

“Socialism appeals to me”

Sanders rally attendees speak on socialism, Democratic Party

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On Sunday, US Senator Bernie Sanders continued his initial series of campaign rallies at Chicago’s Navy Pier, following Saturday’s event in Brooklyn, as he again seeks the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination. Sanders unsuccessfully sought the party’s nomination in 2016, subsequently endorsing Hillary Clinton, the arch-candidate of Wall Street and big business.

The *Chicago Tribune* estimated that over 12,000 attended. The rally attracted diverse social layers, including many young people who have been increasingly radicalized in recent years: large numbers of high school and college students, along with young workers. Significant numbers of professionals and other sections of both the lower- and upper-middle class attended as well.

Reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with attendees, encountering wide interest in a socialist perspective. Many of those we spoke with were attracted to Sanders’ criticisms of social inequality, “the billionaire class” and other social ills. A number were either skeptical of or openly hostile to capitalism and the Democratic Party, while expressing illusions in the possibility of reforming either. As the WSWWS has noted, the promotion of such illusions is a central aim of Sanders’ campaign.

Jesus is 22 and from the Chicago suburbs. He said he had gone to college for two years, studying to become a teacher, before having to quit and work full time at a factory in order to support his family.

He said he had been following the wave of teachers strikes in the US over the past year. “With all the effort they put into teaching students, you’d think they’d get paid more.”

He said that he hadn’t given socialism much thought until recently, which he described as Sanders’ proposals to “use taxes for the people not for the corporations, which makes a lot of sense. I think socialism but with capitalism together is the perfect idea for this country. A complete full market and no regulations is really bad. I feel like the Democratic Party has to change, otherwise they’re going to lose a whole generation, again.”

The WSWWS reporter explained, however, that genuine socialism and structuring society to meet the needs of the majority of the population are incompatible with the extreme levels of social inequality under capitalism and the monopolization of wealth and political power by the rich. Jesus agreed. The reporter also explained that the Democratic Party was the oldest capitalist party in modern history, a party of Wall Street and imperialism, and had

long put forth various “radical” sounding figures as safety valves in order to trap and smother social opposition.

Asked his thoughts on the previous administration of Democratic President Barack Obama, Jesus responded angrily, “The first two years of his presidency, they had control of both houses [of Congress]. He could have done way more, but they didn’t. And Obama deported way more people than Trump. And then he made the whole DACA thing at the end [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, the tenuous legal status for young immigrants], which he knew would get vetoed by a Republican president.

“It’s kind of infuriating, you know? He wasn’t really hope and change.”

Jesus added that he was strongly opposed to the attacks on immigrants. “These people don’t do anything but give to this country,” he said, “and they always live in fear because they might get deported. I think it’s pretty disgusting.”

Alexis is a 21-year-old student from Chicago who studies political science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He spoke of his left-wing views and the need for young people to fight for a better world. “I’m pretty leftist,” he said. “This is as close to the collapse of capitalism I’m going to get. I’m doing everything in my power to make the world a better place. The younger generation needs to be mobilized against a system they deem unfair. I definitely want this president out of office.”

Alexis came to the rally with Oliver, who is 19, from Quincy, Illinois, and also studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. “The most important issue to me is the environment,” Oliver said. “A close second is healthcare, education and inequality. The system should never have allowed this level of inequality.” Oliver added, “I’m not a fan of the Democratic Party, but it may be a better of the two options.”

Reporters explained to Oliver, however, that the politics of “lesser evilism” has resulted in disasters for the working class every election cycle and a further shift to the right, including under the previous Obama administration. Oliver nodded his head and said, “I’m interested in learning more.”

Alexis agreed and also spoke out on his differences with the Democratic Party, noting, “I generally disagree with the Democratic Party.” He added, “Socialism appeals to me. A lot of left politics becomes coopted by the Democratic Party and because of the cooption we are never able to realize the ultimate goals that

we seek. I think that's very dangerous because it prevents any progress. I think we need to radically depart from capitalism."

Young people also came from the economically depressed city of Rockford, Illinois. The city had one of the highest unemployment rates in the country after the financial crisis of 2008. Thousands of good-paying industrial jobs have been destroyed in the Rockford area, only to be replaced with low-wage jobs, including at the Rockford United Parcel Service (UPS) air hub, where workers make as little as \$13 an hour.

