

Bernie Sanders' first campaign ad: From "political revolution" to "real change"

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On November 2, the Bernie Sanders campaign unveiled its first video advertisement of the presidential campaign. The Sanders camp has reportedly spent over \$2 million to air the spot in Iowa and New Hampshire, the sites of the first Democratic primary contests early next year.

The 62-second spot is noteworthy as much for what it omits as for what it includes. The populist rhetoric on display at Sanders' large campaign rallies around the country is almost entirely absent from the commercial. The campaign spot makes no mention of Sanders' oft-repeated slogans against the "billionaire class," nor his call for a "political revolution."

Instead of casting him as a socialist "outsider," the spot seeks to present Sanders in a more conventional light—as the former mayor of Burlington, Vermont and successful congressman who has won plaudits from corporate media outlets such as *Newsweek* and *Time* magazine.

The bulk of the ad focuses on Sanders' personal and family background, portraying him as a family man who rose from humble origins to become an accomplished politician. "Bernie Sanders. Husband. Father. Grandfather. An honest leader—building a movement with you, to give us a future to believe in," the narrator intones at the end of the commercial over a montage of Sanders family portraits. By virtue of its overall tenor, the commercial would not be out of place in any primary campaign waged by either of the two corporate-controlled parties.

At the climax of the spot, Sanders addresses the crowd at one of the earlier mass rallies: "People are sick and tired of establishment politics, and they want real change!" The slogan "real change" is repeated in the title of the YouTube version of the ad uploaded by the Sanders campaign.

This slogan of "real change" is obviously a rehash of Obama's "change" slogan from 2008, as many media commentators have pointed out. Obama's regular use of this vague one-word slogan, along with "hope" and "yes, we can," was designed to make him appear as a "progressive" reformer while committing him to nothing whatsoever.

These phrases did not prevent candidate Obama, once elected, from presiding over the greatest transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich in American history, greatly expanding the repressive powers of the state apparatus, continuing the war in Afghanistan, launching new wars in Libya, Syria and again in Iraq, and putting the US on a collision course with nuclear-armed Russia and China.

The recycling of the old campaign lies of Obama, with implicit assurances to the viewer that they are "real" this time, says more about Sanders' campaign than he likely intended. It demonstrates once again Sanders' real function in the 2016 election campaign: to channel growing disaffection and disgust with the two parties of big business and the capitalist system itself back into the safe channels of the Democratic Party.

Sanders' campaign is staffed and managed by veteran Democratic Party pollsters and campaigners. It has retained the services of Devine Mulvey Longabaugh, a major Democratic Party-aligned media consulting firm that has worked on several campaigns in the past. Among the current and former clients listed on the firm's web site are: former vice president and Democratic presidential candidate in 2000 Al Gore; former senator, 2004 Democratic presidential candidate and current secretary of state John Kerry; the late senator Ted Kennedy; and investment banker and former senator Jon Corzine.

Sanders' social media campaign is headed by Revolution Messaging, according to its web site a firm "led by Obama veterans" who played a major role in the 2008 campaign's efforts to reach younger voters on the Internet. "We are excited to bring on the team behind President Obama's groundbreaking social media, mobile and rapid response digital operations in 2008," Sanders' campaign adviser Tad Devine declared in a press statement in May.

Recently, Sanders hired Ben Tulchin, the pollster for the 2004 presidential campaign of former Vermont governor Howard Dean, who gained an early lead in the contest for the Democratic nomination by tapping into mass opposition to the war in Iraq. Like Sanders, Dean served as a political lightning rod to channel social and political opposition back behind the Democratic Party, where it could be dissipated and suppressed.

The day after the unveiling of the ad, *Politico* reported in a major story that Sanders was seeking to "soften his image" by "almost entirely [dropping] his mega-rallies," which have attracted hundreds of thousands of people, dwarfing the crowds at public appearances by all of the other candidates of both parties. Instead, according to campaign sources, Sanders plans to appear on news programs and talk shows, while "regularly touring coffee shops and diners throughout the early voting states."

The shift away from mass rallies is absurdly being portrayed in the media as an attempt to broaden his base beyond "white, college-educated liberals," as though issues such as poverty and inequality were a matter of indifference to women and minorities. A more likely explanation is that Sanders and the Democratic Party are worried that the popular discontent and political radicalization Sanders tapped into could escape his control. A second, related factor is growing interest in ruling class circles in the possibility of using Sanders to shore up their badly discredited corporate-dominated political system. He is perhaps being groomed for "bigger things."

Last Thursday, Sanders formally declared himself a Democrat while filing for ballot status in the New Hampshire primary, finally ending the "independent" charade he has carried out for over three decades. "I'm a Democrat and should be on the ballot, I don't think I need to say too much more," Sanders said. According to MSNBC, Sanders was accompanied to the New

Hampshire secretary of state's office by the state chairman of the Democratic Party, who "vowed to fight any challenges" to Sanders' appearing on the ballot.



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