

Ohio voters discuss elections and social crisis

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Over the last several weeks, candidates for the presidential nomination from both parties placed a significant focus on the Midwestern US state of Ohio, considered a “battleground state.” Republican frontrunner Donald Trump and Democratic contenders Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders held campaign events in Cleveland, Cincinnati, Youngstown and other cities, right up to the eve of Tuesday’s primary.

Trump sought to exploit social discontent in the heavily deindustrialized state by blaming China, Mexico, and immigrant workers for “stealing American jobs.” For his part, the self-described “democratic socialist” Bernie Sanders blamed “unfair trade deals” for the closure of auto and steel factories and falling wages. He is seeking to channel widespread anger over social inequality back behind the Democratic Party.

Ohio Governor John Kasich, a former Lehman Brothers executive who ran as a “moderate conservative” defeated Trump by 45.4 to 36.7 percent in Tuesday’s primary election. During his tenure as governor, which began in 2011, Kasich implemented sweeping corporate tax cuts and expanded the privatization of public schools.

Clinton supporters feared a defeat in Ohio following the upset victory of Sanders in Michigan. In the end, however, Clinton beat Sanders 56.6 to 42.5 percent. Early exit polls had Clinton winning a large majority of African Americans, a majority of lower and middle-income voters, and majorities in the Cleveland, Northern Ohio and the Ohio Valley. As in other races, Sanders won the overwhelming majority of 18 to 29-year-old voters. He also won the majority in the state capital of Columbus (the home of Ohio State University) and the Cincinnati-Dayton area.

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team traveled to Youngstown, a former steel center ravaged by decades of mill closures and mass layoffs, to discuss the elections. Comments by workers supporting various candidates in the Republican and Democratic primary elections Tuesday reflected the widespread social discontent that exists throughout the country.

“This last week, all these politicians have come to Youngstown. Why? These guys will never come here again!”, said Corvett, a county worker who has lived in Youngstown all his life, giving expression to widespread anger at the entire political system.

WSWS reporters met Corvett outside of the Election Board, which is housed in what was formerly a hospital. “This was a hospital, and now it’s shut down. The hospital’s partner across town got bought out by Valley Health Care. Their corporate office is in Tennessee, a right-to-work state. A hospital this size has just 60 active beds. 60! [Youngstown has a population of more than 60,000] Why? Because they buy it out, shut it down, and farm it

out. That’s Youngstown.”

Corvett remembers “Black Monday,” the day in 1977 when Youngstown Sheet and Tube (YST) slashed 5,000 jobs. “My dad made it until 1982 before they forced him out of the mill at YST, because he had some seniority. These guys had given 15, 20 years of service. They said: ‘Well, here’s a nice gold watch, and by the way, we’re cutting your benefits. Your wife and kids won’t get any healthcare.’ That’s what I remember.”

A number of workers and young people said they were backing Bernie Sanders because they were motivated by the hope that he would address economic and social issues. Idalia, a 22 year-old massage therapist, said that education was the most important issue to her. “I voted for Bernie because I heard he’s for free education. My sister is a high school senior, so that’s where my thoughts are. I think everybody deserves an education. That’s really all that appeals to me about Bernie.”

Idalia added that she was very opposed to Trump’s anti-immigrant opinions. “It’s a lot of BS. The whole country is a big melting pot. And everyone wants to find work, make a living, and support their family. I just want someone in the White House that is making sure we’re doing better as a country, and not blaming one group or another.”

Idalia was sporting a United States Marine Corps sweatshirt, but she said she opposed the wars, which have been going on virtually continuously for her entire life. “I am from a military family,” she said. “My uncle passed in the war, in 2007. I feel that the military goes to war in order to take over other countries. Some people are making money off of these wars, but not most people.”

Giavanna, a biology student at Youngstown State University, who was about to vote for Sanders, said, “I’m originally from Las Vegas and transferred here for school. My parents work as dice dealers in Vegas; they grew up here and they got degrees here. But they had to move to Vegas for work, and they made more money dealing dice without using the degrees they paid for. It’s tough for young people.”

The WSWs spoke to several voters backing Trump. Their often contradictory comments reflected the impact of years of endless wars and political reaction, and how the far-right candidate has exploited the anger of a section of economically distressed workers and middle class people.

Jimmy is a disabled veteran who served four tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. “I voted for Trump because I don’t like politicians. Politicians have been selling us out for years. Trump is different, because nobody owns him. And if everybody hates you, then you’re doing something right.

