

At “People’s Summit,” Sanders backs Democrats’ anti-Russian warmongering

By Jerry White
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The “People’s Summit” in Chicago, organized by the Bernie Sanders wing of the Democratic Party, concluded on Sunday. The event was sponsored by the National Nurses United (NNU) and other unions that had backed Sanders’ bid for the Democratic presidential nomination last year, along with several liberal and pseudo-left organizations aligned with the Democrats.

The event was a political fraud from beginning to end. The basic thread running through all of the workshops and demagogic speeches was the fiction that the Democratic Party—a party of Wall Street and the CIA—can be transformed into a “people’s party.”

In remarks Saturday night, Sanders claimed that his campaign, which came to an ignominious end with his groveling endorsement of Hillary Clinton, had pushed the Democratic Party to the left and forced it to adopt “the most progressive platform in history.” This fantasy flies in the face of reality. Since Trump’s election, the Democrats have moved further to the right, attacking the billionaire president not for his savage austerity proposals or attacks on immigrants and democratic rights, but for his supposed “softness” toward Russia.

Sanders lent his support to the neo-McCarthyite campaign of the Democrats and the military-intelligence apparatus, which sees Russia as the chief obstacle to US imperialism’s drive for regime change in Syria and Iran. “I find it strange we have a president who is more comfortable with autocrats and authoritarians than leaders of democratic nations,” Sanders said. “Why is he enamored with Putin, a man who has suppressed democracy and destabilized democracies around the world, including our own?”

Consistent with his presidential campaign and his post-election efforts to shore up the Democratic Party, Sanders made no mention of the Democrats’ record of militarism or the danger of a military confrontation with the world’s second largest nuclear power.

Instead, he continued to advance the duplicitous line that it is possible to wage a struggle against the economic and political domination of America’s “billionaire class” while

backing that same class’s imperialist foreign policy.

In an hour-long speech that never mentioned the words “war,” “capitalism” or “socialism,” Sanders suggested that a fundamental transformation of society would be possible if young people decided to run for state and local office as “progressive Democrats.” This, he said, was “the real revolution” that his campaign had engendered.

According to Sanders, the popular support for his election campaign had forced not only the Democrats, but significant sections of the Republicans to adopt “progressive” ideas. “We have won the battle of ideas and will continue to win the battle of ideas,” he said.

“We have in recent years made enormous progress advancing the progressive agenda,” he continued. “Sometimes, what we all do is we look at today and think, ‘Well, that’s kind of the way it always was.’ That’s not the case. Ideas that just a few years ago seemed radical and unattainable are now widely supported, and, in fact, some of them are being implemented as we speak.”

As supposed evidence of this political sea change, Sanders pointed to various Democratic city and state officials who have given rhetorical support for mild reform measures, including minimum wage hikes and broader state-funded health coverage. He also pointed to the election of “progressive Democrats” in New York, Mississippi, Pennsylvania and elsewhere.

Sanders referred to last week’s election in the United Kingdom, in which the Labour Party gained 29 parliamentary seats, to say that the “movement for economic, social, racial and environmental justice is growing worldwide.” He said Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn had won those extra seats “not by moving to the right or becoming more conciliatory, but by standing up to the ruling class of the UK.”

As in Sanders’ own campaign, in which he won 13 million votes by claiming to be a “democratic socialist” leading a “political revolution against the billionaire class,” the popular support for Corbyn is an expression of the growing political radicalization of workers and especially

young people in the face of the explosive growth of social inequality and the discrediting of the entire political system. Far from standing up to the ruling class, however, Corbyn, like Sanders, has sought to contain this social opposition within the confines of a capitalist political party, in this case the Labour Party.

Sanders pointed to the immense level of social discontent in the United States. “While the last eight years did get better under Obama,” he claimed, “millions were left behind. Workers who had decent factory jobs were told, ‘Sorry, we’re moving to China.’ Half of older Americans have nothing in the bank. Millions have no health insurance or have high deductibles. Working families are in pain and they are worried about their kids.”

“All over,” Sanders continued, “people are furious. They are asking, ‘Does anybody hear my pain? Does anybody give a damn about me and my family?’”

Will aware of mass disaffection with the political establishment and the radicalization of millions of workers and young people, Sanders and the rest of the organizers of the People’s Summit are concerned that the Democratic Party will not be able to play its traditional role of channeling, containing and suppressing opposition and preventing a mass working-class movement against capitalism.

How was it possible, Sanders asked, that the most unpopular candidate was able to become president? “He did not win the election, the Democrats lost the election,” he answered.

“The current model and the current strategy of the Democratic party is an absolute failure,” he continued. “The Democratic Party needs fundamental change. What it needs is to open up its doors to working people and young people and older people who are prepared to fight for social and economic justice.

“The Democratic Party must understand what side it is on. And that cannot be the side of Wall Street, or the fossil fuel industry, or the drug companies.”

Sanders is by no means the first political snake oil salesman to peddle the lie that the Democratic Party ever was or ever could be anything other than a party of the capitalist ruling class. He is, however, one of the more practiced of this breed, having been at it for decades, during which he has used his façade of “socialism” and “independence” to provide the Democrats with a much needed left cover. He has spent some 30 years in Congress performing this service for the ruling class, and is now being handsomely rewarded, earning not only political prestige and media attention, but also a cool million in income last year.

In fact, the Democratic Party long ago abandoned any

policy of social reform and spent the last four decades undoing the New Deal and War on Poverty programs. It continues to move to the right, not the left.

The Democratic Party has almost nothing to say about the biggest attack on social programs in history. It is not holding congressional hearings on Trump’s destruction of Medicaid or his attacks on democratic rights. Instead, it is holding hearings to pressure or even remove Trump so that the American ruling class can escalate its aggressive policy against Russia, including preparations for war.

Sanders’ support for the anti-Russia campaign expresses the essence of his class position as a capitalist and imperialist politician.

He and the liberal and pseudo-left publications and organizations that back him, from the Democratic Socialists of America to the *Nation* magazine, the International Socialist Organization, Socialist Alternative and other anti-Marxist “left” organizations, are perpetrating a political fraud to block the emergence of a revolutionary movement of the working class.

Some of these forces are urging Sanders to break with the Democrats and build a new “People’s Party” along the lines of the pro-capitalist Podemos movement in Spain or Syriza in Greece. The latter, once in power, quickly betrayed all of its anti-austerity promises and set about implementing social attacks that go beyond those carried out by its conservative predecessors. Both Podemos and Syriza had representatives at the People’s Summit.

Rejecting a political break with the Democrats, Sanders told the *Washington Post*, “Look, as the longest-serving independent member of Congress, I know something about that [third parties]. Where my energy is right now is in fundamentally transforming the Democratic Party into a grass-roots progressive party. And we’ll see where it goes.”

Whatever illusions remain in Sanders will be dissipated as a movement of the working class emerges and workers begin to advance their own demands, which cannot be reconciled with war, social inequality and the maintenance of the capitalist system.

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