

In New Hampshire speech, Bernie Sanders seeks to give Biden “progressive” credentials, comparing him to FDR

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In a speech Saturday to a New Hampshire forum that is a traditional stop for presidential candidates preparing for the state’s primary election, Senator Bernie Sanders appeared as an advocate for President Joe Biden, hailing the “achievements” of the Biden administration and even comparing its work to the New Deal of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the high point of capitalist reformism in the United States.

The speech, delivered at St. Anselm College in Goffstown, New Hampshire, was grossly misleading in painting Biden’s domestic policies in rosy colors. Sanders praised the American Rescue Plan, the initial huge handout to corporate America disguised as an anti-COVID measure, the infrastructure legislation, also a handout to the construction industry, and the Inflation Reduction Act, particularly its spending on climate change, again consisting of handouts to “green energy” companies.

Perhaps most revealing was Sanders’ total silence on the foreign policy of the White House, above all its proxy war in Ukraine against Russia and its rapid military build-up in the Asia-Pacific region in preparation for war with China. This was a deliberate cover-up of the Biden administration’s leading role in a reckless militaristic policy that threatens humanity with the specter of World War III.

Even apart from the danger of a nuclear Armageddon, as Biden himself put it, the drive to war makes it impossible to pursue a reformist agenda at home.

It was the entry of the United States into World War II that put an end to Roosevelt’s reformist experiments in social policy, just as it was the vast spending on the war in Vietnam that ended Lyndon Johnson’s “War on Poverty” in the 1960s. Now the maintenance of a gigantic US military machine, costing more than \$1 trillion a year, combined with the erosion of the global dominance of the US economy, makes anything comparable even to the limited measures of Roosevelt and Johnson absolutely impossible.

This is already evident in the minimal character of the measures enacted under Biden, which Sanders presented as the second coming of the New Deal. Where Roosevelt established the Social Security system, which has become the foundational

program of income support for the elderly and disabled, and Johnson established Medicare and Medicaid, which provide health coverage for nearly half the US population, Biden proved unable to push through even incremental improvements in either program, let alone enact new programs like universal childcare and pre-kindergarten education, which he promised in his campaign.

On the contrary, Biden has shifted to a policy of austerity, as evidenced by this year’s bipartisan debt limit legislation, which includes \$1.5 trillion in domestic spending cuts.

There was a howling contradiction in Sanders’ speech calling for Biden’s re-election. On the one hand, he presented the record of the Biden administration as a massive exercise in progressive reform. On the other hand, he called on the Democratic Party to break with its “corporate wing” and launch an offensive against big business.

This appeal ignores a very obvious and well-established political fact: Biden is himself the personification of the most openly pro-corporate elements in the Democratic Party, a party which, in its entirety, is controlled by the capitalist class. He represented Delaware, the corporate headquarters of choice because of its friendly tax and regulatory structure, for 36 years in the Senate. He was arguably the most right-wing of the Democratic presidential hopefuls in 2008, and certainly the most right-wing of the major candidates for the nomination in 2020, when Sanders was his main rival.

In effect, Sanders is appealing to Biden to break with himself, and peddling illusions among his supporters that such a political contortion is possible.

He declared:

The Democrats, once and for all, must reject the corporate wing of the party and empower those who are prepared to create a grassroots, multi-racial, multi-generational working class party in every state in this country. Democrats, through words and action, must make it clear that they stand with a struggling working class, a disappearing middle class, and millions of low

income Americans who are barely surviving.

Sanders' invocations of the working class reflect the increasing nervousness in the political establishment—of which he is part—that workers are beginning to break free of the control of the bureaucratic trade unions and the privileged apparatus that uses the unions to suppress the class struggle.

That is why Biden has declared himself “the most pro-union president” in history, and why Biden and Sanders both applaud the militant pretensions of “reform” officials like Sean O’Brien in the Teamsters and Shawn Fain in the United Auto Workers, who are likewise boosted by pseudo-left groups such as the Democratic Socialists of America.

Sanders seeks to motivate his appeal to support Biden and the Democrats in 2024 by appealing to popular fears that Donald Trump might return to power on the basis of an authoritarian and ultra-reactionary program. But he does not explain how such a political comeback is possible for an ex-president who is widely hated and who attempted to overthrow the US Constitution and maintain himself in power after losing the 2020 election.

This is due entirely to the refusal of Biden and the Democrats to conduct any struggle against the mounting threat to democratic rights and the transformation of the Republican Party into a fascist party in all but name. On the country, Biden declared that one of his major goals was to preserve a strong Republican Party and enact policies on the basis of bipartisan collaboration.

Sanders presented, in the course of his speech, a dire picture of the social conditions facing the American working class, which was in complete contradiction to his paean to the supposed achievements of the Biden administration. He urged Biden to follow the example of Roosevelt, who delivered his famous speech about “one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished” in the course of a successful re-election campaign.

Sanders declared:

In the wealthiest country in the history of the world, tens of millions struggle to put food on the table, find affordable housing, affordable health care, affordable prescription drugs, affordable childcare and affordable educational opportunities. That is an indisputable reality, and it is imperative that we acknowledge that reality.

At a time of unprecedented income and wealth inequality, while the billionaire class and the 1 percent are doing better than at any time in American history, over 60 percent of our people live paycheck to paycheck, while many work for starvation wages and under terrible working conditions. Despite massive

increases in worker productivity and an explosion in technology, the average American worker is making \$45 a week less today than he or she did 50 years ago after adjusting for inflation, while the vast majority of our families need two bread winners to survive.

The two-time presidential candidate did not explain or address how the Republican Party and the billionaire Trump were able to appeal to working people facing such conditions, because this is due to the right-wing, anti-working class policies of the Democratic Party and the Biden administration, which Sanders supports, and the political straitjacket of the capitalist two-party system, which gives workers no alternative to the Democrats and Republicans.

Despite his nominal status as an “independent,” Sanders has upheld the two-party monopoly, seeking the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party and now functioning as an integral member of the Senate Democratic leadership.

This role was evident on both of the television talks shows where he appeared on Sunday. He gave perfunctory answers to questions about his New Hampshire speech, then was asked virtually the same question by each moderator: What was his attitude to the third-party candidacy of Professor Cornel West, who is seeking the presidential nomination of the Green Party.

On both programs, Sanders expressed his personal admiration for West, while claiming that re-electing Biden was essential to preventing Trump from returning to power. On “Meet the Press,” he said, “at the end of the day, I think the progressive community in general and the American people have got to make a decision as to whether we stand for democracy or authoritarianism.”

On “State of the Union,” he said he disagreed with “my good friend Cornel West” because “there is a real question whether democracy is going to remain in the United States of America,” and it was necessary to support Biden to keep Trump out.

West himself offers no genuine alternative to working people. But Sanders seeks to suppress any effort, no matter how limited, that might threaten the two-party monopoly and divert votes away from Biden and the Democrats.



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