

Bernie Sanders holds rally of 10,000 in Madison, Wisconsin

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More than 10,000 people filled an arena in Madison, Wisconsin Wednesday night to hear Senator Bernie Sanders, the biggest rally held by any candidate so far in the 2016 US presidential campaign.

The rally was double the size of the largest previous rally for Sanders, attended by 5,000 people in Denver last month. It coincided with a sharp rise in support for the Vermont senator in polls of likely Democratic caucus and primary voters.

In neighboring Iowa, the first caucus state, Sanders more than doubled his support from 15 to 33 per cent among likely caucus goers, according to a poll released Wednesday, although he still trailed frontrunner Hillary Clinton, whose support fell from 60 percent to 52 percent. The remainder backed Vice President Joe Biden, who is not a candidate, and former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley.

In New Hampshire, next door to his home state, Sanders trails Clinton by only eight percentage points among likely primary voters, within the margin of error in the latest poll, making the race a statistical tie, eight months before any votes are cast.

On Thursday, the Sanders campaign reported raising \$15 million since he entered the race in late April, most of it from Internet donations. The campaign claimed nearly 400,000 contributions with an average value of \$33.51.

Hillary Clinton's campaign reported raising three times that money during the same period, some \$45 million, but the actual number of donors may be lower, since Clinton has collected many contributions at the maximum level of \$2,700.

While trailing Clinton's vast money-raising machine, the Sanders fundraising is comparable to that of many well-heeled Republicans. Mitt Romney, for example, reported raising \$18 million in his first campaign report

in July 2011.

The growth of support for Sanders is clearly an indication of widespread opposition to social inequality, his main campaign theme. At the same time, he is being brought forward by a section of the Democratic Party and political establishment precisely to channel this sentiment along conventional, pro-capitalist lines.

Sanders continues to receive friendly treatment from the corporate-controlled media, which is well aware that his occasional claims to be a "socialist" are purely nominal, and that he represents no threat to the profits and wealth of the US financial aristocracy.

Typical was the effusive lead in the Associated Press report on the Madison rally: "Nearly 10,000 supporters delivered a jolt of momentum to Bernie Sanders's presidential campaign Wednesday night at a supersize rally where the senator from Vermont asked his backers to help him create a political revolution."

Despite his rhetoric, and a detailed description of social inequality and the domination of the super-rich, Sanders offers his audience a relatively modest reform program that would have been commonplace in a Democratic primary campaign a few decades ago. It is only the dramatic shift to the right by the Democrats, and by capitalist politics as a whole, that makes Sanders sound radical by comparison.

At the Madison rally, Sanders was introduced by John Nichols, editor of the *Capital Times* newspaper, longtime contributor to the *Nation* magazine and enthusiastic supporter of the Obama administration. As in earlier speeches, Sanders inveighed against the "billionaire class" and pointed out that the gap between the wealthy and everyone else "is wider in America today than it has been since 1928."

"The issue of wealth and income inequality, to my

mind, is the great moral issue of our time, it is the great economic issue of our time, and it is the great political issue of our time,” Sanders said.

He recited a number of social evils stemming from economic inequality: real unemployment levels over 11 percent; youth unemployment over 30 percent; low wages for tens of millions; record levels of imprisonment and mounting police violence against African-American youth; mounting student debt.

The candidate called for “a political revolution in America, a revolution which takes on the greed of Wall Street and corporate America, a revolution that takes on the fact that the Republican Party is essentially owned by big-money interests, and too many Democrats are owned by big-money interests.”

Sanders seeks to maintain the fiction that this “revolution” can be achieved within the framework of the Democratic Party and without opposing the capitalist system. He proposes no inroads into the wealth of the billionaires, no nationalization of giant corporations and the banks, not even any concrete proposal for wealth redistribution, although Sanders used the term once, at the very end of his hour-long address.

His main target was the political influence of the billionaires, as though the accumulation of unprecedented wealth could be kept separate from the amassing of political power. Sanders gave a potted history of American politics, suggesting that the 2010 *Citizens United* decision by the Supreme Court was responsible for corrupting and undermining a system that until then was a model of democracy.

The truth is that corporate America controlled both the Democratic and Republican parties throughout the 20th century. The two-party system is a political monopoly of the financial aristocracy. *Citizens United* only marks a further milestone by allowing billionaires to pour in unlimited funds to favored candidates.

Behind the demagogic rhetoric, Sanders’s real politics are thoroughly conventional, and in major respects, deeply reactionary. He embraces a poisonous economic nationalism, which verges on anti-Chinese chauvinism.

In his hour-long speech in Madison, Sanders attacked free-trade agreements like the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership from a nationalist perspective, but made no other reference to foreign policy. This is a remarkable

silence for a man running to become the next “commander-in-chief” of US imperialism.

Sanders makes no appeal whatsoever to the mass antiwar sentiments of the American population. This means that he is fully in accord with the foreign policy of the president he is running to succeed, his fellow Democrat Barack Obama, who is waging wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, while approving drone missile assassinations in a half dozen countries, and stoking up military confrontations with nuclear-armed Russia and China.

It was noteworthy that in his speech Wednesday Sanders only referred to Obama twice, both times favorably, saluting his election as the first African-American president, and congratulating him for the recent policy shift requiring payment of overtime wages for several million workers classified as “managers.”

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