

12 international

USA 'Political Revolution'

Sanders needs to run as independent

The USA presidential elections will be held in November. After eight years in office, Barak Obama, the first black president of America, will leave a legacy no different to his predecessors – massive inequality and racism at home and imperialist wars abroad. He offered nothing different to the usual big business politics, inevitably disappointing all those who hoped he would be different.

But something different is now emerging. Bernie Sanders, a self-proclaimed socialist, is trying to win the nomination to become the presidential candidate for the Democratic Party. This may be the same big business party of Obama, but millions have been attracted to Sanders' pro-working class, anti-corporate, socialist campaign. Below are extracts from an article published by Socialist Alternative (supporters of the CWI in the USA) on 18 March 2016. It explains how socialists in the US have approached this contradictory phenomenon.

Calvin Priest, Socialist Alternative

Before Sanders officially launched his campaign last year, Socialist Alternative called on him to run as an independent candidate. While Bernie believed he could have more impact in the Democratic primaries, we made the case that the Democratic Party is hostile territory for a pro-worker, anti-corporate campaign. The obstacles include the undemocratic methods and structures the Democratic leadership imposes on the primary process, the power of Wall Street money, and the establishment media, as well as the more conservative character of the small minority of primary voters. This means it is far harder for Sanders to take over the Democratic Party than it would be to begin building a new political party.

By running in the Democratic primaries, we argued Sanders was making a fundamental mistake that would mean cutting himself off from the vast majority of people who do not participate in the primary process or even follow the political discussion until the general election and creating illusions that the Democratic Party could be used as a tool for a "political revolution."

Despite these disagreements with Sanders that we have openly put forward at each stage, Socialist Alternative did not stand on the sidelines but instead agreed to go along with Sanders and his supporters to test out his strategy of running in the Democratic primaries. We joined with dedicated Sanders supporters to build support for his pro-worker and anti-corporate left wing campaign. We energetically helped to build rallies, meetings and marches to promote a political revolution against the billionaire class.

However, now it's time to draw a balance sheet of Sanders' attempt to run as a Democrat. It is true that Sanders campaign has drawn millions into a discussion about socialism. But if Sanders accepts the results of the primaries and endorses Hillary Clinton, rather than running as an independent, his campaign will end up as a transmission belt for Clinton and the same old corporate politics of the Democratic Party that alienated so many Sanders supporters in the first place.

Sanders should not allow the political revolution to die at the July Democratic Convention. Millions have been inspired by his call for a \$15 minimum wage, free college, and Medicare for All. That energy must be used to continue to build the movement until November and beyond. No challenge to the billionaire class will ever be successful that begins and ends in a presidential primary. The emerging movement for a political revolution needs to urge Sanders to run independently all through November or to develop a plan B of support for the remaining strongest left, anti-corporate challenger, Jill Stein of the Green Party.

A Party of the 99% Working people not only needs to build a mass movement to fight for their

interests, they also need to create a political tool to take on the billionaires – we need our own political party. The Democratic Party is tightly controlled in a top-down fashion by politicians who are funded by and indebted to big business. Working people and young people have been hugely inspired by Bernie's refusal to take corporate campaign contributions – it shows clearly the grassroots basis of his campaign and his rejection of Wall Street's control of politics. But it is not enough to have one candidate rejecting corporate money in a campaign based on grassroots forces. We need a new political party of the 99%, with genuine democratic structures, which completely and openly rejects corporate money and corporate influence.

We need the revolt against Wall Street to grow from Bernie's single campaign to an organized movement of millions that runs candidates in every state and every city. Bernie should call for a national conference of his supporters and those on the left to launch a discussion and begin making plans to run independent candidates on a pro-worker, anti-corporate platform. This conference could begin the process of building a party of the 99% in the United States.

Kshama Sawant's victories as a socialist in Seattle shows that Bernie's campaign is not a one-time phenomenon. There is a huge and growing interest in socialism, and young people in particular are looking for an alternative to the failed system of capitalism. Sawant was able to win re-election last year in spite of the

fierce opposition of the city's Democratic establishment because she had an organized force on her side – Socialist Alternative.



Bernie Sanders, seeking Democratic Party nomination as presidential candidate