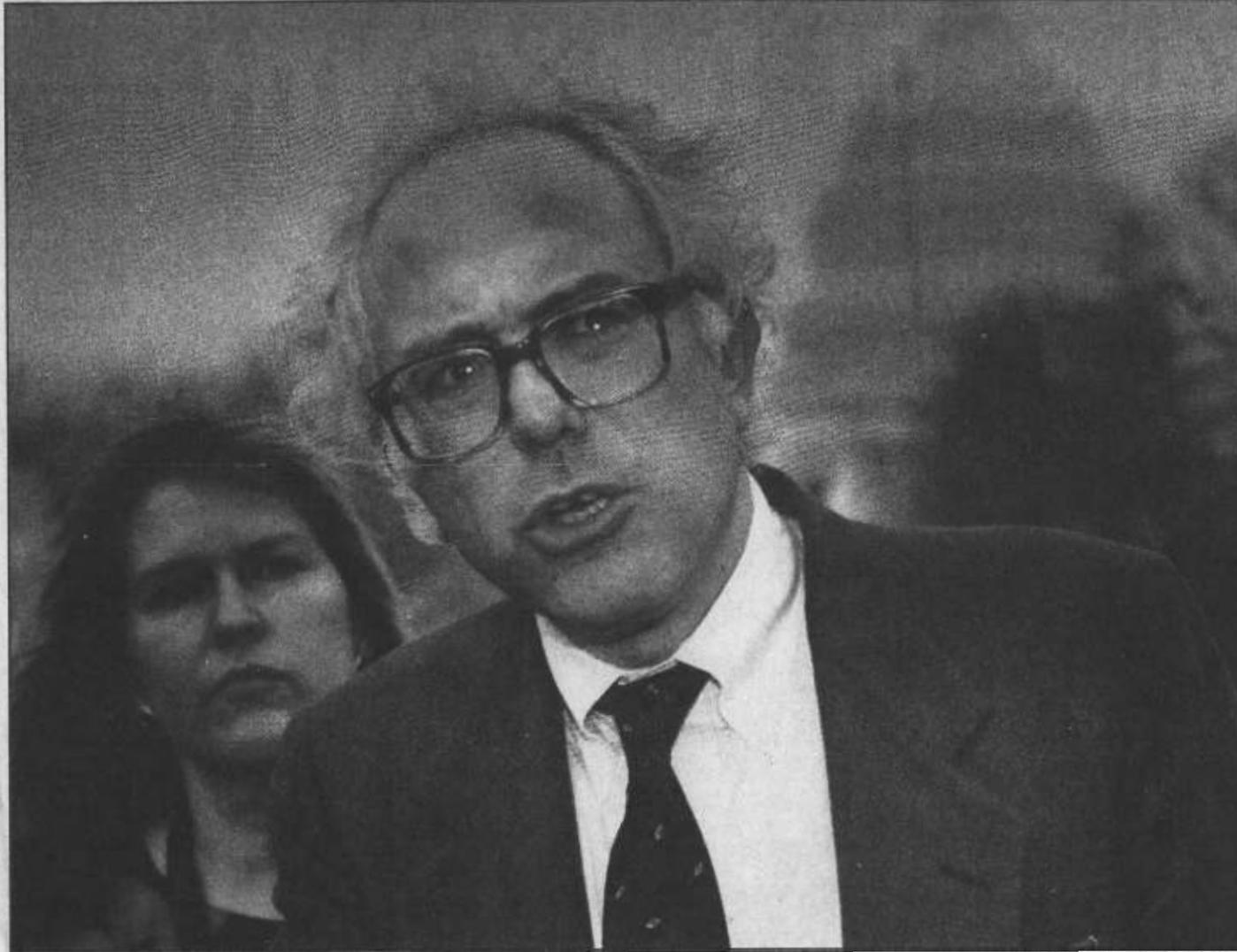


MR. SANDERS GOES TO WASHINGTON



REP. BERNIE SANDERS, VERMONT INDEPENDENT.

GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / MICHELE MCDONALD

The Vermont socialist aims to shake up the Capitol's political scene



By Sally Jacobs
GLOBE STAFF

WASHINGTON — It is just after noon and the freshman class of the 102d US Congress has concluded its ethics seminar early and is heading off for lunch. All of them, that is, but Bernie Sanders.

Sanders, Vermont's newly elected and sole congressman, is standing in front of the Cannon House Office Building in a persistent drizzle. Engulfed by a growing group of reporters and passersby, Sanders is conducting an impromptu seminar on one of his favorite topics.

"What do you think of socialism?" he queries a cluster of young people strolling by. "What happens if we were in France? Does that panic you? Would you be afraid to go to France?"

They shake their heads, giggle at this unexpected find. Sanders, warming to his topic, drops his battered leather briefcase to the wet ground and lobs another one.

"Do your parents worry about the cost of health care?" A chorus of yeses. "OK," he nods. "How many of you know how many countries there are in the entire industrialized world that do not have nationalized health care." Silence. "There're two. The United States and what other country? South Africa." A murmur of surprise. "Now, does that make you wonder about something?"

Bernie Sanders, Brooklyn native, socialist, four-term mayor of Burlington, Vt., and the first genuinely Independent candidate elected to Congress since 1950, has arrived in Washington. And this kind of talk is precisely why he's here. For Bernard Sanders' ambition is not just to represent the people of Vermont. Sanders, 48, aspires to nothing less than the revitalization of a disillusioned electorate and the establishment of an alternative to the "stale promises" of the Republican and Democratic

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Rep. Bernie Sanders, an Independent from Vermont, chats with passersby in Washington.

GARY STAFF PHOTOGRAPHY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mr. Sanders goes to Washington — to shake things up

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parties, what he calls a "progressive political party." Citizens of the nation, unite. You have nothing to lose but your party.

And in the trimly pressed, well-appointed world of Washington, Sanders looks like a dervish at a garden party. This is a man for whom politics is like oxygen, a politician who thrives on ideological debate. And debate he does. Sometimes with whomever will listen.

On a Washington street corner he talks with fervor about "redistribution of wealth" and "political revolution." In a crowded elevator he expounds on national health care, running his hands through his tousled white hair. ("Even on the elevator!" kids his wife, Jane, squeezed into an elevator corner.) He strides through subterranean hallways trailed by reporters, hiking up his wrinkled gray pants, shaking hands with insiders like an ambassador from the outside. He stands in the shadow of the Capitol and shakes his fist at the massive white dome, declares that his new colleagues have fallen out of touch with the people of America, laments that the spark of democracy has fizzled.

And that's just in the first few hours of his first official day in town.

"I have a vision which I think is quite different than most members of Congress," explained Sanders, on the first of several days of orientation for freshmen last week. "I want to change the conversation, to raise issues that are not being talked about, to provide a voice inside that building that is not always heard. I want to make people feel they're part of the process, part of a movement."

"The question is how do you get that reality," he added, swinging his arm toward the Capitol, "into that building."

The other question, of course, is how many people inside that building want to hear about it, or can be made to hear about it. As an Independent — the first elected since Henry Frazier Reams, an Ohio lawyer, in 1960 — Sanders exists outside the bipartisan framework upon which the Capitol fabric is stretched. Nor has he done much to endear himself to his new colleagues. Some diehard party loyalists were put off by Sanders' sharp criticism of both parties during his campaign for the House seat against Republican incumbent Peter Smith. Others simply perceive him as having negligible clout.

Indeed, while Sanders' Independent status looms large in the eyes of his supporters (dubbed "Sanderistas" in the days of his early mayoral success), there are others in Washington to whom the very notion of his radical politics is anathema — even though many acknowledge that Sanders' views are not all that different from some members of the Democratic Party's more liberal wing. In his opening remarks to the freshman class last week, House Minority Leader Robert H. Michel (R-Ill.) noted that the group included 26 Democrats and 18 Republicans. No mention of the Independent slumped in the black leather chair before him. Not a word about democratic socialism.

