**Bernie Sanders Surge Reflects US Shift on Socialism**

By: William Gallo, VOA News

WASHINGTON—

Free college tuition.  Doubling the minimum wage.  A single-payer, universal health care system.  Those are just a few of the campaign promises by Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, who does not try to hide that he embraces a form of socialism.

The independent Vermont senator's self-identification as a socialist is a rarity for politicians in the United States, which, unlike most other Western democracies, does not have any sort of significant socialist presence represented on its political left wing.

Since the Cold War, the term has become something of a dirty word in U.S. politics: a phrase used not just as a description of a political and economic system, but as an insult used by conservatives in an attempt to tarnish the reputation of their left-leaning rivals.

Despite his self-described socialist views, Sanders is experiencing an unexpected wave of popularity, and is drawing some of the largest, most electric crowds of any presidential candidate so far.

**Unexpected surge**

Sanders is now running a solid second to the Democratic frontrunner, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton.  Most notably, a poll last week suggested he has crept to within just 7 percentage points of Clinton in the crucial, bellwether state of Iowa.

Does Sanders' newfound mainstream popularity suggest Americans are changing their views on socialism?

For many younger Americans, that appears to be the case, according to University of Massachusetts, Amherst economics professor Richard Wolff, who says the socialist label is not nearly as scary as it once was.

"For people 30 years of age and younger, saying, 'Bernie Sanders is a socialist' cuts exactly no ice," [[is not an effective smear tactic]] Wolff told VOA. "It's useless.  It doesn't persuade anyone."

A Gallup poll conducted earlier this year lends weight to that view.

**Young Americans more open to socialism**

In the 18-29 age bracket, 69 percent of respondents said they would have no problem voting for a socialist presidential candidate.  Older Americans, however, were less sure, with only 47 percent of respondents of all ages saying they would vote for a socialist.

One reason why younger people are more open to the 73-year-old Sanders' message is that they may not even remember the Cold War, said Wolff.

"Those battles are now two or three decades old. For young people, this is barely known history," he said.

Another possible explanation for the popularity of Sanders' message is the recent turmoil in the U.S. economy that has led to rising inequality.

That is the case for Christy Goldsmith, a doctoral student who lives in Columbia, Missouri. "The biggest problem in America in my view is the wealth gap," she told VOA.

Goldsmith worked for Hillary Clinton's unsuccessful presidential campaign in 2008, but she now says she plans to vote for Sanders.

"I don't mind publicly identifying as democratic socialist at all," she said. "But I think it's important to make the distinction between that and (traditional) socialism."

**Democratic socialism**

That phrase - democratic socialist - is the same one Sanders often uses to describe himself. As a political concept, it is distinct from the Marxist-Leninist brand of socialism commonly associated with one-party rule and state dominance of the economy.

Sanders recently explained the concept of democratic socialism in a crowdsourced question/answer session published by the NowThis online media portal.

"What democratic socialism is about is having a government which reflects the interest of ordinary people rather than what is currently the case, the billionaire class," Sanders said.

As he often does, Sanders used Scandinavian countries - specifically, their universal health care, state-funded college education system and generous worker benefits - as a model for government practices he would like to see.

Sanders also dismissed the notion that these views are incompatible with a democratic system. "In most of those countries the voter turnout is a lot higher than it is in the United States," he said, "They are pretty vigorous democracies."

Sanders' views are basically in line with mainstream social democratic and labor parties in northern Europe, according to John Halpin, who studies political theory and public opinion at the Center for American Progress.

"His 'socialism' is basically the wide provision of public goods like universal health care, paid vacations, family leave, and debt-free college education financed by progressive taxation on the wealthy and corporations," Halpin told VOA.

**A socialist at all?**

Given the differences between these policies and traditional socialism, there is some debate as to whether Sanders should even be called a "socialist" at all.

Noam Chomsky, the renowned leftist political analyst and professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is among those reluctant to use the phrase to describe Sanders.

"I think he should be regarded as a New Deal Democrat, which is about what 'socialism' has come to mean, very remote from its traditional meaning," said Chomsky, referring to supporters of Franklin D. Roosevelt's domestic relief programs in the 1930's.

"That places him far to the left in today’s political spectrum, in which mainstream Democrats are what used to be called 'moderate Republicans,'" Chomsky said in an email to VOA.

**Nomination unlikely**

Like most other analysts, Chomsky says it is "very unlikely" that Sanders will win the Democratic nomination; but, the senator could still affect the presidential race in other ways.

"His campaign opens up questions and issues that are otherwise marginalized, and will probably press the Democrats toward somewhat more progressive positions.  In words at least," Chomsky said.

