

# The Sanders' revolution

**Patty McCabe**  
on the youth pull of Bernie Sanders

**B**ernie Sanders declared after his victory in New Hampshire democratic primary: "Together we have sent a message that will resonate from Wall Street to Washington ... that government belongs to all of the people". He beat his rival Hilary Clinton with nearly 60% of the vote. Yet it is the votes of the young that are most prevalent. In the Iowa entrance poll, he crushed Clinton by an extraordinary six to one—84 percent to 14 percent—among voters younger than 30.

Just what is it about Sanders' politics that makes him so attractive to young votes? Is it as simple as the fact that his policies are very appealing to young people? He wants to help and encourage students rather than cripple them with debt and he is one of the few candidates who is tackling climate change head on, a cause that is much more popular amongst the younger than the older generations. Nor is the answer to be found in his charisma, although he is clearly a brilliant speaker. It is also not accurate to argue that his policies are new. Sanders' politics are not new and certainly not new for him. His fight against Wall Street and the big corporations is one that he has waged for the past 50 years. So why is he suddenly so popular?

The answer is to be found in the fact that the essential message behind Sanders' politics is not of

change but of revolution. The idea that things could and should be different now. In the face of Sanders' unflinching attack on the status quo, Clinton's political pragmatism seems boring and not worth the effort. Her ties with Wall Street also put her in a class that has been discredited in recent years and provides voters with reason to doubt her integrity. Whereas Clinton's reference to feminism and minorities sounds like she is touting old tickets,

Sanders' willingness to tackle issues that transgress identity politics are a revival of the traditional left, one that believed that injustice was common to all, not to individual groups.

Sanders, at the potentially over-ripe old age of seventy four, was hardly the most obvious candidate for the youth vote of America. Corbyn was not the most likely candidate to capture the imagination of young people in Britain. What their popularity does suggest is that their 'old politics' are resonating with the problems faced by young people and a frustration with, and rejection of, mainstream politics.

Unfortunately, this frustration with politics has also provided his political opposite, Donald Trump, with most of his supporters. What is happening in America is a search for a more aggressive political narrative that rejects the view the status quo is either something inevitable, or that it is something that can only be changed gradually.

**'Old politics' are resonating with the problems faced by young people**

## OUR HISTORY - 65

### Douglas Cole - Social Theory (1920)



Douglas Cole (better known as G.D.H. Cole) was a political scientist and historian. A libertarian socialist, he was active in the Fabian Society and the Co-operative movement. He wrote a series of studies of the trade union movement, including the classic *Self-Government in Industry* in 1917 and was sympathetic to syndicalism. He was one of the founders of the National Guilds League, and in 1920 published *Guild Socialism Restated*. *Social Theory*, also published in 1920, was a more theoretical statement of his ideological position. Cole published over 50 political books and pamphlets, as well as hundreds of essays. The select bibliography in Anthony Wright's excellent 1979 study of Cole and *Socialist Democracy* includes over 600 items. Cole also wrote the seven volume *History of Socialist Thought*, which traces the development of socialist thought on an international scale between 1789 and 1939 and which treats Marxism and anarchism as equally valid tendencies within the socialist tradition, and which concludes with a restatement of Cole's own libertarian socialist position. In 1944, Cole was appointed professor of political theory at Oxford University and was the mentor of a generation of socialist intellectuals and politicians. Together with his wife Margaret, Cole also wrote some thirty

detective stories.

"I assume that the object of social organisation is not merely material efficiency, but also essentially the fullest self-expression of all the members. I assume that self-expression involves self-government, and that we ought to aim not merely at giving people votes, but at calling forth their full participation in the common direction of the affairs of the community.

If it is contended that men only ask for peace and quietness, and do not want to govern themselves, I answer in the first place that this is not true, and secondly, that if it was true, we ought not to acquiesce in such a state of affairs, but to alter it as speedily as possible. It has been assumed throughout this book that human beings have wills, and that they have a right and duty to use these wills to their full capacity in the direction of Society. ... The time for a new and definitive social theory is not yet; but it is high time for our generation to set about laying the foundations of a theory more responsive to modern development than that which at present holds sway. Orthodox social theory is bankrupt: it neither corresponds to the facts of today nor affords any help in interpreting the tendencies which are shaping a new social order within the old."