Rally in Detroit for Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed remains silent on Iran war, downplays Trump dictatorship

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At a rally for Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate Abdul El-Sayed held in Detroit Saturday, the speakers, including Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Michigan Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib and UAW President Shawn Fain, remained silent on the escalating US war against Iran and downplayed Trump's open threats to interfere with the November elections and establish a presidential dictatorship.

The event, held at the Detroit Opera House, drew upwards of 2,000 people. The turnout reflected a radicalization taking place among young people and broader layers of the population outraged by declining living standards, soaring prices, anti-immigrant terror, the Gaza genocide and expanding imperialist wars. This has been reflected in recent electoral victories of Democratic Socialists of America and DSA-backed candidates, many of whom call themselves "socialist," in New York, Washington D.C. and Colorado.

However, the role of Bernie Sanders and DSA members Ocasio-Cortez and Tlaib is to divert and neutralize this anger by channeling it behind the Democratic Party, the oldest capitalist party in the United States.

The presence of UAW President Fain on the platform was particularly telling. Fain presides over a corrupt union apparatus that is fully integrated into corporate management and systematically suppresses and betrays the struggles of autoworkers and UAW members in other sectors. He is under federal investigation for nepotism and threatening his rivals within the UAW bureaucracy and has been preoccupied in recent months with battling a rebellion by rank-and-file auto parts workers who have repeatedly voted down sell-out contracts at firms, such as Nexteer, Dana and Bridgewater Interiors.

Fain is a nationalist supporter of US militarism and a backer of Trump's tariffs. He spoke just two days after issuing a statement in which he refused to take any action to protect UAW workers from the wildfire smoke and heat engulfing factories and workplaces in Michigan and other adjacent states.

The support of Sanders and the DSA for Fain embodies their fear and hostility, and that of the entire Democratic Party, to an independent movement of the working class against Trump and the capitalist oligarchy. They seek to provide a "left" cover for the labor bureaucracy, which serves as the ruling class's industrial police force.

One reflection of the growing radicalization of wide layers of workers and young people has been the rise in the polls of El-Sayed, who is seeking the Democratic nomination for the open U.S. Senate seat in Michigan. Sayed is running against Congresswoman Haley Stevens, who has the backing of the Democratic establishment. El-Sayed, whose parents immigrated from Egypt, has won support from workers and young people for his opposition to the Israeli genocide against the people of Gaza. The primary election will he held on August 4.

The rally took place amid an escalation of the war against Iran, with Trump targeting Iran's civilian infrastructure and Iran retaliating against US bases in the region, killing two US soldiers in Jordan. At the same time, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) thugs have gone on a rampage in recent days, murdering Lorenzo Salgado Araujo in Houston and Johan Sebastián Durán Guerrero in Biddeford, Maine.

On Thursday night, President Donald Trump gave a deranged speech, packed with lies, about supposed election fraud, laying the basis for an operation to rig, prevent or nullify the November congressional elections.

Little of this found its way into the remarks of speakers at the rally. Instead, they advanced their standard calls for Medicare for All, promoting the illusion that such a reform would be implemented by a Democratic administration and Democratic Congress.

In fact, it has been 60 years since Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society," the last gasp of Democratic Party reformism. Since then, the Democrats have joined with the Republicans in deregulating business, dismantling much of industry, fueling uncontrolled financial speculation, and imposing austerity on the working class, resulting in the consolidation of a corporate-financial oligarchy that monopolizes the wealth of the country and controls both parties and the entire political system. At the same time, both parties have waged one war of aggression after another, imposing the costs on the backs of working people.

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This has culminated in US support for genocide in Gaza and escalating wars in Iran and Ukraine, along with preparations for war against China and the ever-present danger of nuclear annihilation.

It is particularly significant that amid the hot air directed against the oligarchs, none of the speakers referenced the illegal and criminal war against Iran. This expresses the fact that all sections of the Democratic Party, including its DSA faction, support the war and are in agreement with its essential aims. The only criticism raised against the Trump administration by leading Democrats is that Trump has "sold out" the interests of US imperialism by failing to topple the Iranian government and bring the country under the control of US oil companies.

Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez and Tlaib have all voted at various times in favor of increased military spending to fund the US war machine.

There were no calls for a mass mobilization of the population to stop the murders and abductions by ICE, oppose the expanding war in Iran or block the imposition of dictatorship. All the social anger and energy should instead, the speakers insisted, be directed toward marking ballot papers for Democratic candidates on election day.

While Sanders, Tlaib and Ocasio-Cortez criticized the Democratic Party establishment, they all aggressively supported Biden in 2024 until he dropped out, and then backed his hand-picked replacement, Kamala Harris. Both Biden and Harris were supporters and enablers of the Gaza genocide, the US/NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, the vast enrichment of Wall Street and the creation of a record number of billionaires.

Neither El-Sayed nor any other speaker referenced the eight University of Michigan students and employees arrested on frame-up terrorist conspiracy charges related to anti-genocide protests or the 15 anti-ICE defendants in Prairieland, Texas sentenced collectively to more than 500 years in prison on bogus terrorism charges.

In his speech, Sanders called the upcoming election "historic" but advanced nothing in response to Trump's open threats of dictatorship. He declared, "Israel had every right to respond to the terrorist attack by Hamas," repeating the line used to justify the Gaza genocide, which he only recently has come to denounce.

Of all the speakers, Ocasio-Cortez seemed most conscious of and appealed most directly to the palpable social anger building up among workers and young people. She noted Trump's speech Thursday night, warning, "They will do everything they can to try to overturn our democracy in November." She pointed to "a government of, by, and for the oligarchs." She said that "paramilitary agents are shooting Americans in the street with no further questions," taking note of the murders of immigrant workers Araujo and Guerrero, as well as the murders of Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis.

However, instead of focusing anger toward the source of the problem, capitalism, she instead, echoing Trump, sought to deflect anger toward the overseas rivals of US capitalism, pointing to "bad trade deals," as well as the supposed "bigotry and racism" of workers themselves.

In his remarks, Fain postured as a champion of workers and demagogically denounced billionaires. He attempted to present the recent contract at American Axle in Three Rivers, Michigan as a victory. At American Axle, Fain shut down a 10-day strike and imposed a management-friendly contract in a snap vote on the eve of the UAW Constitutional Convention.

El-Sayed spoke last. This supposed "progressive" and rebel against the Democratic Party establishment in a recent television interview declared: "I am not a socialist... I am a capitalist."

In his remarks in Detroit he recounted his parents' childhood in Egypt and their suffering. He contrasted that to his childhood in the United States, where he was able to attend college and earn a medical degree, serving as director of the Detroit Health Department and later heading the Wayne County Department of Health, Human & Veterans Services. "America gave me all these wonderful gifts," he stated. "I love America."

All that needs fixing, Sayed went onto explain, were certain problems, blemishes on an otherwise healthy American society, including the domination of politics by corporate money and "sending bombs and tanks abroad, rather than to invest in schools and healthcare."

Like other speakers, El-Sayed promoted economic nationalism as the solution to the problems facing workers, again demonstrating the basic alignment of the Democratic Party with the policies of Trump.

Workers must find a way forward independent of the Democratic Party and its "left" promoters like Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez and the DSA. These forces serve as the "left" face of the capitalist state and its war machine, not a genuine opposition to it.

Workers and young people looking for a way to fight war, fascism and austerity must turn to the socialist internationalism advanced by the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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