

Jacobin magazine, the Democratic Socialists of America and the collapse of Biden's social reform bill

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The ignominious collapse of the Biden administration's social reform pretenses has dealt a blow to the fiction that the Democratic Party can be a vehicle for progressive social change. The framework of Biden's "Build Back Better" budget plan revealed last week bears little relation to the bill that "progressive" Democrats like Senator Bernie Sanders and his allies affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America, like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, claimed would represent meaningful improvements in workers' lives.

In the course of "negotiations" with right-wing congressional Democrats, the bill was stripped of most provisions that would cost businesses money or improve the living conditions of the working class. Two years of free community college, paid family and medical leave, a permanent child tax credit, and significant expansions to Medicare have all been killed. Moreover, the supposedly progressive measures still left in the bill are actually oriented towards the interests of the ruling elite.

Out of the \$555 billion allocated for climate-related spending, \$320 billion is in the form of tax credits to utilities, electric vehicle manufacturers, and companies that build battery-charging stations. Another \$110 billion is for subsidies to producers of "solar, batteries and advanced materials."

Proposals for universal pre-kindergarten programs and federally subsidized child care remain left on the table but only to free the mothers of small children to take low-wage jobs. Medicaid has only been expanded into states which refused federal subsidies for expanding Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. This is also aimed at inducing workers to take low-

wage jobs that do not offer health care coverage. The latest reform bill also excludes any significant tax rate increases for either corporations or the wealthy.

Senator Bernie Sanders, whom the Democratic leadership promoted to chair of the Senate Budget Committee to spearhead the legislation, has not declared any public opposition to the new bill, stripped of many of the reforms he and other "progressives" previously called for. In an interview with CNN, Sanders called the current bill "very, very strong" and evaded answering if he would vote for the legislation as is.

The social welfare legislation touted by Sanders, House "progressives" and their pseudo-left supporters as proof that major reforms could be enacted through the Democratic Party has turned into another debacle. No "progressive" Democrat—nor any of the members of Congress affiliated with the DSA—has stated he or she would vote against the bill. This exposes the bankrupt politics of the pseudo-left, who channeled support behind Sanders and the Democrats.

In the article titled "The Reconciliation Bill's Gutting Is What Happens When Your Party Is Addicted to Corporate Money," David Sirota, editor-at-large at *Jacobin* and former senior adviser and speechwriter on Sanders's 2020 presidential campaign, explained the bill's erosion was due to the presence of big money in politics. His article never mentions the role Sanders or any other "progressive" Democrat played in promoting the bill or whittling it down to its current state.

"In general, the reason the Democratic Party always sounds so helplessly incoherent is because its lawmakers are trying to simultaneously appease their corporate donors and look like they are fulfilling their

public promises to fix problems created by those corporate donors,” Sirota wrote.

The Democrats’ allegiance to corporate interests is not a new revelation. In fact, they already understood the path the bill would take.

In September, Yahoo! News cited a lobbyist on Capitol Hill as saying “there was optimism among congressional Democrats that a bill would get passed and sent to Biden for signing into law. But such a bill is likely to be in the range of about \$2 trillion...

“While the various House committees are likely to approve bills that would total \$3.5 trillion, that number would get whittled down before the legislation is sent to the full House for debate and passage, the source said. That could mean that any proposed tax increases on the wealthy and corporations would not have to be as steep as initially envisioned,” the article continued.

Sirota then denounced Biden for upholding his pledge to his donors that “nothing would fundamentally change” under a Biden administration and blamed “Democratic leaders” for creating a bill that only provides “marginal victories.” At the same time, however, Sirota praised Biden’s bill as “significant steps beyond the incrementalism and corporatism of the Obama presidency.”

But just 10 days earlier, *Jacobin* magazine, the semi-official media spokesman for the DSA, published an article by Luke Savage declaring “Bernie Sanders Is Showing the Democrats How to Take on Joe Manchin.” In it, Sanders was lauded for supposedly causing a stir in Washington.

“With his trademark message discipline, Sanders made a direct, accessible, and moral case for the key items in the bill, going on to note the strong opposition from corporate interests and cataclysmic wealth disparities that form the appalling backdrop of the current wranglings in Congress,” Savage wrote.

Now that nothing has come of Sanders’s demagoguery, the pseudo-left is scrambling to cover its tracks. In the subsequent article, Sirota blamed “corporate media misdirection” for the bill’s failure and workers’ indignation.

“All of that corporate media misdirection is carefully crafted to try to gaslight you—to make you feel that your outrage, frustration, and disappointment is illegitimate. ... It should be aimed at the system that guts or outright kills these kinds of bills on a regular basis. It is a

system that doesn’t block *all* positive reforms—it just makes sure most reforms never alter the economy’s overall structure, even when society is facing existential emergencies.”

Sirota mentions “existential emergencies” and crises without actually naming what they are. The words “capitalism,” “pandemic,” and “COVID” do not appear a single time throughout the commentary. Also missing are the roles that Sanders and the DSA played in helping Biden win the presidency and their support for the Biden administration’s criminal policy of reopening schools and workplaces.

The feckless response of the pseudoleft cannot disguise the impossibility of reforming capitalism or obtaining “progressive change” from the oldest capitalist party in the world. The Democratic Party is a party of Wall Street, the intelligence agencies and the military. The role of Sanders and Co. is to provide a leftist veneer.

Workers and young people must draw the necessary lessons. The Democrats cannot be reformed, nor can the capitalist system. Instead of Sanders’s “political revolution” to pressure the Democrats below, workers must break with the Democratic Party and build a mass socialist movement to overthrow capitalism.



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