

Sanders takes his fraudulent ‘Fight Oligarchy’ show on the road

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Amid growing opposition from workers and young people to the Trump administration’s fascistic policies, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders has launched a tour aimed at diverting anger into lobbying so-called “moderate” Republicans to oppose Trump’s budget reconciliation bill while averting a government shutdown on March 14.

Last Friday and Saturday, Sanders held the first two events of his “Fighting Oligarchy” tour in Omaha, Nebraska, and Iowa City, Iowa. The effort of Sanders to present this tour as a historic fight against oligarchic rule is belied by the pathetically narrow and reformist character of its agenda.

It excludes any call for the mobilization of the social power of the working class or any exposure of the cowardice and complicity of the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy in Trump’s march to dictatorship. In fact, it is backed by the very Democratic leaders and trade union functionaries who are doing nothing to oppose Trump and Musk.

Sanders’ bid to promote himself as a tribune of the working class has been tarnished by two presidential election campaigns. Twice, in 2016 and 2020, he ran for president only to back the Democratic establishment’s right-wing candidates—Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden. This was followed by his slavish support for the Biden administration, which paved the way for Trump. Yet, he remains the Democratic Party’s go-to figure for reviving illusions in reforming a party of Wall Street and the military.

True to form, Sanders’ tour has been heavily promoted by the Democratic Party-aligned press, including the *New York Times*, the *Guardian* and *Jacobin*, the mouthpiece of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

On February 21, the *Times* published an interview with Sanders under the headline “Bernie Sanders Isn’t Giving Up His Fight.” In it, Sanders advised the Democrats to recognize that “the system is broken, period. And you can’t patch it up a little here and a little there.”

Yet in the next breath he said that “the best thing we could do is to win over at least two Republicans [sufficient to defeat the budget reconciliation bill in the narrowly divided House]... There are about 15 house districts in America where Republicans won with very slim margins. One of them is in the Omaha area. One of them is in the Iowa City area.”

It would be difficult to devise a more apt definition of the politics of “patching up” the system.

Asked if he regretted his decision to back Biden’s reelection bid until the bitter end, Sanders said: “The reason I stood behind President Biden is that he was supporting an extremely progressive agenda, an

agenda which, in fact, did speak to the needs of working people in this country ... and I think that’s exactly what the Democratic Party has to do right now.”

This “agenda” included institutionalizing Trump’s “forever COVID” policy, record military spending, an imperialist proxy war in Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza, and sharp cuts to Medicaid and social programs. It also included an alliance with the union bureaucracy in betraying and blocking strikes, including a government ban on a rail strike. In backing Biden, the supposed anti-oligarchy fighter vouched for a president who oversaw an 88 percent increase in US billionaire wealth to a total of \$5.5 trillion.

The *Guardian* on February 19 published a statement by Sanders headlined: “We are on the road for democracy and justice.” It spoke of the massive social inequality in America and referenced Trump’s setting himself up as a dictator. It made no criticism of the role of the Democrats or the trade union bureaucracy, and it did not mention US foreign policy.

Perhaps most significant and extraordinary: neither in his *Times* interview nor his *Guardian* statement, nor in his subsequent speeches in Omaha and Iowa City, did Sanders even mention the pogrom against immigrants that is the spearhead of the assault on the democratic and social rights of the working class as a whole. Nothing could more clearly demonstrate Sanders’ own economic nationalism and the shared anti-immigrant program of the union bureaucracy and the Democratic and Republican parties.

None of this prevented *Jacobin* from publishing a laudatory article on February 24 titled “Democrats Appear Paralyzed. Bernie Sanders Is Not.” The article hailed Sanders’ appearances in Iowa City and Omaha, stressing the overflow turnouts and uncritically backing his call to lobby so-called “moderate” Republicans in swing districts.

Sanders was introduced at the Omaha event Friday night by Ron Kaminski, president of Laborers Union Local 1140, which covers all of Nebraska and 10 counties in southwestern Iowa. Kaminski is also a Nebraska delegate to the Democratic National Committee. According to a report on Substack, there were more than 1,000 people in attendance.

Describing the oligarchic character of American society and its embodiment in the Trump administration, Sanders told the crowd:

I was there at the inauguration, and seated right behind Trump was Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg ... They are the three wealthiest people in America right behind the president as he’s getting sworn in. But that’s not enough. Behind those guys are the kind of poor billionaires. They are

only worth 10, 20 billion. Thirteen of them who were nominated by Trump to be in his cabinet...

What Sanders did not explain was why he sat through the degrading spectacle, politely applauding at times along with the rest of the Democrats, including Biden and Kamala Harris. He did not feel it necessary to say why he lacked the political principle and moral backbone to stand up and walk out. Indeed, he subsequently offered to cooperate with Trump on “policies that benefit working people.”

