

The “Pro-Human Assembly” on AI: Sanders and the trade union bureaucracy join hands with the fascist right

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On Tuesday, at an event in Washington called the “Pro-Human Assembly” on AI, Senator Bernie Sanders, AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler and American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten spoke from the same platform as the fascist ideologue and former Trump advisor Steve Bannon, January 6 coup conspirator Amy Kremer and other representatives of the far right.

Under conditions of growing social anger and mounting opposition to Trump and the entire political establishment, Sanders, representing the supposed “left” wing of the Democratic Party, and the trade union bureaucracy are establishing a common platform with and politically legitimizing the fascist right. The aim is to disorient and demobilize this opposition, and to channel it in the most reactionary directions.

The event was billed as a means of bringing together “different political perspectives” to develop a common platform on the future of AI. It was invitation-only, convened at the Marriott Marquis, a few blocks from the White House, and carried live on C-SPAN. Along with Sanders, Shuler and Weingarten, the platform included SAG-AFTRA’s Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, Democratic Senator Richard Blumenthal and Democratic Representative Greg Casar.

From the Republican right came Tennessee Senator Marsha Blackburn, who has pledged to deport immigrants “whether it takes planes, trains or starships,” and Representative Chip Roy, a leader of the House Freedom Caucus, who told the audience that “God gave us dominion over this planet.” Such is the “pro-human” front to which Sanders gives his political blessing.

The organizer was the Future of Life Institute (FLI), headed by MIT physicist Max Tegmark. FLI is a lobby funded by the same billionaires its speakers denounced as “oligarchs.” It was launched with \$10 million from Elon Musk in 2015, and Musk sat on its board. Ethereum founder Vitalik Buterin gave it some \$665 million in cryptocurrency

in 2021. In 2022, FLI offered \$100,000 to a foundation set up by Nya Dagbladet, a Swedish outlet that promotes antisemitic conspiracy theories.

The assembly launched a “Pro-Human AI Coalition” of more than 50 organizations, aimed at the state legislative sessions in January, and a “freeze AI” campaign with a national walkout on October 20. Kremer’s Humans First, whose predecessor Women for America First organized the January 6, 2021 rally at the Ellipse, is running a 35-stop “Data Center Revolt” bus tour.

The program placed Sanders and Bannon back-to-back, and Tegmark, serving as MC, described both in nearly identical language. He presented Sanders as a man with “the courage to speak truth to power, even when it’s costly.” Minutes later he brought on Bannon as “a man who is not afraid of speaking truth to power, even if the powers that be really don’t like that.”

Sanders opened by thanking Tegmark “for bringing people of different political perspectives together.” With his characteristic empty demagoguery, he denounced “a handful of oligarchs,” including Musk, Zuckerberg, Bezos, Thiel, Ellison and Brin, and declared that “the people of this country must make the decisions about AI.” He announced a bill with fellow Democrat Casar to ban “artificial superintelligence” and pause advanced AI development, and a demand that the AI companies “stop pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into super PACs.”

On Trump, Sanders said only that the president’s “ignorance regarding this issue is truly embarrassing.” Sanders did not say a single word to distance himself from the man who was waiting to follow him. On the contrary. Having thanked the organizers for assembling “different political perspectives,” he handed the stage to a fascist as one of them.

Sanders was, in the language of the music industry, the opening act, warming up the crowd for the headliner. For his part, Bannon adopted Sanders’ vocabulary, declaring in his

first sentence, “American citizens are not going to be supplicants to the oligarchs anymore.”

Bannon then launched into a racist tirade against China. “We should take all Chinese nationals and get them out of the labs and get them back to mainland China,” Bannon declared. “We can shut it down in 72 hours,” by “executive action” rather than legislation. This is a call for the mass expulsion of all Chinese immigrants by presidential decree. Sanders, who had just left the stage, said nothing then and has said nothing since.

Bannon explicitly praised Sanders, declaring, “I think Senator Sanders did a very good job of summarizing the risk... I don’t think you could find any two harder partisans than Bernie Sanders on the left and Steve Bannon on the right... we have to rise above it.” Sanders had said as much to the *Wall Street Journal* two weeks earlier: “Politics is always a situation where you make strange coalitions... many of the right-wing people have the same concerns that I have.”

This is the man who organized the January 6 coup from his War Room podcast, called for the heads of government scientists to be put “on pikes,” and who, according to his ex-wife, said he did not want his daughters “going to school with whiny Jews.” But what is a little racism, antisemitism and fascism among friends and political allies?

The union officials supplied the “labor” wing for this festival of reaction. AFL-CIO President Shuler told the audience that “the labor movement stands ready to work with all of you.” AFT President Weingarten said that after the midterms, “Republicans and Democrats and Independents alike” must “get our act together.” Kremer, the founder of Women for Trump, closed the day: “This is not a left versus right fight.”

This is not Weingarten’s first engagement with Bannon. In April 2017, while he was still Trump’s chief strategist in the White House, she met him secretly in an empty restaurant near the White House to discuss, among other things, investing AFT pension funds in Trump’s infrastructure program. Bannon, she concluded at the time, was “one smart guy.” During the pandemic she went further, co-hosting a town hall in 2021 with the far-right Open Schools USA and Jay Bhattacharya, now Trump’s NIH director, to promote a “shared goal” of reopening schools against the opposition of her own members.

These highly paid bureaucrats speak for an apparatus that is thoroughly integrated with the corporations and the state, and bitterly hostile to the working class. Nationalist and pro-war, this apparatus has much in common with the corporatist unions established under Mussolini. Its appearance on a platform with the fascist right is the logical expression of what it has become.

The political significance of the event can be summarized in two respects.

First, in relation to AI itself, there is a systematic campaign to disorient and manipulate broad concerns about the dangers of AI in the hands of private corporations and the financial oligarchy, and to direct these concerns behind a nationalist campaign against China.

Not one of the proposals advanced on Tuesday, from a “freeze” to a “superintelligence” ban to a data-center moratorium, touches the fundamental issue, namely control of these technologies by the oligarchy. Sanders’ own “sovereign wealth fund” proposal would have the state take a 50 percent stake in the AI companies, in a public-private partnership to bail out the tech giants. Tech oligarch Sam Altman offered to help promote it.

The question of who controls AI can be resolved only through the establishment of social ownership and democratic control over the technology by the working class, internationally.

Second, the broader political realignment. With regard to Sanders, he is a man devoid of any principles. In November 2016, Sanders demanded that Trump rescind the appointment of “a racist individual like Mr. Bannon.” Ten years later he opens for him.

What is involved, however, is not only the skullduggery of an individual. There is a social and political logic at work. In the developing alliance of the trade union bureaucracy, the Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez faction of the Democratic Party and sections of the Democratic Socialists of America with the fascist right are the outlines of a new American “national socialism.”

Sanders told the assembly that “the people of this country must make the decisions about AI.” The coalition that he is assembling for this task, however, consists not of the “people,” but executives of the union apparatus, fascist conspirators, various political representatives and one aging and opportunist Senator.

The decisions about AI, as about war and dictatorship, must and will be made by the working class, in the United States and internationally—in a ruthless opposition to the oligarchy, its parties and the political dregs assembled in Washington.



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