Could a Sanders campaign really open the door for more people in the United States to identify themselves as socialists?  Halpin, with the Center for American Progress, says it is not likely.

"Americans generally don't like predetermined ideological labels and believe they can take ideas across the spectrum," he said. "Without an organized socialist party or movement, it's hard to see it making much of an impact on its own."

Trevor Burrus, a research fellow at the CATO Institute, a libertarian research organization in Washington, agrees.

"I think real socialist policies are still quite unpopular," he told VOA.

"The popularity of highly redistributive welfare states, as well as animosity toward 'the rich,' tend to go up when the economy slows down, as it has done in recent years," he said.

Conservative Review ­

**Dear America: Don't Listen To Bernie Sanders. Sweden's Not All That**

By: Alexandra Ivanov | August 24th, 2015

 “The education of all children, from the moment that they can get along without a mother’s care, shall be in state institutions.” – Karl Marx

Presidential candidate Bernie Sanders (D) has said that socialist policies characteristic of countries like Sweden should be implemented in the U.S. As a Swede, I would strongly advise against this.

The worldwide socialist movement praises the Scandinavian countries for their high living standards and welfare. Easy to do for someone who has never lived in Sweden or read a book on Swedish history.

First off: The success of Sweden predates the welfare state. In reality, the economy began to fall behind in the 1960s when the state rapidly expanded. Moreover, Sweden enjoyed the highest growth in the industrialized world between 1870 and 1936 – between 1936 and 2008 the rate dropped down to number 13 out of 28 industrialized nations.

The Swedish­Kurdish scholar Dr. Nima Sanandaji has written all about this in his book Unexceptionalism, published by the Institute of Economic Affairs. Not only did it hurt our economy, the growth of our welfare state has also made our social capital deteriorate. A study by the OECD, mentioned in Scandinavian Unexceptionalism, calculated the share of GDP spent on disability and sickness programmes and it showed, with the exception of the Netherlands, that the five Nordic countries spend more than all other OECD­countries.

The grand welfare state – built on the idea that someone else picks up the bill – has also influenced the way people view society and morality. The change is noted by the World Values Survey: 82 percent of Swedes agreed in the 1981­84 survey with the statement “claiming government benefits to which you are not entitled is never justifiable’”. Thirty years later only 55 percent of Swedes believed that it was never right to claim benefits to which they were not entitled (Sanandaji, IEA, 2015).

A thriving economy, morality and a good business climate is incompatible with socialism. Only two of the 38 most successful privately owned Swedish companies were established after 1970. Today Sweden slowly moves away from the old ways, but someone who makes 2,500 USD a month will still pay 1,000 USD out of that in taxes, and on top of that 25 percent VAT. Third­way socialism (market socialism) might look good on paper, but when people lack ownership over the wealth they create, productive people will either leave or do something else.

However, living in a socialist country has other side­ effects other than just hurting prosperity and growth. By giving away the money one creates, the power to make decisions over one’s life is also abandoned.

 Imagine living in a country where it is illegal to homeschool your child? We’re also high on other government monopolies: you can only buy beer and wine in the stateowned stores. They are closed Saturday 3 pm until Monday 10 am and have a worse selection than your local Kroger. Horse racing? A state­controlled monopoly. To sum it up: Even our pharmacies were nationalized in the 1970s, and when we deregulated the market in 2008, only Sweden, North Korea and Cuba had a government monopoly for pharmaceutical retailing.

A strong government system which expands at the expense of personal liberty will influence human psychology. One of the most terrible consequences of Swedish socialism is how individualism has been replaced by state­individualism. Relying on individual help and support has been replaced by reliance on the state.

They don’t ever just take your money. Sweden strives to be the most equal country on earth, and the politicians won’t let anything stand in the way. An important part is the almost free (a Swedish word in Swedish for “someone else pays”) daycare for children. Since it’s all distributed by the government, politicians decides the curriculum as well as the values taught. There’s even been discussions about making daycare mandatory.

What is the core of living in the country of equals? Never believe that you are better than anyone else. In all Scandinavian countries we have the Law of Jante: the idea that individual success and achievement is unworthy and inappropriate.

As a young girl growing up in Sweden, I always looked towards the United States for hope and inspiration. A country founded on the principles of freedom and self­ownership. A country where the people were not supposed to serve the government, but the other way around.

When I hear Bernie Sanders speaking about socialism, I am reminded of the words of Thomas Jefferson: “The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground”. I advise you to protect your rights and run as far away as possible from candidates who advocate socialism.

*Bio: Alexandra Ivanov is a Swedish opinion leader and chairwoman of The Confederation of Swedish Conservative and Liberal Students. She has previously worked at the Swedish think tank Timbro and the Swedish Taxpayers association.*