Senate then votes on the amendments, marathon-style which can go on for hours.

The event is mostly an opportunity for politicians to secure video clips of themselves supposedly fighting for their constituents to be used for future campaign ads.

In this case, Sanders' attempt to "force the vote" on the minimum wage is doubly farcical since not only is it clear that he does not have the votes to get the amendment passed, but even if he did, the archaic and anti-democratic parliamentarian rules have already prohibited the amendment from being included in the bill.

A number of "left" publications and organizations, including *Jacobin* magazine, have commented extensively on the events mostly from the standpoint of begging the Democratic Party to have a moral awakening. *Jacobin* issued calls pleading with Vice President Kamala Harris to overrule the parliamentarian's advice, which she has the constitutional authority to do. It should come as no surprise that the White House has already decisively ruled out any attempt to overrule the parliamentarian.

What are the political conclusions one must draw of these events?

First, the very fact that an increase in the minimum wage from the current extreme poverty-level wage has been torpedoed by the Democrats, under such extraordinarily dire conditions, only underscores the bankruptcy of the entire political system and its contempt for the great majority of the population.

Under conditions in which tens of millions of workers are unemployed and underemployed, and thousands more are struggling every day to put food on the table for their families, the Democratic Party has mustered only a pittance in relief for workers, backtracking on

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even the most basic campaign promises only two months into the Biden administration.

With Democratic Party control of both chambers of Congress and the executive branch, they have been forced to resort to administrative means and technicalities to cover over their right-wing policies.

Second, the fight over the minimum wage has once again revealed the real role of Senator Bernie Sanders and his fellow “progressives” as a critical part of the Democratic Party operation. Their political function is to provide a left gloss to the party as it moves ever more sharply to the right.

As for Sanders himself, he has been aligned with the Democratic Party as a senator for the last 15 years and in the House for 18 years before that. The peak of his political career stretched throughout his 2016 and 2020 presidential runs and were waged under the banner of “political revolution.”

Both campaigns ended in fawning endorsements and rigorous campaigning for two of the most right-wing candidates the Democratic Party has ever produced: in 2016 Hillary Clinton, and in 2020 Biden.

As payment for his services, Sanders now holds a top position in the Democratic leadership as chair of the Senate Budget Committee. Sanders was given the position because he is a trusted member of the Democratic Party apparatus. If proof of his allegiances is required, one must look no further than the current debate on the minimum wage. Despite all of his bluster, Sanders’ “political revolution” has proven incapable of achieving even the most minimal social reforms.

Finally, behind the decision not to pass a minimum wage increase is not a broken moral compass of leading Democrats, as the apologists for the Democratic Party constantly proclaim, but rather class interests. The Democratic Party is subservient to the interests of the financial oligarchy, and, therefore, categorically opposed to any significant measures to address the needs of the working class.

The class character of the Biden administration has already found stark expression in the first two months in power, both at home in the attempts to reopen schools and workplaces while the pandemic continues to rage, and abroad, with the airstrikes on Syria last week.

The efforts and energies of the working class must be based not on futile hopes of transforming the Democratic Party, but on the construction of a movement in the working class to prepare and lead the struggle for genuine socialism.

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