

A statement by the Solidarity National Committee:

As Sanders' Challenge Continues: A Political Revolution Underway?



Bernie Sanders, campaigning in Washington. Across the country he is winning the youth vote.

BERNIE SANDERS' CAMPAIGN is sweeping like a meteor across the political sky. After the early primaries, conventional "wisdom" assumed he had peaked. But not only did he win Michigan, his support has continued to build in the western states. On March 26 Sanders swept Washington State, Alaska and Hawaii winning over 70% of delegates, forcing somewhat speechless media commentators to fill up their allotted time with nothing but Bernie.

As national polls of Democratic voters show him in nearly a dead heat with Hillary Clinton, Sanders' challenge to the establishment is no longer discounted as an amusing sideshow in the world of so-called "real politics." Nearly one million people have attended Sanders' mass rallies and events, often waiting for hours in long lines. The content of Sanders' stump speech rarely varies; this campaign has the character of a protest movement on the march.

This is turning into an extraordinary election year in the midst of an extraordinary social crisis. The party "establishments" that control the Democratic and Republican parties on behalf of the corporate ruling class have lost control of their script — at least temporarily.

Commentators like to portray Sanders and Donald Trump as symmetrical "populist outsiders" responding to working-class anger and frustration. But while Bernie Sanders appeals to traditions of social solidarity and shared responsibility for resolving the disasters facing our society, Trump taps into the worst instincts of scapegoating "Others" — Muslims, immigrants, and

any other convenient targets. No wonder that open white-supremacists and "nationalists" see Trump's campaign as an opening for their politics of racism and hatred.

The youth and working-class energy that fuels Sanders' campaign illustrates the profound attraction of his program for single-payer health care, expanded social security, tuition-free public universities, a \$15 minimum wage, "political revolution" against Wall Street and "too big to exist" banks. Socialism is no longer a dirty word for a generation that is feeling the sharp end of the stick of capitalism right now.

Among working-class Americans, Sanders is also showing strength. (See Labor for Bernie, www.laborforbernie.org). While a number of unions plunged into early endorsements for Clinton, without taking the time or trouble to see how their members might feel, the AFL-CIO hasn't yet done so, surely in part because of pro-Sanders sentiment within significant sectors of labor. The United Auto Workers says it's surveying the union's membership, which UAW president Dennis Williams describes as "conflicted." Labor for Bernie's April 1 national meeting at the beginning of the *Labor Notes* conference in Chicago was a well-attended and lively event!

Despite all the excitement and the hundreds of thousands of young people and first time voters that have participated in the primary and caucuses, the Democratic party establishment is 99% convinced that the avowed democratic socialist is not electable — and one percent utterly terrified that he just might

be, in view of what might emerge from the Republican rat pack. They don't like the fact that Sanders polls better than Clinton against the Republican front-runner Trump.

What Sanders calls a political revolution against "the billionaire class," or what the Occupy movement called "the one percent" — the corporate capitalist ruling class — has never been more urgent. But whatever the outcome of the primary contests, that revolution will not take

place within the confines of a party ultimately owned and controlled by the very oligarchy that the Sanders campaign rails against.

Bernie Sanders' candidacy presents itself as an asset to the Democratic Party by bringing in young and working-class folks who are notably tepid in their enthusiasm for Hillary Clinton — all too understandably so! Thousands of Sanders supporters have already announced they will not vote for Hillary. This number may grow as Hillary the nominee swings further and further rightward — away from the political accommodations she made to Sanders supporters during the primaries — in order to attract mainstream Republican voters.

The prospects for "party unity" might be further damaged if the Democratic leadership goes deep into its bag of dirty tricks to sideline Sanders — for example by open race-baiting, red-baiting or relying on unelected super-delegates to seal the Clinton nomination. But those methods are certainly available if needed. And the party establishment's final line of defense will be pure scaremongering — the pseudo-practical lie that "nominating Bernie will throw the White House to the rightwing Republicans." With the assistance of those liberals and progressives practiced in this art, yet another generation of radical social activists will be bombarded with the mirage of the lesser evil.

Whatever the sound and fury emanating from the nomination process, corporate America, the banks, Wall Street and the hedge funds can be sure that the Democratic Party remains in safe hands. They prospered under Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, as they did under George W. Bush in between, and the heated rhetoric of a political campaign won't change the reality that, as Sanders has pithily put it, "it's Wall Street that regulates Congress." The plain fact is that it regulates the Democratic Party too, which is precisely why Bernie Sanders himself has been running as a political independent for decades.



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The question, then, is what comes after the primary campaign and the Democratic convention. We would be thrilled to see Bernie Sanders' campaign carry on into the general election as an independent candidacy, rather than seeing the Sanders "bern" and the energy he's captured dissipate in disillusionment and frustration, as Jesse Jackson's 1988 Rainbow challenge so tragically did. But Bernie has consistently refused to carry forward his "political revolution" outside the confines of loyalty to defeating the Republicans and electing a Democrat.

The efforts of Sanders loyalists to save the unique political movement that has been built can only work if the movement finds a means of continuing and expressing itself independently from the Democratic Party. Pretending to make change from inside is the historical kiss of death to all radical insurgencies that have gone before.

What form that independence might take isn't predictable, and can only emerge from among the engaged activists. Could it move toward independent politics, perhaps at the local and regional levels? Might thousands of Sanders supporters conclude that like Bernie, they really are socialists and begin to draw some appropriate conclusions that could give new life to the socialist movement in the United States?

Those are the open questions for discussion among hundreds of thousands of folks who are "feeling the Bern." Like others on the socialist left, Solidarity hopes to be part of that exploration. A mass convergence is shaping up for this July in Philadelphia around the Democratic Party convention. Let's meet up and talk together about the future of the political revolution as we protest the parties of the oligarchs.

[For those interested in a progressive third-party alternative, we suggest checking out the campaign of Dr. Jill Stein of the Green Party, www.jill2016.com.



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