

”Left” demagogy in the service of reaction

Pro-war Bernie Sanders campaigns for Democrats at the University of Michigan

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On Saturday, November 5, Senator Bernie Sanders spoke at the University of Michigan (UM) as part of his nationwide “Our Future Is Now” tour promoting Democratic candidates in the midterm elections.

Addressing some 1,000 attendees in the university’s Rackham Auditorium, Sanders argued that all young people and students had to turn out on Election Day, November 8, to vote “up and down” against Republicans and for Democrats because the election was uniquely consequential.

Sanders cited the attack on abortion rights, climate change and the ongoing assault on democracy by Trump and the Republicans as reasons to vote for the Democrats. At the same time, he hypocritically claimed that his blanket endorsement “by no means” suggested that Biden and the Democrats were doing “nearly enough.”

Sanders called climate change an “existential” question, warning that continued failure to address global warming threatened all of humanity in the coming decades. This, of course, is true, as is the fact that, apart from giving lip service, Biden and the Democrats have done no more than any other government to address the problem.

Nowhere in the course of his 45-minute speech did Sanders mention an even more immediate existential threat—the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine, which threatens to trigger a nuclear world war.

This was not an oversight. Sanders, for all his left-sounding demagogy, is not a socialist. He is a critical part of the Democratic Party and, like all Democratic and Republican politicians, a loyal defender of American capitalism and imperialism and its wars of aggression, including the US/NATO-provoked proxy war against nuclear-armed Russia. In recent days, Sanders has directly intervened to oppose peace negotiations and demand “war until victory” for Ukraine, increasing the danger of a

nuclear holocaust.

Last month, 30 members of the House Progressive Caucus published an open letter to Biden calling for peace talks with Russia, citing “the catastrophic possibilities of nuclear escalation and miscalculation” and worldwide hunger as a result of food supply chain disruptions. The letter sparked a savage response from the leadership of the Democratic Party.

The Biden administration does not want an end to the war. Its overriding concern is neither the defense of democracy—whether in Europe or the US—nor Ukrainian “self-determination,” but rather the weakening and eventual dismemberment of Russia, which is seen by the Pentagon, CIA and Wall Street as an obstacle to taking on and defeating China and establishing US hegemony over the Eurasian continent. To this end, Biden is prepared to sacrifice the lives of countless Ukrainians and Russians, and risk the death of millions of even billions of people worldwide.

Within 24 hours of the appearance of the letter, in a demonstration of rank cowardice and subordination to the military/intelligence apparatus, the so-called “progressives” withdrew it and affirmed their support for prosecuting the war “until Ukrainian victory.”

The following day, Sanders, asked by a reporter about the letter and its withdrawal, said, “I don’t agree with that, and they don’t agree with it, apparently. It was withdrawn today, so it becomes a non-issue.” Thus the Vermont senator began his pre-election tour to hustle votes for the Democrats by declaring his support for war until “victory.”

Full support for the US-NATO war against Russia and its further escalation is the position not only of Sanders, the hero of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the pseudo-left more generally, but of the DSA itself.

None of the four DSA members of the House Progressive Caucus—Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), Cori Bush (D-MO) and Jamaal Bowman (D-NY)—has made a statement about the withdrawal of the letter.

Last March, all of the congressional DSA members unanimously voted for a \$40 billion military aid package for the Ukraine war. DSA members were present at Saturday's rally at UM to promote Sanders and the fiction that the Democratic Party can be pressured to the left. Sanders made a point during his remarks of pointing out the presence of DSA Democratic Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib in the audience.

The administration has plowed over \$50 billion in military aid into Ukraine since Russia invaded the country last February. That is more than four times the annual cost of Biden's totally inadequate student debt relief program—currently held up in the courts.

Putin's invasion was a reactionary and disastrously miscalculated response by the capitalist oligarchic regime he heads to decades of US-led provocations, including the eastward expansion of the NATO military alliance to Russia's very borders. The US backed the regime-change operation in Ukraine in 2014 that brought in a far-right, rabidly nationalistic government in Kiev that glorifies Stepan Bandera, the nationalist leader who collaborated with the Nazis in the mass murder of Jews and Poles during World War II. The US and NATO massively armed the Ukrainian government and its fascist allies such as the Azov Battalion, turning Ukraine into an instrument for war against Russia.

Sanders' support for imperialism is not new. For decades, he has supported Washington's international war drive, including the Obama administration's destruction of Iraq and Syria under the guise of defeating ISIS. Sanders' militarism goes hand in hand with his economic nationalism, which the ruling class and the trade union bureaucracies employ to pit US workers against their class brothers and sisters in China, Mexico and other countries.

Sanders' services to the ruling class have involved repeated interventions aimed at propping up the trade union bureaucracies as they sold out and betrayed one strike after another. He made a point at UM of falsely identifying the working class with the corporatist and pro-imperialist unions. "I've been involved in several strikes, standing up for workers," he boasted.

The workers he "stood up for" include 2,000 New York University graduate students, whose strike in the summer

of 2021 was sold out by the Graduate Student Organizing Committee (GSOC), an affiliate of the United Auto Workers (UAW).

In November of that year, Sanders hosted a virtual forum to cover for the UAW's sell-out contract imposed on striking workers at farm equipment maker John Deere.

This year he backed the concessions contract imposed by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union on 8,400 King Soopers supermarket workers, and traveled to Britain to promote the Rail, Maritime and Transport union as it worked to isolate and suppress strikes by rail workers amid a wave of walkouts by health care workers, bus workers and others.

Now he is backing the attempt of the Biden administration, the rail companies and Congress to impose a sellout contract on 120,000 US rail workers.

In speaking with WSWS reporters and members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality before Saturday's event, students and young workers aired concerns over the attacks on democratic rights such as abortion and the threat of far-right forces in and around the Republican Party. But neither Sanders nor his DSA promoters could offer any policies to address these or any of the critical issues facing youth and students.

IYSSE members distributed leaflets and spoke to attendees about the role of Sanders and the DSA in supporting the war in Ukraine. In opposition to the demagoguery of Sanders, the IYSSE explained its fight to build an international anti-war movement of youth and students based on the working class and the fight for socialism. Many students expressed interest and signed up to find out more.

Last week, the IYSSE published a statement calling for the building of this movement and announcing a global online meeting to be held Saturday, December 10. Workers and youth can register for the meeting here.



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