Sanders and Warren look for deals with Trump as his attorney general threatens Democrats

Patrick Martin
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Two of the most prominent nominally left members of the Senate Democratic caucus appeared on Sunday television interview programs to claim that there were deals to be made with fascist president Donald Trump on economic and social policy, while arguing against focusing on holding Trump and his cronies accountable for crimes ranging from financial corruption to waging illegal wars.

Senator Bernie Sanders made this argument on both NBC's "Meet the Press" and CNN's "State of the Union." He told NBC host Kristen Welker, "We cannot spend all of our time investigating Trump" and that the rout of the Republicans in the midterm election was about more than Trump's "corruption and illegal, unconstitutional actions."

Sanders called Trump "erratic" rather than fascist, authoritarian or dictatorial, adding that he was "a good politician" who could be persuaded to work with the Democrats. "I think, when Trump looks out in the world and he sees millions of people working for starvation wages, he might not be unsympathetic to raising the minimum wage to a living wage," Sanders said. "He would love, I think, to take credit for doing what every other major country does: guaranteeing healthcare to all people."

While nominally an independent, Sanders sought the Democratic presidential nomination in both 2016 and 2020, at times even calling himself a democratic socialist. But in practice, he has been a completely conventional bourgeois politician, particularly backing the foreign policy of American imperialism, whether on Ukraine, the Middle East or China.

After repeating his usual platitudes about providing healthcare for all as a human right—which the leadership of the Democratic Party implacably opposes, defending profit-making hospitals, insurers and drug companies—Sanders claimed that even Trump could be brought round to this view.

He is expected to become chair of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee in January, and said that both Trump and Congress could work together "to finally do what every other major country on Earth does, and that is guarantee healthcare to every man, woman, and child, as the human right to a Medicare for all, single-payer program."

In response to a question from Welker, Sanders embraced the position put forward by Democratic senator-elect Adam Hamilton of Kansas, the pastor of the largest United Methodist congregation in that state, who said the Democrats should prioritize cooperation with Trump over retribution for his innumerable crimes. He offered this sophistry:

> Do we want to hold the Trump administration accountable for their corruption, for their illegal, unconstitutional actions? Absolutely. But at the end of the day, when you've got the highest rate of childhood poverty in America, of any major country, when 20 percent of our seniors are trying to survive on $15,000 a year, when people are scared to death that Elon Musk and the other billionaires are pushing AI down our throats with cataclysmic impacts on the economy, our privacy rights, on our health, and—and imposing an existential threat to humanity, we cannot spend all of our time investigating Trump. We've got to stand up for working-class families, make a real difference in their lives.

According to Sanders, holding Trump accountable would be an obstacle to bettering the conditions of life for working people. Besides its inherent absurdity—presuming that Trump can be moved by genuine concern for the interests of the masses of workers whom he has despised and exploited his entire life—Sanders is covering up the real driving force of the attacks on jobs, living standards and social benefits.

These are facing destruction, not simply because Trump is a criminal (although that is certainly true), but because the financial oligarchy must destroy the social gains of the working class to maintain its profits, increase its wealth, and pay for the massive expansion of its police-military apparatus under conditions of escalating warfare around the world.

When asked about Trump's appointment of fascist ideologue and anti-immigrant bigot Stephen Miller as his new chief of staff, in the first post-election change in the White House, Sanders dismissed the action with the words, "Well, Donald Trump is the president." So, presumably, he is entitled to staff the White House with defenders of mass murder. Sanders went on:

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> Trump is many things. I personally believe he is mentally unbalanced, erratic, but he's not stupid, and he is a good politician. And I think, when Trump looks out in the world and he sees millions of people working for starvation wages, he might not be unsympathetic to raising the minimum wage to a living wage. He would love, I think, to take credit for doing what every other major country does, guaranteeing healthcare to all people. So I'm not worried about Miller. Do I think we can work with Trump? Maybe. I'm, by no means, guaranteeing it. But it is certainly worth the effort.

