

Bernie Sanders attempts to divert opposition to Trump behind the Democratic Party and support for war with Russia

Jacob Crosse, Andre Damon
6 March 2025

The fascistic rant delivered by Donald Trump before Congress on Tuesday night, six weeks into his second administration, has provoked disgust and anger among broad sections of workers and youth. But revulsion alone is not enough. It is necessary to make a clear analysis of what and who is responsible for the rise of Trump and the role of different political tendencies.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted on the eve of Trump's speech, "There exist two fundamentally different forms of opposition to the Trump administration"—the opposition of the working class and young people, and the opposition of significant sections of the ruling class. The latter agree with the basic elements of Trump's policy, particularly his domestic agenda, but have significant conflicts with aspects of his foreign policy, centered on the war against Russia.

In this division, Bernie Sanders, along with the various organizations in and around the Democratic Party that have promoted him, are firmly on the side of the ruling class opposition and stand opposed to that of the working class.

On Tuesday, Sanders delivered his own "rebuttal" to Trump's remarks. His aim was to cover up the essential agreement of the Democratic Party with Trump's social austerity policies and attacks on democratic rights and to divert social opposition back into the two-party system.

Sanders began his remarks by referencing the extreme levels of social inequality in the United States, which he sought to portray as caused solely by Trump and the Republican Party. "The three richest people in America," Sanders said, "the folks Trump invited to stand behind him at his inauguration, now own more wealth than the bottom half of our society." He added, "We are no longer moving toward oligarchy. We are living in an oligarchy."

This statement is true enough, but it raises a crucial question: Where did this oligarchy come from?

For four years, Democrat Joe Biden—whom Sanders endorsed and defended—presided over a massive transfer of

wealth to the financial oligarchy, with the billionaires' combined fortunes surging from \$7 trillion to \$10 trillion. Biden's administration bailed out Wall Street, suppressed wages and forced workers back into unsafe workplaces during the pandemic, leading to hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths.

Sanders spoke after the official response to Trump's speech of the Democratic Party, delivered by Senator Elissa Slotkin, who vowed to help Trump attack bedrock social programs. "You wanna cut waste? I'll help you do it," declared the former CIA agent.

In his remarks responding to Trump, Sanders said, "No, we're not going to cut Social Security," as if the official representative of the Democratic Party had not just pledged to help Trump slash social spending. Bernie Sanders has run the same political con game for decades: working to portray the Democratic Party's right-wing policies as the total opposite of what they are and hoping no one notices.

In addition to whitewashing the Democrats' right-wing policies, Sanders also covered up the real character of the Trump administration. He never once used the words "fascist" or "dictator" to describe Trump. Less than a day after Trump called for the mass arrest of students and workers protesting the genocide in Gaza, Sanders did not even acknowledge Trump's attacks on the First Amendment.

He did not mention, let alone oppose, what Trump himself identified as the central pillars of his administration: the mass deportation of immigrants and his protectionist trade policies. This was no accident. Sanders has himself sided with far-right figures like Steve Bannon in calling for an end to H-1B visas for immigrant workers. He has also long supported tariffs and protectionism, falsely claiming they would protect American jobs, and has repeatedly pledged to "work with Trump" in implementing such policies.

Sanders also promoted in his remarks the same trade union apparatus that has openly embraced Trump's protectionist

policies. This was the same day that Shawn Fain, the head of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, declared of Trump's trade war measures, "We are glad to see an American president take aggressive action on ending the free trade disaster."

But the most insidious aspect of Sanders' speech was his attempt to tie opposition to Trump to support for imperialist war—specifically, the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

"For the first time in our 250-year history, we have a president who is turning his back on democracy and allying us with authoritarianism," Sanders declared. "No. We must not abandon the people of Ukraine who were invaded by the Russian dictator, Vladimir Putin. We must always stand for democracy, not dictatorship."

What is Sanders talking about? The past century-plus of American history has been one of relentless imperialist violence, from the Spanish-American War and the brutal subjugation of the Philippines, to the nuclear bombing of Japan at the end of World War II, to the wars in Korea and Vietnam. The very war that brought Sanders into politics, the Vietnam War, killed over 3 million people in Southeast Asia in a bloody attempt to preserve US hegemony in Asia.

As he climbed the political ladder, Sanders lent his support to multiple wars and military interventions, either outright or through votes for funding. He backed the 1999 NATO war in Yugoslavia, the US invasion of Libya and the ongoing war in Ukraine, which is a calculated effort by Washington to draw Russia into a conflict that will "bleed it white." Under Biden, the US has funneled hundreds of billions into a proxy war that has sacrificed hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian lives—all to cement American control over the Eurasian landmass.

As for Ukraine itself, far from being a democracy, the Zelensky government operates under martial law and has integrated fascist forces into the highest levels of the state. With the support of the US, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has outlawed left-wing opposition parties, canceled elections, and imprisoned socialist opponents of the war and his regime, most notably the Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotyuk.

On the issues of foreign policy—that is, those that are the real concern of the Democratic Party—Sanders' remarks were entirely in line with those of Slotkin, criticizing Trump for being insufficiently aggressive against Russia and China.

Over the past decade, workers and young people have had a significant political experience with Sanders. In 2016, he ran for president under the banner of "political revolution," only to throw his support behind Hillary Clinton, whose right-wing, militarist and pro-corporate policies helped create the conditions for Trump's first election. In 2020, he repeated the same routine, shutting down his campaign early

to endorse Biden.

In 2024, Sanders did not run himself, instead devoting himself to promoting Biden, whom he absurdly called the most "progressive" president since Franklin Roosevelt—even as Biden oversaw massive social austerity, escalated US wars abroad, and openly called for a "strong Republican Party," paving the way for Trump's return. After Biden's withdrawal, Sanders backed Kamala Harris.

The Sanders experience is not just instructive about him as an individual but about an entire political tendency. From the beginning, Sanders was promoted by a network of pseudo-left organizations, including the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which helped foster illusions that the Democrats could be pushed to the left.

This is part of a global phenomenon: the pseudo-left blocking a genuine socialist movement while bolstering the ruling class's war policies and strengthening the right. Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party in the UK, Syriza in Greece, and the Left Party in Germany were all hailed as "left" alternatives, only to betray mass discontent and keep opposition trapped within the capitalist system. Rooted in privileged sections of the upper-middle class, these forces do not oppose capitalism or imperialism but work to suppress working class struggles. In every case, they have served to strengthen the far right.

In his defense of the political establishment, Sanders seeks to present Trump as some sort of aberration from the "normal" course of capitalism, which he asserts is one of peace, equality and democracy. In fact, Trump is the highest expression of the very capitalist social order that Sanders has spent his life defending and apologizing for. As Vladimir Lenin explained in his landmark book *Imperialism*, capitalism "strives for domination, not freedom," and oligarchy, monopoly and the domination of colonies by the imperialist powers are the most essential characteristics of the capitalist system.

The fight against Trump is not a struggle to return to some mythical "better" version of American imperialism, but a fight against the capitalist system itself and the oligarchy that upholds it.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact