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The Bern is back!

Knut Dethlefsen on how Bernie Sanders' second candidacy for US President demonstrates the leftward shift of the Democratic Party

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What does Bernie Sanders' candidacy mean for the US Democratic Party? Is his appeal strong enough in the days of younger left-wingers like the shining light, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez?

Bernie Sanders' profile is still appealing. He's changed American politics for good: his proposals have become the principles of progressive politics in the US. However, he's no longer the only person pushing them. In 2014, Democratic Socialist Sanders was an outsider; now he's one of the favourites competing to be the Democratic presidential candidate.

Sanders' particular strength is not flaunting his personality, but rather addressing the problems of a huge number of citizens. Despite strong economic growth, lots of American families can't make ends meet. Sanders' fight against the powerful financial and political lobbies also speaks to Republican voters, and he's proven that he can mobilise the younger generation, which is crucial for making the White House his home. However, the Dems would rather have a young woman challenge Donald Trump, so one of his strong competitors might become the candidate.

Democratic policies have shifted to the left and many candidates besides Sanders are now calling for socio-political reform. With a fairly homogeneous group of candidates, what kind of campaign will it be?

Following the mid-term elections in November 2018 that rewarded the Democrats with a strong majority in the House of Representatives, the party is well positioned to compete for the highest office in the country. However, the first primaries don't begin until next February. Between now and then, the race will be very

lively. There are already a number of strong candidates and others are sure to throw their hats in the ring.

The organisation, 'Our Revolution', which is great at getting out crowds, backs Bernie but it would also support someone else in the election campaign after the primaries. Primaries give party members the chance to choose a person who can win the epic battle against Donald Trump, his backers and his base. That's what it's all about, as Bernie Sanders explained when he announced his candidacy.

How do you evaluate the Democrats' shift to the left? Is that a clever move or the guarantee for four more years of Trump?

The Democrats have responded to the needs of American society and the Democratic base by moving to the left. Calling healthcare a right, not a privilege helped the Democrats' succeed in the mid-terms. Since Trump won in 2016, more and more people have become active all over the country. Masses of people reject politics by, and exclusively for, the wealthy. They're uniting – with much deeper engagement – in political parties like Working Families and the Democratic Socialists of America, in trade unions, immigrant and refugee associations, environmental organisations, and tons of other movements and groups.

What the Democrats need to win in 2020 is a campaign that targets manipulative Republicans and lobbyists, a campaign that promises good jobs, rising wages, good healthcare, affordable education and an end to corruption and nepotism à la Trump. Everyone's got to get involved. As Bernie Sanders says, "There's only one way that we can win – and that is together: Not me. *Us*."

The interview was conducted by Joanna Itzek.



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