Bernie Sanders urges “independent” candidates to emulate right-wing nationalist campaign of ex-union bureaucrat Dan Osborn

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In the wake of Kamala Harris’s presidential defeat and the Democrats’ loss of control of the Senate and failure to regain a majority in the House, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, with the support of *Jacobin* and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), is advancing a new electoral trap aimed at keeping workers and youth tied to the Democratic Party.

Keenly aware that millions of workers and students are alienated from both big business parties and the capitalist system they represent, Sanders and other Democratic Party operatives are attempting to prevent a revolutionary movement from below by sowing illusions in ruling class-approved “independent working class” campaigns.

To this end, in multiple social media posts and interviews, including with *The Nation’s* John Nichols this past week, Sanders has effusively praised former union bureaucrat Dan Osborn’s 2024 “independent” campaign for the US Senate as the “future.” In *The Nation* interview, headlined “Bernie Sanders: We Need More Working-Class Candidates to Challenge Both Parties,” Sanders declared:

> I think that what Dan Osborn did should be looked at as a model for the future. He took on both political parties. He took on the corporate world. He ran as a strong trade unionist. Without party support, getting heavily outspent, he got through to working-class people all over Nebraska. It was an extraordinary campaign and it tells me that the American people are sick and tired of seeing the rich getting richer. They think billionaires dominate both political parties. They want real change, and Dan’s campaign raised those issues in a very significant way.

Asked by Nichols if he was “talking about creating a third-party, or creating a new political grouping” the nominally independent senator from Vermont, who caucuses with the Democrats, responded, “Not right now, no.” He added:

> What I am saying is that, building off of Osborn’s campaign… where people can run in the Democratic primary and win, that’s fine. Where it is more advantageous to run as an independent, outside of the Democratic primary process, we should do that, as well.

The last thing the “democratic socialist” senator from Vermont wants is for workers and youth to break with the Democratic Party and bourgeois politics. This is why Sanders rejects building a third party and instead promotes nominally “independent” candidates to dragoon workers and youth back into the orbit of the Democrats.

Sanders presents Osborn as a champion of the working class in opposition to both the Democrats and Republicans, when the reality is the opposite. Prior to running for Senate, Osborn was the president of Local 50G of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM) in Omaha, Nebraska. Throughout his Senate campaign, Osborn touted his stint as a union bureaucrat to posture as a friend of the working class.

However, Osborn used his role not to fight for the workers against the corporation, but to strangle their struggle and impose a pro-company sellout. During the 2021 Kellogg’s strike, Osborn waged a national chauvinist campaign to keep striking workers in the US isolated from their class brothers and sisters internationally.

In a broadside against Mexican workers, Osborn said in an interview at the time:

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> A lot of Americans probably don't have too much issue with the Nike or Under Armor hats being made elsewhere, or even our vehicles, but when they start manufacturing our food down where they are out of the FDA control and OSHA control, I have a huge problem with that.

In a preview of his anti-immigrant Senate run, he campaigned for a boycott of "made-in-Mexico Nabisco products."

After the workers had struck for 77 days, Osborn helped Kellogg's push through a contract betrayal that expanded the hated "two-tier" wage and benefits system and led to the closure of the Omaha plant and destruction of 550 jobs.

The Democrats failed to field a candidate and Osborn only narrowly lost his Senate race against incumbent Republican Deb Fischer. In the course of his campaign, Osborn never once pointed out Trump's fascist politics or condemned him for having tried to overturn the 2020 election. Instead, Osborn solidarized himself with Trump and claimed "Fischer stabbed Donald Trump in the back" for calling on Trump to drop out of the presidential race in 2016.

During and following his campaign, Osborn pledged to work with Trump to "secure the border," including through the completion of Trump's border wall.

There is nothing "working class" about supporting Trump's fascist border policies and attacks on immigrants. But Osborn's hatred of the working class, and of socialism, does not end there. In an interview with a Nebraska libertarian earlier this year, the ex-union bureaucrat touted his support for the US proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, framing it as the ultimate expression of "America First" in the fight against "communism."

Osborn declared, "Sending aid to Ukraine is America First. And let me explain, it's America First because, first of all, we don't have our troops over there."

He added, "so I just want to be clear, we are fighting a proxy war, you know, and we kind of got the best of both worlds right now. And I think the Russian aggression and communism has to be stopped."

While Osborn might not be aware that the USSR collapsed over 33 years ago, he still retains his anti-socialist politics from when he "proudly" served in the US Navy and US Army National Guard.

In addition to Sanders, those endorsing Osborn's anti-communist, anti-immigrant, pro-bureaucracy campaign include *Jacobin* founder Bhaskar Sunkara and elements of the trade union bureaucracy, such as United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain and Dustin Guastella, director of operations for Teamsters Local 623.

In a November 22 article published in the *Guardian*, Sunkara and Guastella praised "Osborn's ideas" and his "class background," which, they wrote, "was key to his being able to deliver a credible populist appeal."

Sunkara and Guastella called on the nationalist labor bureaucracies to recruit "talented candidates" and work with "organizations like Osborn's to get these candidates the funds they need to win elections."

The "organization" to which Sunkara and Guastella were referring is Osborn's political action committee (PAC), known as the "Working Class Heroes Fund." The PAC, which allows anonymous donors, raised nearly $8 million by mid-October, according to the *Nebraska Examiner*, which noted that Osborn "benefited from roughly $20 million in outside spending on his behalf" during the campaign.

The "about" section on the Working Class Heroes Fund website explains that the purpose of the PAC is provide money for politicians to get elected and unite "the working class across party lines." In other words, to forge pro-imperialist "national unity."

Reflecting the nationalist and proto-fascist politics of Osborn, the fund notes that it will be supporting "working class candidates, particularly patriots who have served their country."

There is nothing "working class," "progressive" or "left-wing" about any of this. That Sanders and the pseudo-left are backing this right-wing trap is an expression of their complete bankruptcy and that of the capitalist system they defend.

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