

Sanders talks ‘left’ and moves right

Patrick Martin
1 August 2015

Democratic hopeful Bernie Sanders held the largest online event of the 2016 presidential campaign Wednesday night, giving a brief address via live streaming video to more than 3,500 house parties held in all 50 states. Campaign organizers said more than 100,000 people sent RSVPs for the event and an even larger number attended.

The “house parties,” some held in public venues such as halls and restaurants, but most in private homes, are a campaign tactic, first used by Democrat Howard Dean in 2004, for collecting large numbers of email addresses and small donations from supporters.

Hillary Clinton’s campaign held an estimated 650 parties on the day she formally announced her candidacy. The scale of the events for Sanders was five times as large, an indication of the growing discontent among Democratic voters with the pro-corporate policies advanced by Clinton in her campaign.

The Vermont senator has focused his campaign on warnings about the growth of economic inequality and the power of the “billionaire class,” while offering little in the way of substance to differentiate himself from Clinton.

He occasionally refers to himself as a “socialist,” by which he means an American version of the reformist policies once pursued but repudiated over the past two decades by the social democratic parties in Europe. All of these parties—in Britain, Germany, France, Greece, Scandinavia, etc.—are systematically cutting social spending and imposing austerity on the working class, working hand-in-glove with the traditional conservative parties.

According to an analysis by the *New York Times*, based on data supplied by the Sanders campaign, there were house parties in 423 of the 435 US congressional districts. By far the largest turnouts were in liberal college towns like Boulder, Colorado, as well as in the Northeast and the Pacific Coast, particularly San

Francisco, Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington, where more than 1,000 attended in each city. The *Times* reported much lower turnouts in the more impoverished inner-city areas.

“Tonight really is an historic night,” Sanders told his audience, speaking from the home of Manisha Sharma, a bank attorney, in an upscale neighborhood of Southwest Washington DC. “To the best of our knowledge, there has never been a political online organizing event this early in the campaign which involved 100,000 people in 3,500 locations in every state in the United States of America. And that’s pretty impressive.”

However, when he moved from the broader audience to address more conservative and business-oriented groups Thursday and Friday, Sanders toned down his populist rhetoric considerably and reiterated a chauvinist and reactionary position on immigration.

Speaking Thursday before the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in Washington, Sanders went out of his way to reject calls by immigration activists for open borders. He repeated comments first made in an interview Tuesday with the Vox web site, in which he denounced unrestricted immigration as the perspective of the Koch brothers, the ultra-right billionaires who have pledged to spend nearly a billion dollars to elect Republican candidates in 2016.

Asked about criticism from immigrants’ rights groups, Sanders said, “What they are talking about is completely opening up the border. That was the question. Should we have a completely open border so that anyone can come in the United States of America? If that were to happen, which I strongly disagree with, there is no question in my mind that that would substantially lower wages in this country.”

Sanders went on to depict immigrants as a threat to Hispanic-American and African-American workers, saying, “When you have 36 percent of Hispanic kids in

this country who can't find jobs and you bring a lot of unskilled workers in the country, what do you think happens to that 36 percent of kids of today who are unemployed? Or 51 percent of African-American kids? I frankly do not believe we should be bringing in significant numbers of unskilled workers to compete with those kids."

Pitting immigrants against native-born workers, particularly the lowest-paid and most exploited, is one of the oldest and most noxious traditions of American capitalist politics. That Sanders embraces this Know-Nothing legacy tells more about the real nature of his campaign than all his talk of defeating the political influence of the billionaires.

In what was perhaps his most revealing remark, he cited the consensus of all his Democratic and Republican rivals, asking, "But to simply open the borders of America. Do you think there is any candidate for president who thinks that that makes sense? I don't think so."

No one asked whether he would be bound by the opinions of Donald Trump, Ted Cruz or Scott Walker in other areas of policy—foreign and military policy, workers' rights, or tax breaks for Wall Street, for example.

Sanders also told his audience, representing Hispanic businessmen and corporate executives, that he ruled out running as a third party candidate. "The answer is no," he said, in response to a question. "The reason for that is I do not want to be responsible for electing some right-wing Republican to be president of the United States."

Evidently, he is not troubled by helping to elect a right-wing Democrat.

Again, no one asked the obvious question: what does his allegiance to the eventual Democratic candidate say about his claimed "independence" from the Democratic Party over the past 24 years in Congress? In truth, his claim to oppose the corporate-controlled two-party system is a sham. Sanders has supported every Democratic presidential candidate since he was first elected mayor of Burlington, Vermont in 1984.

On Friday, Sanders spoke to the Urban League, the most conservative of the African-American lobbying groups and the one most closely associated with efforts to promote "black capitalism."

As in his remarks to the Hispanic businessmen,

Sanders dropped any reference to "political revolution" and gave barely a nod to anti-Wall Street sentiment. He devoted much of his remarks to police violence, which he portrayed entirely in racial terms, intoning the phrase "Black Lives Matter" while promising unspecified actions to reduce the high rate of unemployment among black youth.

Sanders said several times, with an air of apology, that his emphasis on economic inequality and the power of the billionaires might make some people in the audience "uncomfortable." He did not elaborate, but there are more than a few black multi-millionaires in the Urban League and the group is heavily dependent on contributions from corporations and what Sanders has called the "billionaire class."



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact