

Thousands attend Sanders rally in New York ahead of primary

A WSWWS reporting team
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On Wednesday, approximately 30,000 people, the majority in their twenties and thirties, crowded into Washington Square Park in lower Manhattan's Greenwich Village to hear Democratic Party presidential candidate Bernie Sanders speak. In attendance were also several hundred workers from telecom giant Verizon who had gone on strike that morning.

The size of the event was significant. The rally rivaled the number of people that came to the park in December 2014 to protest the failure of a grand jury to indict the cop who choked to death Staten Island resident Eric Garner in July that year. It surpassed the number of people (about 20,000) who attended Obama's campaign rally in Washington Square Park in 2007.

A rally by Hillary Clinton held the same day, in contrast, attracted about 1,300 in the Bronx.

For the first time in decades, the primary elections in New York state on April 19 will play a significant role in determining who will win the party's presidential nomination. The 291 delegates at stake are the largest of any single state contest so far in the Democratic primaries. While Clinton continues to lead Sanders in polls by at least ten percentage points in New York, the Senator from Vermont has narrowed the margin significantly over the past several months. National polls indicate that Sanders has a slight lead over Clinton.

As at other campaign events, those attending the Sanders rally in New York City were motivated by opposition to inequality, war and the domination of the gigantic banks and corporations over economic and political life. The size of Sanders' rallies are an indication of a general leftward shift in the population.

There is an enormous chasm, however, between the

aspirations of workers and youth and the proposals advanced by the Vermont senator.

At his rally, Sanders gave a version of his standard stump speech, speaking of change from below and denouncing Hillary Clinton for taking huge speaker's fees from investment bank Goldman Sachs, a remark which elicited a chorus of boos and jeers from the audience. Except for a reference to Clinton's vote for the Iraq War, he did not address foreign policy issues, including the increasingly tense military situation in the South China Sea and provocative US actions against Russia.

At the Democratic Party debate the next day, the bankruptcy of Sanders' proposals to "break up the banks" was on display, as he insisted that it was not appropriate for the government to make decisions on what banks do, and that the banks themselves would have to make decisions on selling assets if required to by legislation. Sanders has opposed the nationalization of the banks and major corporations or any challenge to the profit principle.

In line with the union bureaucrats who spoke, Sanders also promoted economic nationalism, which is used to divide workers against each other. He has been endorsed by the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and some other unions.

Jacob, from Connecticut, studying acting at New York University, said, "It sounds to me like Sanders is representing a middle class that has been left behind. He's speaking for people who are often not spoken for. He has a strong stance on women's rights and for people of color. Economically I think he is taking a stance against the big banks. He's fighting for your average working class citizen.

"I think in contrast to Hillary he represents a break from the establishment. I'm dissatisfied with the whole

system and I think a lot of people are. He seems more down to earth than the other candidates.”

When a WSWS reporter pointed to the record of the Democratic Party in supporting the interests of big business, Jacob replied, “A lot of people here, including myself are not Democrats. Nothing gets done within this old-fashioned two party system. So anyone who says they are going to challenge that, I admire.”

When asked about Sanders policies on war Jacob said, “I know he flip-flopped on the Iraq war, first voting against it, then for it. That is a concern.”

Ivan said, “It’s the first time we have had a genuine left-of-center candidate since [1972 Democratic presidential nominee candidate George] McGovern. It’s an opportunity we can’t afford to lose. The danger of Bernie not winning is someone like Clinton continuing what’s been going on for the last 15 years, which is working people getting shafted. I think Bernie’s Democratic Socialism is a step on the right path. Having Americans identify as socialists is revolutionary in itself. It brings in a dialogue that has practically been banned here.”

Ivan went on to say that he wished Sanders was a lot more critical of Israel’s genocidal occupation of Palestine but he believed that Sanders supporters could “push Sanders further to the left.”

When asked what he thought about the fact that none of the candidates are discussing the growing war danger, Ivan suggested that Sanders was smart to not discuss the issue, since his views on foreign policy would be used against him by the mainstream media.

Ivan added, “I hope Sanders doesn’t support Hillary if he doesn’t get the nomination. I myself would not vote for her.” Sanders reiterated last week that he would back Clinton if he is defeated in the primaries.

Ryanne, a freshman at The New School, said she came to the rally “because I feel this is a big thing regardless of who wins, and I want to show my support. Bernie is the only candidate talking about the issue of inequality, and that is really what I support.”

Asked about her thoughts on the Democratic Party, she added, “Honestly, I wanted to register as an independent, and it was very difficult for me to swallow my pride and register as a Democrat [as required in New York to vote in the primaries]. I don’t like the Republicans or Hillary, but I feel like I have to vote for the Democrats in opposition to the

Republicans. I really don’t like siding with one party because of the system.”



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