

How Did This Man Win?

Hardly anyone, including perhaps the candidate himself, believed the news Burlington voters sent City Hall last week: Get rid of five-term Mayor Gordon Paquette and give us socialist Bernard Sanders. UPI reporter Candace Page analyzes what sank the mayor's presumably unsinkable ship. In photo at right, Sanders is congratulated on election night by a campaign worker.

By CANDACE PAGE

BURLINGTON (UPI) — When Burlington elected New England's first socialist mayor in a generation, no one was more stunned than some of the people who voted for him.

Bernard Sanders, a rumpled 39-year-old political activist, forged a coalition of students, poor people and unhappy neighborhood groups last week to defeat five-term Democratic Mayor Gordon Paquette.

"The decisions in this city are not going to be made in the offices of banks and big businesses anymore," Sanders quickly promised.

If his 22-vote victory survives a recount, Sanders — who ran as an independent — will be the first avowed socialist to lead a New England city since Jasper McLevy led Bridgeport, Conn., in the 1940s and 50s.

Already, his win is a dramatic demonstration of how once conservative, rural Vermont has been transformed by the migration of professional people fleeing urban areas to the south.

Meanwhile, the political establishment of Burlington, a city of 38,000 on Lake Champlain, remained in shock.

In 10 years as mayor, Paquette had averaged 72

percent of the vote. He was considered so popular Republicans could not find anyone to run against him.

Even Sanders' voters were taken aback by the victory.

"It was sure a surprise to me that he won," said one Sanders' voter, Ben Bosher, a 32-year-old real estate salesman.

"I voted for Bernie as a protest against the mayor... he wasn't dealing with some of the important issues in the city."

In part, analysts said Paquette lost because he was on the wrong side of some neighborhood issues and because he backed a 65-cent tax increase overwhelmingly rejected by voters.

More importantly, they said, he was identified with the 10-year spurt of urban renewal projects that have absorbed most of the city's energies while transforming the face of downtown.

Sanders, meanwhile, downplayed his radical past and traded his jeans for a suit and tie.

Asked if he still considers himself a socialist, Sanders responded, "We're not discussing that now."

The Brooklyn, N.Y., native had already quit Vermont's

radical third party, the Liberty Union, which he helped found.

During his Burlington campaign he did not renew his former calls for worker-controlled government, public ownership of utilities and an end to compulsory education.

Instead, he promised assistance to low-income and elderly people and a voice for neighborhood groups at City

Hall — and beat Paquette in the two inner city wards where the mayor's political career began.

In addition, Sanders attracted voters who were casting their first ballots in Burlington, new professional people unimpressed by the stolid leadership of the city Democratic Party.

"The new voters are new to

Burlington. They're professional people who grew up in Boston or New York," University of Vermont political science professor Garrison Nelson said Saturday.

"They don't see (Paquette's) economic development as synonymous with progress — that's why they came to Vermont in the first place," he said.



photo: UPI