

Sanders campaign seeks to channel anger over inequality behind Democrats

Patrick Martin
22 June 2015

More than 5,000 people attended a rally for Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders at the University of Denver Saturday night. The rally was the largest since Sanders launched his candidacy for the 2016 Democratic nomination, following a rally of 3,000 people last month in Minneapolis and a week-long series of rallies across Iowa, drawing 500 people at Waterloo and 700 at Drake University in Des Moines.

The campaign swing by Sanders has been accompanied by extensive and largely favorable media coverage. The *Wall Street Journal* profiled the “Bernie boomlet” in an article headlined, “Bernie Sanders’ Longshot Campaign Drawing Big Crowds.” The *Washington Post*, in a report on a Sanders campaign swing through Georgia, described people “gathering for the democratic socialist senator from Vermont, whose mad-as-hell campaign for president has been drawing crowds that have surprised even Sanders.”

Politico.com published favorable reports on the Sanders campaign three days in a row, highlighting his unexpected showing in a poll of likely Democratic primary voters in New Hampshire (trailing frontrunner Hillary Clinton by only 44-32 percent), and describing a Clinton visit to South Carolina that provided her “an unwelcome dose of Bernie-mentum, giving the Democratic front-runner a first-hand look at the grass-roots fervor Sanders is generating on the left.”

The Associated Press headlined its report, “Defying conventions, Bernie Sanders emerges as a challenger for Hillary Clinton,” describing the campaign in these terms: “In a race for the Democratic presidential nomination with Hillary Rodham Clinton, the blunt talk about the economy and the gap between the rich and poor is working for Sanders.”

The culmination of this media promotion was a

lengthy profile of the candidate in the US edition of the *Guardian*, under a headline that conveys the tone of the article as a whole: “Inside the mind of Bernie Sanders: unbowed, unchanged, and unafraid of a good fight.”

The subject of this uncritical adulation is, as the WSWS has explained, a bourgeois politician who calls himself a socialist. Except for shunning the party label—until his presidential campaign—Sanders has been a loyal member of the Democratic congressional caucus, first in the House of Representatives, then the Senate, for the past 23 years.

While raising the issue of economic inequality and assailing the political role of billionaires, Sanders is a defender of the capitalist system in general and American imperialism in particular, as demonstrated especially in his support for US military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and throughout the Middle East.

His populist rhetoric on economic issues is tied to a reactionary nationalist orientation. Sanders has sought, with some success, to push Clinton toward open opposition to the Obama administration’s policy on trade negotiations. He denounced her repeatedly for initially refusing to take a position on legislation to give “fast-track” authority to Obama, sought by the White House in order to conclude the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal with Japan, Australia and nine other countries, but excluding China.

Union officials who have made opposition to TPP their main political focus have praised Sanders, and the South Carolina AFL-CIO went so far as to pass a resolution urging the national federation to back his candidacy before pulling back under orders from AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka.

After weeks of evasion, Clinton publicly sided with the House Democrats who initially blocked passage of “fast-track” authority. In an appearance Friday on

HBO's "Real Time" TV show, Sanders was hailed by host Bill Maher, with the comedian declaring that the Sanders campaign had forced Clinton to start "talking like Elizabeth Warren."

There is no question that Sanders's rise in the polls, as well as the turnout at his rallies, reflects rising anger among working people and youth over deepening social inequality as well as mounting interest in socialism. Sanders attacks "the billionaire class" in nearly every campaign appearance. He told his audience on "Real Time" that over the past 40 years, "there has been a huge transfer of trillions of dollars from working families to the top one-tenth of one percent."

But the suggestion that Sanders will push Clinton, or the Democratic Party as a whole, to adopt more progressive positions is a gross distortion of the real political dynamic of his campaign. His role is not to push the Democrats to the left, but provide a left cover for this reactionary organization. The Sanders campaign is being promoted to head off the emergence of a movement by working people and young people against capitalist politics and corral them back inside the Democratic Party.

While Sanders adopts the label "socialist," his program amounts to nothing more radical than higher taxes on the wealthy and more spending on social welfare schemes, leaving the fundamental economic structure of capitalism unchanged. More fundamentally, Sanders's support for US militarism and his protectionist demagoguery brand him as a defender of corporate America.

While Sanders boasts that he has no billionaire supporters, he does have a following among a section of the wealthy and the upper-middle class. On Saturday, in between rallies in Las Vegas and Denver, the candidate traveled to Los Angeles for two fundraisers at the homes of wealthy Hollywood liberals. At the first, the home of actor Mimi Kennedy, he was introduced by former Democratic state senator Tom Hayden. At the second, his hostess was Betty Sheinbaum, niece of the late film mogul Jack Warner, founder of Warner Brothers. Hundreds attended the events, which raised nearly \$1 million.

Sanders has already raised \$10 million and his campaign projects raising \$50 million before the end of the year.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact