

Sanders' appeal to anger over inequality continues to draw crowds

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More than 100,000 people nationwide have attended campaign rallies for Bernie Sanders, the self-described “socialist” running for the Democratic presidential nomination, over the past few weeks, by far the largest crowds of any candidate in the 2016 presidential race.

Sanders set a record for the 2016 election cycle when he spoke to 16,000 people on the campus of the University of Washington at Seattle on Saturday. This record was surpassed the following day when 28,000 attended his rally in Portland, Oregon. That crowd was nearly equaled when 27,500 people came to Sanders' rally in Los Angeles on Monday.

In a country where socialism has been effectively banned from political discourse for decades, workers and youth have been attracted to the Sanders campaign because the candidate describes himself as a socialist and because he has made the question of inequality the centerpiece of his campaign.

However, there is nothing genuinely oppositional, let alone “socialist,” in the politics of Sanders, who has caucused with the Democrats for 25 years and who sides with the party leadership on almost every issue. The essential function of his presidential campaign, underscored by his remarks over the weekend, is to channel growing popular hostility to the capitalist two-party system back within the safe confines of the Democratic Party.

Elements in and around the Democratic Party are increasingly coming to rely on the Sanders campaign to contain popular opposition in the face of increasing dysfunction in the campaign of Hillary Clinton, the current front-runner. The trade union bureaucracy, in particular, is concerned about the consequences of throwing their support behind a candidate whose corrupt relations with American corporations is being increasingly exposed.

Such considerations lay behind Monday's endorsement of Sanders by the National Nurses United (NNU) union, the first major endorsement of Sanders from the trade unions. The executive director of NNU, who organized a sellout of striking nurses in Illinois and California earlier this year, appeared on stage at the Los Angeles rally, where she declared, “He's real. He's authentic. That's why we're supporting him.”

Sanders, for his part, continued to promote illusions that the social problems cited in his campaign could be dealt with within the framework of the capitalist two-party system. He described the class divide in America in deliberately nebulous terms, contrasting the “billionaire class” to “the once-great American middle class,” with no mention of the working class or the capitalists.

Sanders portrayed the growth of inequality as a purely national problem. He cited as its cause not the capitalist system, but the policy decisions of American politicians, who largely remained unnamed (partly because so many of them are Democrats). He called for “an economy which works for all people, not just a handful of billionaires,” implying that such a thing was possible within the framework of capitalism.

While he made virtually no reference to American foreign policy, Sanders did declare his support for the Obama administration's Iran nuclear deal. “Look, I'm not going to tell you that this is a perfect agreement,” Sanders told the rally in Portland. “But the United States has to negotiate with other countries. We have to negotiate with Iran. And the alternative of not reaching an agreement, you know what it is? It's war. Do we really want another war, a war with Iran?”

Sanders' acceptance of the choice first laid down by Obama himself between the nuclear accord and a war of aggression against Iran indicates that he completely

accepts the foreign policy objectives of American imperialism.

His hour-long speech in Los Angeles primarily consisted of a list of indicators of social inequality, while offering no serious proposals to address them. What concrete proposals he did make—breaking up the biggest Wall Street banks, universal healthcare, a rise in the minimum wage to \$15 per hour—have no chance of passing Congress, whether controlled by Democrats or Republicans. Moreover, Sanders did not mention that the vast majority of the social indicators he cited in his remarks have considerably worsened under Obama, whom he is seeking to follow as the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party.

Sanders reiterated his call to overturn the *Citizens United* ruling, implausibly portraying the 2010 Supreme Court decision as the source of corporate control of American politics. He declared that any Supreme Court nominee under his administration would be required to support the overturning of *Citizens United*. He also called for public financing of elections.

Sanders' claimed opposition to the corporate financing of elections does not square with his decision to run for the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party, which has significantly outspent the Republicans in the last two presidential elections, by far the most expensive in American history. In the 2012 election, the first presidential campaign after the *Citizens United* ruling, Obama became the first candidate in American history to raise over one billion dollars for his campaign.

In Los Angeles, where nearly half of the population is Hispanic or Latino, Sanders absurdly portrayed himself as a champion of immigration rights, despite his lengthy record of scapegoating immigrants and foreign workers for lowering the wages of native-born American workers.

Sanders gave speaking time to an immigration activist and told the crowd that "Eleven million [undocumented immigrants] cannot continue to live in fear." His real attitude towards immigration was revealed in comments made to the Vox web site last month, when he denounced as a "Koch brothers' proposal" the right of workers to live and work in the country of their choosing and portrayed open borders as a threat to the American nation-state. (See: Bernie

Sanders pits US workers against immigrants in Vox interview).

Sanders also repeated his support and admiration for Hillary Clinton, a multimillionaire who personifies the sordid ties between corporate America and the US government. In an interview with "Face the Nation" on Sunday, Sanders defended Clinton from mounting criticism, "some" of which he declared to be motivated by sexism.

"I don't know that a man would be treated the same way that Hillary is," Sanders said. "All that I can say is I have known Hillary Clinton for 25 years. I admire her. I respect her. I like her. She and I have very different points of view on a number of issues."

In remarks to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce late last month, Sanders reiterated that he would not run as an independent if he failed to win the Democratic nomination, and that he would endorse the nominee of the Democratic Party.



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