In his Omaha speech, Sanders studiously avoided using the “f” word (fascism) in describing Trump and his administration. His only reference to the ultra-militaristic policy of the new government—including plans to annex Canada and Greenland, take back the Panama Canal and seize and ethnically cleanse Gaza—was a sarcastic jab at Trump’s blaming Ukrainian President Zelensky for the war with Russia, making clear his support for the US/NATO imperialist war.

Turning to the House Republican budget reconciliation bill, Sanders said it would pay for more than \$1 trillion in tax cuts for the top 1 percent by making massive cuts to “Medicaid, education, housing and the programs that working people need.” He stressed that just two Republican “no” votes would defeat the bill, adding, “And what I’m asking you to do is make sure that your congressman, Mr. [Don] Bacon, is one of those two Republicans. And tomorrow I’ll be bringing that same message. I will be bringing it all over the country. We can beat that bill.”

He then instructed the attendees to access his website on their cell phones to find the phone numbers of their senators and members of Congress, adding, “These telephone calls work.”

The following morning Sanders delivered essentially the same speech to some 2,000 who attended meetings in Iowa City, Iowa. There, he gave out the phone number of the Republican incumbent in Iowa’s First Congressional District, Mariannette Miller-Meeks, who narrowly won reelection in 2024.

Why the specific focus on blocking the Republicans’ budget bill by winning at least two Republican defectors in the House? The Democratic Party, already in shambles and reeling from its 2024 election debacle, is between a rock and a hard place in regard to the budget bill, which must be passed by March 14 to avoid a government shutdown. It wants to avoid passage of the Republican bill, for fear that its \$880 billion in Medicaid cuts and other social cuts combined with a further tax break for the billionaires will fuel further popular disgust with its refusal to seriously fight Trump.

At the same time, it wants to avert a government shutdown, for fear of shaking the financial markets and triggering greater popular outrage and resistance. To avert a shutdown, the Democrats must supply a number of votes, under conditions where the Republicans have only a three-vote majority, to make up for “no” votes on any budget by the far-right Republican Freedom Caucus.

Ergo, the party leadership is looking for a rotten compromise that will scale back the cuts in Medicaid while allowing other major social cuts to go through. This is what Sanders is seeking to engineer, behind his anti-oligarchy demagoguery.

This was made clear in an email sent out on February 25 by “Team Bernie” from the Omaha meeting. It asked those who had signed up to call Rep. Don Bacon, cautioning that they “be respectful,” and ask him to vote “no” on “any legislation that cuts Medicaid to give tax breaks to billionaires.” In other words, don’t worry about cuts to other

social programs such as food stamps, housing aid and education.

Even as Sanders was promoting the most inane forms of reformist maneuvering, another event was taking place outside Washington D.C. that underscored the bankruptcy at all such efforts to avoid a struggle by the working class against capitalism. The annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) was a spectacle of fascist reaction, with leading Trump officials promoting an agenda of counterrevolution and dictatorship. Trump praised Musk’s mass purge of federal workers and gutting of government departments and agencies, and the multi-billionaire paraded on stage with a chainsaw to symbolize the war on the working class.

Trump acolyte Steve Bannon gave a Hitler salute, as did others at the three-day event. Immediately following the conference, Musk issued his email instructing all federal employees to list five accomplishments over the previous week or be fired.

In the face of this real threat of dictatorship and fascism, Sanders tried to bolster his appeal for passive protests to the powers that be in the place of mass industrial and political action by the working class by invoking the revolutionary history of the United States and mass struggles for trade union and civil rights.

Speaking in Omaha, he said: “We know we can take them ... Because we know a little about American history ... You had brave people ... who took on the entire British Empire to create a new country...”

“You think taking on and defeating the slave owners of America was an easy task? It wasn’t, but people had the courage and died by the tens and tens of thousands to end the horror of slavery. People said it couldn’t be done.”

Those were social and political revolutions, two of the greatest bourgeois democratic revolutions in history. They overthrew the existing political institutions and, in the case of the Second American Revolution, the Civil War, eradicated the slave power that controlled the southern states and expropriated their property by freeing their slaves.

Today, the capitalist system that these revolutions consolidated is in terminal crisis and must seek to overturn all of the progressive advances achieved over the past 250 years. The turn is to the working class and the revolutionary fight for socialism.

The defeat of the oligarchy and its drive to dictatorship requires the mass mobilization of the working class to bring down Trump and the entire rotten political system, expropriate the oligarch parasites, and restructure society on the basis of common ownership of the means of production and production for social need, not profit. And this is an international, not just a national struggle, in a world more economically interconnected than ever before.

Those who are looking for a way to fight should take up the fight for socialism and join the Socialist Equality Party.



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