Simon is an 18-year-old high school student from Rockford. He spoke of the economic devastation the city has faced. "I've grown up here my entire life," he said. "It is the epitome of the 'Rust-Belt' city. It's really depressing. There's a drug issue there. There's a lot that needs to be fixed. A lot of industrial jobs have left. At the Belvidere Assembly Plant they started laying off 1,400 workers."

Recently Fiat Chrysler announced that it would eliminate an entire shift at its Belvidere plant near Rockford and lay off nearly 1,400 workers, something which the United Auto Workers union is doing nothing to stop.

Andrew, a 20-year-old worker and friend of Simon's from Rockford, spoke of the impact of the layoffs. "Rockford is a community that had its roots in industry. There's a lot of small manufacturing and a lot of workers are struggling," he said.

"My cousin works at Belvidere Assembly," he added. "The majority of people employed in the last six years are going to get laid off. It's a horrible situation. There's families that get their entire income from the Belvidere Assembly Plant. There's fathers and mothers that work there together. What are they going to do come May? They're going to get laid off and have no income. I guess they will get unemployment, but unemployment will only do so much."

Simon spoke about his desire for free college education. "When Bernie started to run and started talking about free college education for everyone, that is one thing that really struck me," he said. "Student loan debt is horrible. I'm a senior at Rockford East, and it's really stressful and so complicated. It's such a terrible system. If education was free and universal, it would provide equal opportunity for all."

Andrew noted that he could not afford college. He said, "I'm not actually in college right now. Financial issues for college is a big thing. If college was free, I would definitely take advantage of it and further my knowledge."

Louis is also 22 and is a college student studying communications in Chicago. "I've heard a lot about Sanders, but just wanted to come out and hear what he had to say. I thought he made a lot of good points in his first run."

Louis listed a number of issues he was concerned about, including "inequality financially, our presence in the political realm, violence in our neighborhood. Police brutality definitely needs to be addressed. But I think if we address those things head on they can change."

He said that he did not consider himself a Democrat. "I personally don't put myself in a political party."

Louis said that he had not given much thought to socialism previously, and said he thought that there were ways to address

social problems within "each belief system, whether capitalism or socialism."

However, when a reporter explained that there was an objective conflict within society, between a reactionary financial oligarchy and the working class which produces all of society's wealth, he agreed, adding, "I agree with everything you just said. I strongly believe the working class is the whole heart of America, and the world."

Jake is a 23-year-old, originally from Cincinnati, Ohio. "I'm a sales manager in Chicago. Universal healthcare is a big issue for me. Social issues have been quite relevant to me as well. I know Bernie doesn't go as far on a lot of issues, as far as socialism, that I want though."

"Healthcare matters to me because living should be a human right," he noted. "We should care about other human rights. The rise of insulin costs is abhorrent. I have four people in my family that have diabetes. Luckily, they are all fortunate enough to be able to afford it. But I've heard the horror stories. Nobody should die from a treatable disease. It's disgusting that a black market for insulin has to even exist. I am young enough and fortunate enough to get insurance from my father. I haven't gotten any major health issues at this point—and I don't have to in the near future. But what if my dad lost this job?"

Danny is a friend of Jake and a worker in Chicago as well. He contrasted the spending on war with spending on social programs in the United States. "The Pentagon misplaced \$7 billion and they don't know where it went," he said. "And they can't afford healthcare? I think saving people's lives affordably is more important than invading other countries and destroying lives."

Both Jake and Danny also spoke about Sanders' tacit support for the Trump administration's efforts to oust the Maduro government in Venezuela, which could create a violent civil war. "We should not be involved in that," Jake said. "That's nonsense," Danny added.

Jake also spoke about other issues that were important to him, including education and the recent strikes of teachers. "The other big issues that matter to me are education—public vs. private. I've been following the teacher strikes and I have friends who are teachers in California. My friends were in the Los Angeles teacher strike. Teachers need to be paid a lot more. Education solves a lot of root problems. I'm also really concerned about income inequality."

The authors also recommend:

Sanders launches his campaign with a blast of demagoguery
[3 March 2019]



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