"So, it'll take a little while," Sanders said later, his normally intense expression relaxing into a broad smile. "It's been decades. But eventually, it'll be the Republicans, the Democrats and our Independent."

Not yet, though. Sanders' maverick status has already threatened to become a controversial issue among House Democrats, ignited by his bid to be admitted to the party's caucus, an organization that controls committee assignments and is critical to legislative support. A potentially divisive battle over the issue was averted when Sanders decided not to formally apply to the caucus, which had been scheduled to take up the issue yesterday.

Instead, House Speaker Thomas S. Foley (D-Wash.) said at a press conference yesterday that although Sanders would not be admitted to the caucus unless he joined the Democratic Party, he would be appointed to a committee. But whether Sanders will be allowed to acquire seniority or eventually hold a committee chairmanship, a post appointed by the caucus, was unclear yesterday. Democratic spokesmen said that the terms of Sanders' committee status will likely be ironed out later this week. But the issue was not so neatly resolved before some pointed political grandstanding had taken place.

While some liberal Democrats spoke in support of Sanders' admission, a group of conservative party members last week circulated a letter opposing his inclusion in the caucus. "The full privileges of the Democratic Party should not be given to a socialist," said Rep. Charles W. Stenholm (D-Texas), chairman of the Conservative Democratic Forum, who had said he would vote against Sanders. "I will not support Mr. Sanders' nomination to the Democratic Caucus unless he changes to the Democratic Party."

Although of a more liberal bent, Democratic Caucus Chairman Rep. Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.) met with Sanders last week and said pretty much the same thing, advising Sanders that "if he wanted to become a member, he had to be a Democrat," according to an aide. Sanders, to no one's surprise, promptly refused.

Sanders said yesterday that he was "delighted" with the outcome because he would be able to serve on one of the committees that deal with issues of concern to Vermonters. "What I was quite nervous about, to be honest, was becoming some kind of outcast and being shunted about from one committee to another which would not be dealing with Vermont's interests," Sanders said. "But that is not going to happen and I am quite happy about that."

Sanders, clearly, managed to survive this go-round without sacrificing his political principles. And it could be that the Democrats' effort to keep him at arm's length could benefit him in the long run, at least to the extent that it appears to bear out his charge that the two parties are ideologically moribund: Sanders, the man speaking on behalf of working-class men and women, the man who defied the status quo, the man who dared to take on the system, gets shut out.

Either way, no one, Sanders included, thinks that the job facing the lone Independent on Capitol Hill is going to be easy. As most see it, the looming question is how a man who has spent the better part of his life as a political outsider will fare in a game dominated by insiders. First and foremost, Sanders, like any other representative, is going to have to keep the folks back home happy.

"Everything depends on whether he can deliver for Vermont," said William Schneider, an analyst with

the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative research organization in Washington, D.C. "As long as he's effective, as long as he covers his bases in Vermont, he can advocate a flat world if he wants."

Just how well Sanders is able to perform for his constituency will likely determine Vermonters' enthusiasm for his efforts to foster a political revolution. And how well he does either will likely hinge on how he maneuvers his fringe position.

"In the first few months they'll try to make him the pet leftie, the media darling," said Garrison Nelson, a professor of political science at the University of Vermont. "He will become the C-Span favorite. He and [Rep.] Newt Gingrich [R-Ga.] will rage against each other. But if he is an outsider who is able to marshal the media in an effective manner, he will be able to make a difference."

Added Thomas Mann, director of governmental studies at the Brookings Institution, "If you're on the ideological fringe, you're not likely to be a real shaper of policies that emerge from the institution. On the other hand, there are those within the Democratic Party who yearn for a more principled and differentiated Democratic message, people who might relish the arrival of someone who would speak in unabashed fashion and give the party more of an edge."

