

Bernie Sanders, DSA play crucial role in passing anti-strike law against railroaders

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On Thursday afternoon, the US Senate voted by a margin of 80 to 15 to impose the terms of a national rail contract that tens of thousands of workers voted to reject. The vote in the Senate followed the law's passage Wednesday in the House of Representatives.

The law—which does not even include the fig leaf of seven paid sick days that was narrowly approved as a separate measure in the House—is a major assault on the democratic rights of all workers in the United States.

While Wall Street breathed a sigh of relief, the vote resolves nothing from the standpoint of railroaders. Workers still have not agreed to anything, and they cannot accept as legitimate a dictatorial vote based on the “right” to override workers that Congress has arrogated to itself.

To a far more direct and open degree than before, workers are locked in a fight against the capitalist state itself. To the extent that anything “positive” has come out of this, it is that the vote completely exposes all factions of the political establishment.

This includes the self-described “most pro-labor president in American history,” Joe Biden. But a critical role was also played by the pseudo-left factions of the Democratic Party, including Senator Bernie Sanders and the four members of the House who are affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

The pro-company, anti-worker, dictatorial measure could not have passed in the form that it did, with the speed that it did, without their support.

On Tuesday, House Democrats introduced a separate resolution, originally drafted by Sanders in the Senate, to add seven paid sick days on top of the contract they were imposing. This was a sham aimed at providing political cover. It had no chance of reaching the 60-vote threshold to overcome a filibuster in the Senate. Even if it did pass both houses, it would do next to nothing to seriously address workers' demands.

Before the vote on the sick days resolution, three out of

four DSA members of the House joined with the vast majority of Democrats to vote in favor of imposing the contract, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Defending her vote, Ocasio-Cortez later nonsensically claimed that her vote to block a strike and impose the contract was cast in order to allow Democrats to fight for sick days in the Senate.

The Senate, after voting to reject a Republican proposal to extend the deadline into February, voted down the sick days proposal, as expected, in a near party-line vote, with Democrat Joe Manchin playing his assigned role of joining with Republicans against his own party.

Sanders' defeated proposal in the Senate was framed as an amendment to the anti-strike bill, whereas the House proposal to add sick days was voted on separately. This means that, because both houses passed identical legislation with respect to the question of imposing the contract itself, the bill went immediately to Biden's desk without delay. Any delay would have been completely unacceptable to the ruling class, which was demanding the contract be imposed immediately, well before the December 9 strike deadline.

The most significant element of the voting in the Senate was the expedited procedure, worked out in negotiations involving both parties and the White House, which required the unanimous consent of all 100 senators. If either Bernie Sanders, the “progressive” Elizabeth Warren or anyone else had objected to this, the vote would have been delayed.

In other words, Sanders' support was decisive, under conditions in which the outcome of voting was known in advance. Not only that, he was a principal architect of the parliamentary maneuvering through which it was passed.

Sanders and the Democrats are cynically using the Republican opposition to sick days to posture as friends of workers after they voted to impose the contract by an even wider margin than the Republicans, many of whom

voted against it for factional reasons. But even the *New York Times*, the house organ of the Democratic Party, could not avoid admitting the obvious.

“In a statement that perfectly captured the yawning gap between Democratic Party rhetoric and behavior,” *Times* editorial board member Binyamin Appelbaum observed in an opinion piece, “House Speaker Nancy Pelosi denounced railroad companies as rapacious profiteers who ‘have been selling out to Wall Street to boost their bottom lines, making obscene profits while demanding more and more from railroad workers.’ Then, just one sentence later, she announced that House Democrats would stand with the profiteers.”

There was no such admission, however, from *Jacobin* magazine, which functions as a mouthpiece for the DSA. Following the House vote, but hours before the Senate vote, it rushed to publish a comment with the triumphant headline: “Democrats Were Dithering on Railworkers’ Rights. The Left Just Forced Their Hand,” written by Branko Marcetic.

Marcetic’s entire column was devoted to creating an absurd narrative whereby the intervention of Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez, et al. had, through brilliant and principled politicking, succeeded in shifting the entire political establishment to the left. After this pretense was exploded less than 24 hours later with the Senate vote, *Jacobin* discreetly moved the article from its lead spot to far down on the front page.

Exposed in the process is the entire political function and outlook of the pseudo-left. There is nothing socialist about them. They are an important element of capitalist political control over the working class. Using empty populist demagogy, they serve to corral and defuse opposition from below, provide a “left” cover for the Democratic Party as it lurches further to the right, and keep workers trapped within the confines of capitalist politics. To be blunt, they could not give a damn how many railroaders are pushed into early graves by brutal attendance policies.

Their politics reflects the outlook and defends the interests of a privileged section of the middle class, which includes in its ranks substantial elements of the union apparatus itself.

The DSA, *Labor Notes* and other pseudo-left groups unconditionally defend the union apparatus, which in the rail struggle and every other struggle has played a critical role in suppressing, diverting and blocking the efforts of workers to oppose the corporations. Against the initiative of railroad workers to form the Railroad Workers Rank-

and-File Committee, which has played the leading role in mobilizing opposition, the pseudo-left responds with undisguised hostility.

The pseudo-left, in opposition to genuine socialist internationalism, is nationalist, pro-war and pro-capitalist. What predominates within these layers is an intense struggle for access to privileges. A central feature of this brand of politics is the use of racial and gender politics, both to deflect from the more fundamental issue of class and as a lever to jockey for positions among themselves.

Therefore, the pseudo-left is deeply hostile to the working class, whose fight for equality threatens to abolish, not redistribute, privilege. Having said “A,” they will also say “B.” If the state injunction against the railroad workers is defied by the workers themselves, the next step for the ruling class will be physical repression, arrests and violence. The pseudo-left will back that as well.

The entire political system, including both its right wing and nominal “left,” is revealing itself as an instrument of class rule. The shabby maneuvering over sick days cannot conceal from the working class the significance of what has taken place. Workers will begin to draw sweeping conclusions. By its own actions, Washington has shown to workers that they cannot fight for even their most minimal demands within the existing framework.

They have unwittingly made a powerful argument for social revolution in the United States. For this, workers need real socialism, not the fake socialism on offer from the pseudo-left. This means the fight for the political independence of the working class and the fight for a workers’ government which organizes society in the interests of human need, not private profit.



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