

New York rally by Sanders, Mamdani and union officials covers up US war drive against Iran

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On Sunday, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who is nominally independent, and leading union officials—including Sara Nelson, international president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, and Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers—held a rally in New York City aimed at bolstering the union apparatus under the framework of a new initiative, “Union Now.”

The speeches were filled with empty demagoguery and bluster, aimed at promoting the Democratic Party and covering up for the records of the various speakers. What was most significant, however, was what was not said. Not one of the speakers uttered the word “Iran” or mentioned the escalating global war. This silence prevailed under conditions in which American warships continue to menace Iran’s coastline, and the Trump administration has implemented a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

The rally was held the same day the *New York Times* published an editorial establishing the boundaries of what it and the Democrats consider permissible dissent. As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, the demand that Trump “involve Congress and seek help from America’s allies” was a call for the Democratic Party to formally co-own the war and provide it with political legitimacy. The function of organizations like the DSA, and figures like Sanders and Mamdani, is to police opposition from the left, ensuring that hostility to war and dictatorship never develops into an independent movement of the working class.

That political function was on display throughout Sunday’s event.

In his remarks, Mamdani, who has twice traveled to the White House seeking an alliance with Trump as the administration wages mass deportations at home and illegal war abroad, never once said the words “Trump,” “war,” “Iran,” “militarism,” “fascism,” “capitalism” or “strike.” Instead, he praised the assembled union bureaucrats, Sanders and his “deputy mayor for economic justice,” Julie Su, falsely describing Su as a “lifelong champion for workers.”

This is a lie. As labor secretary under Gavin Newsom and later as Biden’s deputy and acting labor secretary, Su repeatedly worked with corporations and the union bureaucracy to suppress workers’ struggles. She was involved in efforts to block or contain strikes and job actions by refinery workers, railroad workers, West Coast longshore workers, autoworkers and Boeing workers. She also helped slow-walk autoworker Will Lehman’s lawsuit over the 2022 UAW election, in which only 9 percent of the membership voted, shielding the bureaucracy from a serious challenge by rank-and-file workers.

Sara Nelson presented the new initiative “Union Now,” a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that supposedly exists to “raise money to directly support workers who are organizing and striking” and to “support ambitious campaigns that require shared resources and solidarity.” In practice, this is a proposal to build yet another fundraising and staffing mechanism orbiting the union officialdom, one more apparatus for collecting money in the name of workers while keeping struggles under the control of a bureaucratic apparatus that functions as an instrument of corporate management.

Weingarten followed the same script. Like Mamdani,

she invoked “union density” while saying nothing about the illegal war against Iran, the genocide in Gaza or Israel’s ongoing military assault on Lebanon. Instead, she celebrated a tentative agreement reached by United Teachers Los Angeles as a victory, though its real purpose was to head off a broader joint struggle by educators in Los Angeles.

Sanders, for his part, delivered another version of his stale “Fighting Oligarchy” speech. He spoke of the wealth of the top 1 percent and denounced “big money” in politics, presenting the central problem as *Citizens United* and campaign finance. This fiction has been the stock in trade of Sanders for more than a decade. The problem is not one Supreme Court decision, but the capitalist system itself, which subordinates every aspect of social and political life to the interests of the financial oligarchy.

Sanders made the real purpose of the event explicit when he declared, “If the Democratic Party wants our support, it must become a party of the working class, not corporate America.” This fraudulent formulation sums up Sanders’ political role. The Democratic Party is not a neutral vehicle that can be pressured into serving workers’ interests.

It is a capitalist party, rooted in the defense of private property, imperialist war and the state apparatus. It can no more be transformed into a party of the working class than the Confederacy could have been transformed into an egalitarian society. Its defense of capitalism binds it to the financial oligarchy and the intelligence agencies Sanders falsely postures against, while ensuring that every movement he leads ends by subordinating workers and youth to their class enemies.

There is no genuine fight against the “oligarchy” that does not place at its center the fight against imperialist war. Sanders’ appeal for the Democratic Party to become a “party of the working class” is especially obscene under conditions in which that party is being mobilized to provide political legitimacy for the next phase of the war. What he presents as a vehicle for reform is, in reality, one of the principal instruments through which the American ruling class organizes imperialist violence abroad and suppresses opposition at home.

On Sanders’ “Fighting Oligarchy” tour last year following the US bombing of Iranian nuclear sites, the WSWs wrote:

Sanders’ hollow calls to oppose the invasion of Iran, like his toothless “No War Against Iran Act,” are not serious efforts to halt imperialist war. They are political maneuvers designed to trap workers and youth searching for a way to end war back within the dead-end of the Democratic Party and the capitalist system it defends.

The only way to stop the war against Iran, end the genocide in Gaza and break the stranglehold of the financial oligarchy is through the independent mobilization of the working class—against all capitalist parties, their governments and their political representatives.

Sunday’s rally in New York confirmed this assessment completely. At the very moment the American ruling class is preparing a wider war against Iran and intensifying repression at home, Sanders, Mamdani and the union bureaucracy offered only silence on war abroad, growing dictatorship domestically and renewed illusions in the dead institutions of capitalist politics.

Workers and youth looking for a way forward must stay far away from these bourgeois politicians. The fight against war, dictatorship and inequality requires a clean break from the Democratic Party, the trade union apparatus and the entire capitalist system they defend.



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