

Bernie Sanders' Mission Impossible: Save the Democratic Party

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Over the past few days Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders has taken his “Fighting Oligarchy” campaign tour through several Midwest states, including Wisconsin, Michigan and Illinois. The events have drawn a few thousand people, significantly less than earlier in the year but nevertheless reflective of popular opposition within layers of the population.

In contrast to the union bureaucrats and Democratic Party politicians that have dominated the speaking platforms, those attending Sanders’ events are looking for a strategy and program to fight against Trump, the financial oligarchy, dictatorship and war.

They do not find what they’re looking for. In 2016, Sanders’ self-identification as a “socialist” and promises of a “revolution” created an aura of radicalism that excited audiences. But nearly a decade has passed, and the bloom is off the badly wilted rose. The oligarchs are richer and more powerful than ever. Without proposing anything, the denunciations of the oligarchy have acquired a ritualistic character. Sanders has been reduced to imitating himself, repeating the old and overused applause lines.

The purpose of the “Fighting Oligarchy” tour is not to put an end to the “billionaire class,” in the words of Sanders, but to chloroform the population to the advanced stage of the crisis and corral mass opposition to the Trump administration, inequality and capitalism back into the Democratic Party.

The “Mission Impossible” of saving the Democratic Party that Sanders has chosen to accept takes place under conditions in which support for the Democrats is collapsing. Last week the *New York Times* reported that registrations for Democrats between 2020 and 2024 were down in all 30 states that track party registration. This “stampede” away from the Democratic Party is “occurring in battleground states, the bluest states and

the reddest states, too,” per the *Times*.

This is not because of a surge in support for the Republicans. Rather, large sections of workers and young people hate the Democratic Party, a party of Wall Street, for its support for genocide, its right-wing policies and its spinelessness and collaboration in the face of Trump.

Sanders—who concluded his “political revolution” in 2016 and 2020 by backing Clinton and Biden—has evolved into an absolutely dependable, even essential prop of the Democratic Party. Everything he says and, more importantly, doesn’t say is crafted to conform to the needs and interests of the Democrats.

Notably absent from his speeches over the past week has been any reference to the most immediate political danger confronting the American working class: Trump’s systematic drive to dictatorship. Under conditions in which Trump is deploying thousands of armed soldiers to the streets of D.C., with threats to invade virtually every other major city in the United States, Sanders said absolutely nothing about the military occupations.

In advance of his remarks in Chicago, Trump explicitly threatened to send the National Guard into the city next. Yet Sanders made no mention of this unprecedented development nor warned workers and young people in the city of the implications. This is in line with the general silence of the Democratic Party as a whole, which is terrified of encouraging popular resistance from below.

Sanders repeated his well-worn lines about inequality in the United States, along with pro forma calls for “Medicare 4 All” and a “living wage.” He paints a picture of a society dominated by unprecedented inequality and oligarchic power in the hands of figures like Musk, Bezos and others.

This is all cynical and dishonest demagogic, as he does not propose any significant measure or action to oppose the power of this oligarchy, which controls both political parties. His tub-thumping resolves itself into the thin gruel of voting for Democrats and calls for “campaign finance reform.”

As for foreign policy, Sanders also toes the line of the Democratic Party. In contrast to earlier events, Sanders’ team forbade any flags or handmade signs. This was done to prevent putting Sanders in the awkward position of throwing out anti-genocide protesters as he did at a rally in Idaho earlier this year.

In his comments on the genocide in Gaza, Sanders solely blamed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the ongoing mass murder campaign, completely absolving the primary role of the US government, including Biden as well as Trump, in funding and arming the genocide while providing Israel political cover. Sanders did not refer to the mass murder and ethnic cleansing campaign in Palestine as a “genocide” but called on “tough guy” Trump to “take on Netanyahu.”

More significant are Sanders’ statements supporting the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and criticizing Trump from the standpoint of what matters most to the Democrats—issues of foreign policy.

Sanders is highly conscious of his political role, as are the organizations that have backed his campaigns and continue to promote him as a tribune of the people—the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and others, which represent privileged sections of the upper-middle class. And as Sanders’ appeal wears thin, there are others who are being promoted to fulfill the same function.

The same day Sanders held his rally in Chicago, New York City mayoral candidate and DSA member Zohran Mamdani held his own event, a “scavenger hunt,” in New York City. Mamdani, who won the Democratic Party primary by capitalizing on the broad popular opposition to the Democratic Party establishment, inequality and the genocide in Gaza, has quickly moved to accommodate himself to the big business interests that run the city.

No wonder Trump feels empowered to rule as king. With “opposition” like this, why wouldn’t he?

The fact is Trump could not be carrying out any of his actions or even have returned to the White House

without the Democratic Party. Following Trump’s failed coup, it was Biden (hailed by Sanders as the “most progressive president since FDR”) and former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who repeatedly called for a “strong Republican Party,” who refused to prosecute the fascist criminal.

The Democratic Party, terrified of opposition from below, seeks to chloroform the population about the real state of American democracy. The Democrats fear that exposing the true character of Trump’s coup and the social conditions that underlie it would encourage mass opposition that they cannot control.

The role of Sanders, Mamdani and the DSA is not to lead a “political revolution” but to act as a fireman, snuffing out, alongside the trade union bureaucracies, the flames of class struggle and mass discontent before they can grow into an independent mass movement of the working class aimed not at reforming capitalism, but overturning it.

The Socialist Equality Party says what Sanders cannot and will not say: The fight against Trump is inseparable from the fight against the oligarchy, and the fight against the oligarchy is a fight against the capitalist system.

There is no resolution to the unprecedented crisis confronting the working class in the United States and internationally except through mass social struggle, the aim of which must be the conquest of political power and the socialist reorganization of economic life. This struggle must be waged in opposition to the Republicans, the Democrats, and all the political representatives of the ruling class—including Sanders himself.



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