“I like Trump’s position on trade,” Jimmy added. “I like

securing the border, because illegal is illegal. What happens if I do something illegal? I go to jail. So why do immigrants get more rights than I do?" He also said he thought that "welfare people" were a problem. "Why should I take care of their babies? I have enough trouble taking care of my own."

At the same time Jimmy opposed the vast social inequality in the US, saying, "Wall Street will sell their mother for money. My base closed down, and they said there was no more money. But then the economy went bust, and all of a sudden they found money to help the Wall Street people." On the other hand, he said, "Nobody poor ever gave me a job. If you tax the rich, there won't be any rich people to give people jobs. It's a catch-22, you've got to have rich people somewhere."

Daniel, a 23-year-old lawn-care worker, also voted for Trump. He said he that Trump's proposals to control trade were a good idea. "A lot of Youngstown's steel jobs went overseas in the 70s. I think companies that make things in China or other places should have to pay more taxes to ship things back here, so an American-made product would be at an advantage."

Daniel was conflicted about the wars in the Middle East. "I feel that the way we're handling ISIS is wrong. We need to take them out, rather than bombing cities and killing innocent people." However, he also said he doesn't believe that the US military is interested in "spreading democracy." "I think the war is a money game. It's a war for oil," he said.

Reporters spoke to people at a coffee shop in downtown Youngstown. Like city centers in most Rust Belt cities, the main streets were largely empty with large numbers of abandoned and boarded up shops.

A Clinton supporter expressed the complacency of a section of the upper middle class backing the Democratic Party candidate, and a hostility to workers. "I have eight brothers and sisters and they are all for Sanders. But he did an interview with the *Rolling Stone*, and he talked about wealth distribution and that was the thing that just rubbed me the wrong way. What is that going to say to people who don't want to work hard? That's what turned me off about him."

She added: "There are a lot of people who think like Trump that immigrants are at fault. But there are a lot of people in our country who take advantage of the system and just don't want to work."

Javier, a worker who has lived in Puerto Rico and New York City, spoke against efforts to blame immigrants for driving down wages, a position advanced by both Trump and Sanders. "Immigrants are taking low-paying jobs most American workers don't want. There are so many millionaires and billionaires out there, and they don't know what to do with all their money. They could go into communities here in Ohio or cities like Detroit and start programs for the youth, but they don't. They have all this money and they are never satisfied."

"Everybody needs a scapegoat. If you are about to get caught you are going to blame the next man. It would be different if Trump was in our shoes, but he had a father who gave him so much money. Nothing was given to us and we had to claw our way up. If Trump were an immigrant, how he would feel if someone was saying what he is saying."

A retired steelworker described his experiences, which mirror

those of an entire generation in Youngstown. "I hired into the mills in 1964 and worked at Sharon Steel, Briar Hill, Republic and as an outside contractor. All of them have been shut down. I was screwed out of my pension. I was two-and-a-half years short of a full pension. You could buy two years but not the other half-year. Everyplace was unionized and workers felt strong. The new generation is being screwed."

"They say the Chinese are taking away the jobs," he added. "Who sent the jobs over there? The corporations wanted lower wages. But workers in China have families to feed, too, just like us. Everyone has to have the right to work."

A worker from Norfolk Southern railroad, who said he was voting for Clinton, added, "Workers in China and Vietnam have to organize too just like we did years ago. It's corporate greed. They do whatever it takes to make profits. Screw the trickle down business. Nothing has trickled down. Norfolk Southern is cutting jobs because of the collapse of the coal and oil industries. Anyone with less than two years has been furloughed. The company is concerned that another railroad will take it over and they are carrying out cost-cutting to keep their shareholders pleased. Warren Buffett, the billionaire, owns Burlington Northern. How can anybody have so much money that they can't spend it? This is capitalism in the extreme. It has to be balanced."

Aletha Temple, a childcare provider, said she was voting for Clinton and her son was voting for Sanders. "There is no support for day care workers, for teachers or for our public school system, which is horrible. Our inner-city kids need activity programs but they canceled them."

"Trump is a reality show celebrity. We don't need racism and violence. That is dangerous, and it could cause a war in our own country. We have to stop police killings. It is not just happening to black people but anybody who is poor. We all bleed red. We all need to eat and want to have enough to be happy and feed our families and put decent clothes on our kids. If all the workers of the world could come together it would be great."



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