

Bernie Sanders covers for Jeff Bezos as fraud of \$15 pay raise at Amazon is exposed

By Tom Hall
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Only one week ago, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders presented himself as the arch-enemy of the online retail giant Amazon and its CEO Jeff Bezos, the wealthiest man on the planet. After Amazon announced it would increase starting pay for its workers from \$12 to \$15 an hour, Sanders spoke of Bezos as though the two were close friends and mutual admirers.

For months, Sanders posted videos and articles to his Facebook pages denouncing the company's abuse of low paid workers in its warehouse fulfillment centers, where workers are pushed to the point of exhaustion and physical incapacitation.

Sanders also criticized Bezos' obscene wealth, including him in one of his "Faces of Greed" videos. He sponsored a bill in the Senate, which had no chance of passing, called the "Stop BEZOS Act." The bill would have taxed low-wage employers such as Amazon at a rate commensurate with what their employees receive in government assistance.

Sanders did everything he could to present himself as the representative of growing popular outrage in response to revelations about the abuse and exploitation of workers at Amazon, including those exposed by the WSWs.

However, after Bezos increased his employees' pay to a still poverty-level rate of \$15 an hour, Sanders rushed to embrace Bezos as an altruistic reformer.

"Today I want to give credit to where credit is due, and I want to congratulate Mr. Bezos for doing exactly the right thing," Sanders said in a speech in the Senate. He added on Twitter, "What Mr. Bezos has done today is not only enormously important for Amazon's hundreds of thousands of employees. It could well be, and I think it will be, a shot heard around the world."

"Further, Mr. Bezos has indicated his support for raising the national minimum wage," Sanders added.

"And as someone who has introduced the \$15 an hour federal minimum wage, I very much look forward to working with him in this area. Mr. Bezos and Amazon are now leading the way."

Bezos tweeted his appreciation to Sanders for his kind words. "Thank you @SenSanders. We're excited about this, and also hope others will join in."

Amazon's pay raise is a cynical public relations exercise. An increase to \$15 an hour would still leave workers struggling to pay their bills, and it could even reduce income by pushing them past the eligibility threshold for welfare programs such as food stamps and subsidized rent.

Moreover, the company is pairing the rise in hourly pay with the elimination of productivity incentives, bonus and stock options. Financial analysts have also pointed out that Amazon will still get its pound of flesh back through speedup and lower hiring levels.

Sanders is now actively working to shield Amazon from the widespread belief among workers that the announced pay rise is a sham. "Our understanding is that the vast majority of Amazon workers are going to see wage increases, including some very significant increases as the minimum wage goes up to \$15 an hour," Sanders said in a statement to Fox Business Channel. "I would hope that as a result of Amazon's new policy, no worker, especially long-time employees, sees a reduction in total compensation. Amazon can afford to make all workers whole and should do that."

Sanders' use of phrases such as "our understanding is" and "I would hope that" amounts to an indirect admission that the things he is denying are in fact true.

Sanders' sudden about-face shows what his campaign against the internet company was from the beginning: An attempt to get out in front of growing

working class anger at Amazon and other low wage employers to demobilize it. It recalls his political striptease at the 2016 Democratic National Convention, when he voted with both hands for Hillary Clinton's nomination after months of criticizing her as being in the pockets of the banks, and after Wikileaks revealed that the Democratic National Committee had conspired with Clinton against his own campaign.

According to Sanders' narrative, popular pressure, exerted through union campaigns such as Fight for \$15 and through "progressive" Democrats such as Sanders himself, succeeded not only in forcing a concession from Amazon, but transformed the company and Jeff Bezos into advocates on behalf of the very workers that they ruthlessly exploit.

This encapsulates the basic dishonesty of Sanders' politics, which claims that the Democrats, a party of Wall Street, the military and the privileged upper-middle class, can be transformed into the vehicle for a "political revolution" against the very billionaires that control that party. But no amount of popular pressure can change the social interests of the capitalist class, which is based upon exploitation of the working class.

Sanders, who claims to be a "democratic socialist," works tirelessly on behalf of the very billionaires he claims at times to oppose to obscure and disguise this basic truth, elementary for any genuine socialist, and to promote illusions in the possibility of capitalist reform.

As with his presidential campaign in 2016, Sanders' campaign against Amazon was motivated by concern that workers seeking to oppose exploitation will find their way to genuine socialism. No doubt the growth in readership of the *World Socialist Web Site's International Amazon Workers Voice* was a source of anxiety in the Sanders camp, which attempted unsuccessfully to co-opt homeless Amazon worker Shannon Allen after the WSWS broke her story earlier this year.

Now that everything, allegedly, is fine at Amazon, Sanders is moving on to the next campaign, this time on McDonald's, which has also been targeted for protest stunts by Fight for \$15.

"Today McDonald's pays wages that are so low many of its workers need Food Stamps, Medicaid, and public housing to survive," Sanders stated in a recent Facebook post. "If McDonald's raised the minimum

wage to \$15 per hour and respected the constitutional rights of their workers to form a union it would set an example for the entire fast food industry to follow."

Workers should place no more faith in this latest charade than in his campaign against Amazon.

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