

From the US Left: An Open Letter to Bernie Sanders Supporters from Solidarity, a socialist, feminist, anti-racist organization

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To meet human need, a political revolution must take back the billions diverted to the U.S. war machine and the military-industrial complex. So where does Bernie stand?

Bernie Sanders' campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination has taken off like a rocket, with huge rallies and an outpouring of enthusiasm for his condemnation of corporate greed, inequality, and rampant social injustice in the United States. Bernie openly says he's a socialist, and much of his program is flatly unacceptable to the ruling capitalist "one percent" and the Democratic Party leadership. What he's saying about what's wrong with our system is catching fire, especially among young people and workers hit by the economic crisis. And after a problematic start he's taken important steps in reaching out to the Black Lives Matter movement and embracing the fight against racist police brutality, the militarization of "law enforcement," and the prison-industrial complex.

But there's a gaping hole in Sanders' program for economic and social justice: his platform does not talk about what's called "foreign policy"—war and peace, military spending, the vast global network of U.S. bases, the infamous Guantanamo detention center, Palestine and Israel, or the refugee crisis from the horrific wars in the Middle East. These are not abstractions, but life-and-death issues for millions of people—and absolutely fundamental for the hopes of a "political revolution" and mass "grassroots movement" that Bernie Sanders calls for.

A sign breaks down discretionary spending—the Pentagon accounts for over half.

Let's be crystal clear: building an economy that meets human needs and halts capital's forced death march toward environmental catastrophe cannot be done without massive cuts in spending on the worldwide military machinery, around half of which the United States makes up all by itself. Some 54% of all U.S. government discretionary spending goes to the Pentagon's war machine.

U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW), a coalition of some 165 trade union organizations launched in 2003 to oppose intervention in Iraq, is circulating the petition below. We urge everyone to [add their signature](#).

"To Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, and all other Progressives: "We call upon all those who seek our political support to speak out forcefully, with clarity and passion, for a new definition of national security that puts the welfare of our people and the planet ahead of the interests of the Pentagon brass, military contractors, multinational corporations and the military-industrial complex." - U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW)

Solidarity, a socialist organization that's committed to independent political action, does not endorse any Democrats or Republicans. We believe both parties serve the interests of big business and the profit system—period. We believe that we, the 99%, need our own political party and our own independent movements to speak for the majority. That doesn't blind us to the way Sanders'

campaign and his supporters are shaking up the political establishment and raising vital issues for our political future.

In fact, for a long time we have admired Bernie Sanders' record as an independent and a socialist campaigning and ultimately winning election as mayor of Burlington, congressperson, and then Senator from Vermont. We applaud his efforts in the Senate on behalf of the needs of veterans. As Senator Bernie Sanders' website shows, during his time in the Senate Sanders has not been silent on critical issues of war and militarism—far from it.

So why the total silence on these issues on Sanders' presidential campaign website? There is no reason to imagine that he has personally changed his views. Rather, we have to assume that the issues of the permanent war machine and U.S. military interventions are not what he wants to fight around in his campaign. Somehow, perhaps they are “divisive” and would divert attention from his calls for economic justice within the Democratic Party primary.

By choosing to run as a Democratic and not an independent, Sanders is now trapped in the framework of this capitalist party, which is heavily influenced by the military-industrial complex and a belief in the destiny of the US as the world's number one imperialist power. Bernie's silence forces us to assume that his policy, with a few variations, is fundamentally a continuation of that of Barack Obama and his Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and John Kerry. What few statements he has made, for example about “carefully” continuing drone warfare, don't contradict this assumption.

Sanders' silence is a betrayal of humanitarian principle, and is in total contradiction with the objective of building an economy that meets human needs. Bernie Sanders' supporters should not accept this silence. Let Bernie know that opposition to the deadly excesses of the U.S. war machine is an integral part of the political revolution we all want.

We in Solidarity share your aspirations and commitment to the fight for radical change against the inhumanity of the 1%. But our side will never win if we continue to support the two political parties that have no intention of representing our interests because they are owned and controlled, bought and paid for by the 1%. What we need is a new, independent party that working people run in the interests of the 99%.

As supporters of independent politics, we urge you to check out the Green Party presidential campaign of Jill Stein. When Bernie Sanders' campaign is over and done, Jill Stein and the Greens will still be there, running on a program for a Green New Deal that puts people and our planet ahead of profit. In the meantime, let's keep talking—both among ourselves, and to those tens of millions of Americans who are looking for a way out of the mess that capitalism has made.

From Solidarity, September 10, 2015

P.S.

* <http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/4509>