**The American left rises**

Tabitha Spence January 30, 2020

The energy was electrifying as US presidential candidate Bernie Sanders took the stage in front of 26,000 people in New York this fall. Armed with fresh endorsements from progressive House Representatives Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, the senator called for a comprehensive policy overhaul.

Emphasizing the influence Bernie has had on her own political journey, AOC stresses that to do all the things we aspire to, from living wages and universal healthcare to a Green New Deal: “We need to have a revolution of working class people. It needs to be multi-racial, multi-gendered, and multi-generational. Our future is not going to get better unless we demand it and unless we work for it. Bernie’s campaign is part of a mass movement in America.”

Not long ago the idea of a ‘political revolution’ elicited snickers from mainstream media and the political establishment when Bernie’s campaign in the 2016 presidential race began. Yet today unprecedented numbers of people continue pouring into town halls, stadiums, and streets across the country to engage with Sanders on the major issues confronting their families and communities.

Over five million people gave small donations (averaging $18 per person) to support Bernie Sanders on the campaign trail in 2019, amounting to about $96 million for the year. Despite the fact that all other Democratic candidates – with the exception of Elizabeth Warren – are courting big dollar donors, Bernie out-fundraised them while refusing to accept the legalized bribes from vested interests. Remarkably, even without support from wealthy elites and the mainstream media, Bernie is also the only Democratic nominee who consistently beats Donald Trump in the polls.

What makes Bernie Sanders’ position in the American political process so unique is that he is the only candidate our generation has ever seen who is genuinely a person of the movements. Civil rights, anti-war, climate justice, social equality – you name it; Bernie has been an active voice for progressive social change.

Bernie’s base, like Trump’s, understands that something is very wrong when nearly 60 million American households (43percent of the country’s population) cannot afford even basic living expenses. Trump managed to convince the hurting (white) working class, that their suffering stems from black, brown and Muslim bodies coming and taking what is rightfully theirs. Bernie, on the other hand, locates the roots of the crises facing ordinary Americans of all stripes in the political and economic system operating in the interests of a billionaire class.

Bernie doesn’t limit himself to pointing fingers or merely critiquing a system that has enriched this tiny minority of people while keeping an entire underclass one illness or accident away from eviction and bankruptcy. He goes on fighting for meaningful structural transformation in the interest of working class Americans, which has been his objective since he entered politics several decades ago.

The insurgent ‘We, not me’ campaign led by Bernie is all the more impressive when you take into account his unapologetic association with ‘Democratic Socialism’. The idea of socialism was demonized in the US as a result of cold-war scaremongering and McCarthyism, and the subsequent decades scrubbed any awareness of alternative potentialities to the depredations of the capitalist system. Capitalism had come to be identified with freedom, while socialism reminded people of the gulags.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the idea of the public sphere had been all but crushed in the US. The federal budget reflects continued cuts in public sector funding meant for public education, social security, healthcare, housing, infrastructure and environmental protection. While Trump’s approach to governance in many ways differs from establishment Republicans, his policies intensify the assault on the public coffers and regulatory institutions meant to protect the public.

Record tax breaks and subsidies were given to corporations and the rich, and the military budget continues to swell. In 2019, $700 billion was given to the US military, roughly the size of the next 10 largest military budgets around the world.

As these companies, financial institutions and US military literally get away with murder through state-backed projects at home and abroad, the US continues imposing crushing economic sanctions and facilitating brutal attempts at taking control of any country or region that dares to assert their sovereignty to say no to harms, and yes to people’s power. By the 1990s, with the help of PR firms, school curriculum and the corporate media, the public had been effectively systematically replaced with the polished veneer of a supposedly neutral and efficient private sector.

With the idea of socialism all but deflated around the world, how did Bernie manage to overcome taboos associated with ‘socialism’ in the belly of the capitalist beast itself? His strategy involved connecting with ordinary Americans by actively listening to the public he serves as Senator of Vermont, and to the communities he visits all across the nation. Based on the alarming situation a huge percentage of the population finds themselves in, as well as extensive research of effective policies elsewhere, Bernie designed clear policies proposals that could transform people’s everyday experiences and give them more dignified lives.

The Bernie moment has resonance not just in the US, but all around the world. It is not just the rise of an individual working to usher in an era of some version of Democratic Socialism in the US. Bernie is part of a larger growing international movement for the transformation of social relations that put real power into the hands of all citizens, in the interests of all, not just a handful of billionaires. Moreover, his stance against wars and his strong advocacy against the climate crisis makes him relevant to countries such as Pakistan, which have borne the brunt of US imperialism.

Bernie is part of a growing progressive movement in America and globally. The logical outcome of four more years of Trump is deepening social divisions, ecological unraveling, and abandonment of people in need. Only a committed, focused, democratic and rapidly growing political revolution will be able to bend the curve of history away from that future, and toward justice.

Bernie is an anchor of the Left who is unapologetically ‘In it to Win It’. He may be up against Goliath when you think about the forces defending the status quo. But Bernie doesn’t stand alone. He stands on the shoulders of giants, and among fighters who refuse to let their future be stolen.

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