In his appearance on CNN, Sanders struck a slightly more left pose, at least initially, declaring, "The new Democratic majority has got to be bold, work, take on the oligarchs, and fight for the working class of this country."

But he admitted in response to questions from host Dana Bash that not even half the Democratic caucus in the House supports Medicare for all—to say nothing of the Republicans—and there is even less support in the Senate. Sanders cited polls showing the popularity of guaranteed access to health care for all, but these numbers only demonstrated that the corporate-controlled two-party system is incapable of providing what working people want and need.

Asked about the December 11 deadline for funding the federal government, Sanders demurred when asked if he would oppose legislation that continued funding for the war in Iran, saying "nobody is comfortable with the government shutting down. Nobody wants that." Instead, he appealed to "my Republican colleagues" to pressure Trump to end the war.

He added that on January 1, 2027, 15 million people would lose access to healthcare because of the One Big Beautiful Bill enacted by the Republican-controlled Congress in 2025. Again, he appealed to "our Republican colleagues" to take action to prevent that social disaster, without offering any action on the part of the Democrats.

Senator Elizabeth Warren, appearing on the CBS program "Face the Nation," said she looked forward to bipartisan cooperation with congressional Republicans and the Trump administration on legislation on credit card rates and on further trade restrictions on the export of sophisticated computer chips to China.

Warren said, "We have worked on a bipartisan basis to try to stop Donald Trump from encouraging Nvidia, permitting Nvidia to send these chips to China. And now we're seeing some of the consequences of that. So we have got a lot of places where work needs to be done and a lot of different avenues to do it."

The anti-China campaign is only one of the areas in which the Democrats are pushing for an even more aggressive foreign policy stance for US imperialism, even if cloaked in different rhetoric than Trump's bullying demands for concessions on trade, investment flows, and outright land grabs (Greenland, Canada, Panama, etc.)

Neither Sanders nor Warren mentioned the war in Ukraine, but behind the scenes the Democratic leadership is already engaged in discussions on how to revive the flow of US arms and financial aid to the right-wing dictatorship of Volodymyr Zelensky. The Ukrainian president hailed the outcome of the US midterm election as a positive for the war against Russia.

Meanwhile the Trump White House continues its belligerent response to the election debacle, signaled by the appointment of Miller as chief of staff, which takes effect on Monday and does not require Senate confirmation.

Attorney General Todd Blanche was the administration's spokesman on "Fox News Sunday" and CNN's "State of the Union," and he presented the Department of Justice as the legal service agency for any Trump administration official investigated or accused of wrongdoing by the incoming Democratic majorities in the House and Senate.

Asked whether he would represent Secretary of War Pete Hegseth if he were impeached, Blanche replied, "Well, yeah." On Fox he declared, "If you work in this administration, you have a lawyer."

He also echoed Trump's threat that the DOJ would investigate congressmen and senators who sought to impeach or otherwise sanction officials like Hegseth, leaving open the possibility of criminal charges against leading Democrats. "They are not allowed to just go around threatening existing members of the administration, to go around threatening companies," he said.

Asked whether Democrats could be prosecuted, he answered, "It depends on what the crime is and what they've done."

The administration treats congressional oversight as a crime, while the Democrats, who won both houses in a landslide and need no Republican votes to pass legislation, respond with offers of cooperation, as if the losers had won.

Their appeals for "bipartisan common ground" are not naïveté. They reflect the class interests the Democrats share with Trump: defense of the financial oligarchy, fear of the social opposition expressed in the vote, and agreement on the essentials of imperialist policy abroad.

Their principal difference with Trump is over the war against Russia, and that is what they are prepared to negotiate. Sanders, the leading figure of the party's "left" wing, and Mamdani, with his talk of a "shared purpose" with Trump, play the critical role of giving this accommodation a progressive cover.



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