

Democratic presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren mixes anti-corruption demagoguery with identity politics at New York City rally

By Sandy English
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On Monday, Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, a leading contender for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, spoke to a crowd of 10-15 thousand people at Washington Square Park in lower Manhattan.

The crowd was a mixture of campaign supporters and bystanders, many from New York University across the street. Warren spoke under the park's historical arch, which was festooned with campaign banners and surrounded by her most vocal supporters.

She was introduced by two New York state Democratic politicians and Maurice Mitchell, the head of the Working Families Party, a paper organization that was set up by the unions—including the corrupt United Auto Workers—in 1998 and endorses various Democratic candidates, including Bernie Sanders in 2016.

Warren began by making a dishonest and self-serving reference to the women killed at the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in 1911 at the nearby Brown Building. She recounted in some detail the horrible deaths of the scores of women in one of America's worst industrial accidents. Warren proceeded to elicit the loudest applause of the evening from her supporters by telling the audience that, "We're not here because of men at all. We're here because of some hard-working women."

She was referring the Triangle Shirtwaist workers, but these women came from the largely immigrant working class in lower Manhattan, which was, a century ago, socialist-minded and would have known exactly what to call a capitalist politician appealing to them for votes for the Democratic Party.

Warren then put forward two of her main campaign proposals: to fight corruption and tax the wealthiest Americans two percent of their annual income.

The thrust of Warren's first argument was that she

would enact laws to fight the excessive influence of corporations in government. While she correctly observed that "Corruption and influence peddling has seeped into every corner of our government," she offered no explanation of why this was the case but sought to attribute nearly the entire social crisis of capitalism to "corruption" alone.

"So, what has this corrupt business as usual gotten us? The extinction of one species after another as the earth heats up, children slaughtered by assault weapons, the highest levels of inequality in a century, wages that barely budge, crippling student loan debt, shrinking opportunity for the next generation."

She even managed to explain Trump's far-right policies in terms of the president's corruption: "Donald Trump is corruption in the flesh ... He tries to divide us, white against black, Christians against Muslim, straight against queer and trans and everyone against immigrants. Because if we're all busy fighting each other, no one will notice that he and his buddies are stealing more and more of our country's wealth and destroying the future for everyone else."

In other words, if only the rich had less influence in the government, then life could improve for millions. She made proposals such as banning former officeholders from becoming lobbyists, and full transparency in meetings with lobbyists. "Anyone who wants to run for federal office will have to put their tax returns online," she said.

Even if these measures could be enacted in a country in which three individuals own as much wealth as the bottom half of the population, it would be child's play for billion-dollar corporations to circumvent them. A set of "reforms" that leaves large-scale wealth intact is no surprise coming from Warren. As she said in an interview

with CNBC in July, “I am a capitalist. Come on. I believe in markets.”

On Tuesday, she also called for the impeachment of Donald Trump based on his supposed collusion with Russian agents outlined in the Mueller report.

The second element of her program that Warren raised was her plan to tax assets above \$50 million at an annual rate of two percent. With the billions from this tax, she said, “We can make technical school, community college and four-year college tuition free for everyone who wants to get an education.” She also proposed making childcare and pre-kindergarten education free to all.

She framed her housing plan—to reduce rental costs by 10 percent over the next ten years, a laughably inadequate figure in New York City—in terms of race. “My housing plan will help families living in formerly redlined areas buy a home and start building the kind of wealth that government-sponsored discrimination denied their parents and grandparents,” she said. Her proposals to reduce global warming were also pitched to the politics of racial identity: “My climate plan includes justice for the Black and Brown communities that have struggled with the impact of pollution.”

She remained silent on foreign policy, neither raising the trade war with China nor the vast and expanding American military machine, nor Trump’s war threats against Iran.

She was equally silent on the role of her own party in the growth of inequality and the “corruption” that she attacked. As the WSWS noted when she announced her campaign in December, she has nothing to say “on the role of the Democratic Party in the growth of economic inequality, particularly the Obama administration’s bailout of the banks and its decision to block any efforts to punish the Wall Street speculators who triggered the 2008 global financial collapse.”

Warren’s proposed reforms, however, do attempt to make inroads into the support Bernie Sanders has among millions of young people and sections of the working class. Most polls in the last week show that Warren is now closing the gap with Sanders and Biden making her one of the top three in the contest for the Democratic Party presidential nomination.

Tuesday’s rally itself was an effort on the part of the Warren campaign to capture the support by younger people who are currently leaning toward Bernie Sanders with appeals to restriction on the influence of corporations and demagogic references to the massive social inequality in the United States.

Jacobin, the magazine affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which supports Sanders, was indignant that the Working Families Party had endorsed Warren.

Concerned about a threat from the Warren campaign to its own efforts to integrate itself with the Democratic Party leadership, the magazine notes, “Her proposals (domestically, at least) are, on the whole, solid progressive policies, though never stronger than Sanders’. But not until the last few weeks has she even made rhetorical nods to building the kind of movement that Sanders argues we need, much less done anything to actually build that movement.”

Not much of the layer of younger people who attended Sanders’ Brooklyn rally in March or a similar one in Washington Square Park in 2016 were to be seen. The crowd, at least those who had come to the rally to see Warren, were largely in their thirties and forties and the minority of younger people were mostly curious bystanders. Certainly, holding a rally at night with floodlights and cheering in front of a large university is bound to attract some attention from students.

Warren’s speech did not convince many of the bystanders, especially students. One NYU student told the WSWS: “She’s just like the other Democrats, she gets up on the podium and makes all these promises, but they mean nothing. They continue to bomb and kill people across the world. Despite what they say even people like Sanders back the American military and its crimes in the Middle East.

“I was interested in Bernie in 2016 but then he backed Clinton and didn’t do anything about Yemen or about occupations in Palestine. I am not interested in anyone from either party for 2020; they all fight for the same big business interests that profit from American war.”

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