Double-digit victory for Sanders in Wisconsin primary

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Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders routed former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the Democratic presidential primary in Wisconsin, winning by a double-digit margin. The result defied poll numbers showing a close race as well as media coverage anointing Clinton as the near-certain Democratic Party nominee.

More than half a million voters gave their support to a candidate they believed to be a socialist. With nearly 85 percent of the vote counted, Sanders was holding a margin of 56 percent to 43 percent, by far his most impressive showing in a primary contest and four times the margin of his upset victory in the Michigan primary on March 15.

Sanders swept 69 out of 72 counties in the state. He lost only in Milwaukee County, the state's largest, by a narrow margin, and in two small rural counties. He dominated the vote in Madison, the state capital and site of the main campus of the University of Wisconsin, and won all of the smaller industrial cities: Green Bay, Appleton, Sheboygan, Eau Claire, La Crosse, Racine, Kenosha and Janesville.

Exit polls documented the widespread support for Sanders among younger voters as well as a significant shift among younger African-American and other minority voters, who backed Sanders over Clinton for the first time. Sanders won 78 percent of white voters younger than 45 and 54 percent among non-white voters in the same age bracket. Clinton's only sizeable margin came among non-whites aged 45 and older, where she won 78 percent of the vote.

Those who responded to one exit poll identified Sanders as honest and trustworthy by a margin of 90 percent to 8 percent. Asked the same question about Clinton, only 57 percent said she was honest and trustworthy, while 38 percent—among Democratic primary voters—said she was not.

Three in 10 voters cited income inequality as their top issue, up from an average of 25 percent in other state contests, and Sanders won the support of two-thirds of these voters. Three quarters said they were worried about the direction of American life, with nearly 40 percent expecting the next generation of Americans to live worse than today, while only one-third thought that living standards would improve.

Registered Democrats made up 70 percent of the primary voters, up from 62 percent in 2008, but this did not benefit Clinton, as she lost both Democrats and independents.

The exit polling showed a distinct shift to the left among those voting in the Democratic primary. The proportion identifying themselves as liberal rose from 46 percent to 67 percent, while those calling themselves "very liberal" rose from 16 percent to 25 percent. Sanders won 78 percent of those who favored more liberal policies than those of the Obama administration.

Perhaps the most significant finding in the exit polls, not just in Wisconsin but more generally, is the steady increase in turnout among young people, who are becoming more politically engaged and activated. Young people aged 18 to 29 made up only 8 percent of total voters in 2000 and 9 percent in 2004. This figure jumped to 14 percent in 2008 and has reached 17 percent so far in 2016.

The result in Wisconsin is a devastating setback for Clinton, a fact tacitly conceded by her own campaign in its decision to hold no election night rally with her supporters in the state. Instead, the campaign issued a perfunctory written statement congratulating Sanders on his victory, while Clinton herself met behind closed doors with New York City fat cats, collecting $10,000-a-head donations at a private fundraising party in the upscale Riverdale neighborhood.

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The vote in Wisconsin is also a repudiation of the corporate-controlled media, which again chose to focus its coverage not on half a million people voting for a self-proclaimed "socialist," but on the antics of Republican candidate Donald Trump, who lost the Republican primary in Wisconsin to Texas Senator Ted Cruz.

Discussion of Trump and the efforts by sections of the Republican Party establishment to block his nomination dominated the television coverage of the Wisconsin vote. The scale and dimensions of the defeat of the Democratic frontrunner were scarcely acknowledged.

On the contrary, the *New York Times* published a lengthy front-page article Monday, on the eve of the primary, essentially declaring the Sanders campaign dead and quoting a series of campaign aides, and even the candidate's wife, as though they were participating in a post-mortem.

The Wisconsin result has delivered another blow to the official narrative not only of the campaign for the Democratic nomination—where Clinton has been decreed the all-but-certain winner—but of American politics as a whole. According to this account, American voters are fundamentally conservative and unshakably committed to the "free enterprise" system. But nearly eight million voters have given their support to a candidate who claims to be a socialist and who has focused his campaign on denunciations of the billionaires and their corrupt domination of American society and its political system.

The US ruling elite and its media mouthpieces know that Sanders himself is no threat to the capitalist system. His socialism is little more than a label pasted on traditional liberal policies. He does not call for public ownership of the corporations and banks, let alone the establishment of a planned economy, but merely for higher taxes and fewer privileges for the super-rich.

The ruling class has been taken unawares by and fears the growth of anti-capitalist sentiment and working class opposition which are finding only an initial reflection in the broad support for Sanders, but which will go far beyond the reformist nostrums of the senator from Vermont.

This class fear was expressed in a commentary published Monday in the *Financial Times*, written by Roger Altman, a prominent Wall Street Democrat and deputy treasury secretary in the Clinton administration. Under the headline "The fury of American voters is in its infancy," Altman points to the rise of Donald Trump in the Republican campaign and Sanders in the Democratic, both appealing to deep-seated anger and distrust of the political system, and polls showing that two-thirds of Americans say the country is on the wrong track.

He writes: "At its heart, this anger is economic. Ever more Americans are having trouble making ends meet. Many of the jobs created since the financial crisis are low-wage. And voters do not expect better incomes in the future. For a nation accustomed to believing that each generation would live better than its predecessor, this is a bitter pill."

Altman notes that real median household income is down 7.5 percent from its peak, while real median wages have fallen 4 percent since the 2008 financial crash. The majority of new jos are low-paying, and in 2013, 22 percent of children did not have enough to eat at some point during that year. Without a change in policy to alleviate these conditions, he warns, "voter anger will intensify," with dire consequences.

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