Fringe status is nothing new to Sanders, who has spent more than two decades carrying the radical banner in a state that was once the most Republican in the union. His march has become the stuff of Green Mountain legend: four bids for office in the 1970s as a candidate of the Liberty Union party. Then, in 1980, the stunning 10-vote victory that put him in the mayor's office in Burlington, where he remained for eight years. In 1988, he was narrowly defeated in his first bid for Congress by Smith, who assumed the seat vacated by Jim Jeffords when he ran for the Senate. But in 1990, a time, to be sure, of voter frustration, all the years of campaigning, the solid mayoral record, the unwavering commitment to progressive ideals, the sheer determination, paid off in a 56 percent win.

"I'm still walking a little bit on a cloud," Sanders said, standing amid his freshman colleagues last week and taking in the lofty cream and gold-trimmed room, the massive chandeliers overhead. "It's enormously exciting."

For a man who almost single-handedly upset the status quo in Burlington a decade ago despite fierce antagonism, Washington looks like an intoxicating challenge. At last, a national stage for his goals of affordable housing, lower limits on campaign spending, a progressive income tax and universal health care. And last week, Sanders, flanked by his wife, armed with orientation materials, clad in crisp pink and white striped shirt and gray suit, was chatting to be off.

First, though, there were the closed-door crash courses on congressional conduct. One hour on allowances and expenses. One hour on congressional ethics. One hour on spouses' perspectives. Sanders took an early leave from the session to make some contacts concerning the impending caucus vote and to visit Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), leaving his wife to attend sessions on organization and office automation.

Like those of her husband of two years, Jane Sanders' political passions run deep. It was during a 1980

meeting with the former Burlington mayor, Gordon Paquette, that Jane Sanders first heard Sanders' name. Director of the Burlington Youth Office, Jane Sanders had paused in a heated debate with Paquette when the mayor archly observed, "You sound just like Bernie Sanders," she recalled. "I sat down and said, 'Who's Bernie Sanders?'"

On meeting Sanders shortly afterward, she found not just a kindred commitment to the needy and disenfranchised but a determination that has weathered countless campaigns. "Work is the shared basis of our relationship," said Jane Sanders, 39. "We both have the belief that government can make a difference in people's daily lives."

Although exhilarated to find themselves now working on a national level, neither Sanders intends to stray too far from Vermont. Sanders plans to hold a number of public meetings on issues back home and has already scheduled one on the Persian Gulf. Jane Sanders expects to divide her time between Vermont — where two of the couple's four children, all from previous marriages, will remain with her mother — and Washington, where she will help set up the office and work in human services.

In the meantime, there's a session on congressional rules and regulations, another one on members' benefits and services. There's a cocktail reception at the White House, a dinner hosted by Foley. And there's a lot of work to be done.

But, then, maybe a bit of it has already been taken care of. "The fact is that we've brought democratic socialism into the conversation. And that," Sanders added as he hurried toward a meeting, his arms loaded with papers, "is a major step."

ACTION	
NORTH AUSTIN CINEMA 4	5361 635-8520
THEATRE 10	1107 732-8900
THEATRE 11	9042-712-6520
THEATRE 12	6231 232-8800
THEATRE 13	4307 712-0400
ARLINGTON	
CAPITOL 204 MASS. AVE. 648-4300	
1. DREAM PRINCE IN 1825 FROM EGYPTIAN	
2. PASTORAL FROM THE EDGE (R)	4:30 7:00 9:30
3. JEREMY BENTHAM (R) (1991) (TV) (VHS)	
4. THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS (R)	4:30 7:00 9:30
5. THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS (R)	4:30 7:00 9:30
6. THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS (R)	4:30 7:00 9:30
7. THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS (R)	4:30 7:00 9:30
REGENT 7 MEDFORD ST. 643-1100	
"THE KILLER"	1:30 7:15 9:30
NORTH ATTLEBORO	
TRI-BORO CINEMAS (908) 695-4411	
1. THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS (R)	1:15 4:00 6:45
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BEVERLY HILLS	
STUDIO "ALWAYS OPEN 7 NIGHTS"	484-1700
"POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE" (R)	7:00-9:00

THE MOVIES

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