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SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



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BUILD A MASS MOVEMENT FOR \$15 / HOUR - Page 6

Fighting for the 99%

- ✪ No budget cuts to education and social services! Full funding for all community needs. A major increase in taxes on the rich and big business, not working people. The federal government should bail out states to prevent cuts and layoffs.
- ✪ Create living-wage union jobs for all the unemployed through public works programs to develop mass transit, renewable energy, infrastructure, health care, education, and affordable housing.
- ✪ Raise the federal minimum wage to \$15/hour, adjusted annually for cost of living increases, as a step toward a living wage for all.
- ✪ Free, high quality public education for all from pre-school through college. Cancel student debt. Full funding for schools to dramatically lower teacher-student ratios. Stop the focus on high stakes testing and the drive to privatize public education.
- ✪ Free, high quality health care for all. Replace the failed for-profit insurance companies with a publicly funded single-payer system as a step toward fully socialized medicine.
- ✪ A guaranteed decent pension for all. No cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid!
- ✪ Stop home foreclosures and evictions. For public ownership and democratic control of the major banks.
- ✪ A minimum guaranteed weekly income of \$600/week for the unemployed, disabled, stay-at-home parents, the elderly, and others unable to work.
- ✪ Repeal all anti-union laws like Taft-Hartley. For democratic unions run by the rank-and-file to fight for better pay, working conditions, and social services. Full-time union officials should be regularly elected and receive the average wage of those they represent.
- ✪ No more layoffs! Take bankrupt and failing companies into public ownership and retool them for socially necessary green production.
- ✪ Shorten the workweek with no loss in pay and benefits; share out the work with the unemployed and create new jobs.

Environmental Sustainability

- ✪ Fight climate change. Organize mass protests and civil disobedience to block the Keystone XL oil pipeline, coal export terminals, and fracking. Massive public investment in renewable energy and efficiency technologies to rapidly replace fossil fuels.
- ✪ A major expansion of public transportation to provide low-fare, high-speed, accessible transit.
- ✪ Public ownership of the big energy companies. All workers in polluting industries should be guaranteed retraining and new living-wage jobs in socially useful green production.

Equal Rights for All

- ✪ Fight discrimination based on race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age, and all other forms of prejudice. Equal pay for equal work.

- ✪ Immediate, unconditional legalization and equal rights for all undocumented immigrants.
- ✪ Build a mass movement against police brutality and the institutional racism of the criminal justice system. Invest in rehabilitation, job training, and living-wage jobs, not prisons! Abolish the death penalty.
- ✪ Fight sexual harassment, violence against women, and all forms of sexism.
- ✪ Defend a woman's right to choose whether and when to have children. For a publicly funded, single-payer health care system with free reproductive services, including all forms of birth control and safe, accessible abortions. Comprehensive sex education. Paid maternity and paternity leave. Fully subsidized, high-quality child care.
- ✪ Equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, including same-sex marriage.

Money for Jobs and Education, Not War

- ✪ End the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. Bring all the troops home now!
- ✪ Slash the military budget. No drones. Shut down Guantanamo.
- ✪ Repeal the Patriot Act, the NDAA, and all other attacks on democratic rights.

Break with the Two Parties of Big Business

- ✪ For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people, and activists from workplace, environmental, civil rights, and women's campaigns to provide a fighting, political alternative to the corporate parties.
- ✪ Workers and social movement organizations should stop funding and supporting the Democratic and Republican Parties and instead organize independent left-wing, anti-corporate candidates and coalitions as a first step toward building a workers' party.

Socialism and Internationalism

- ✪ Capitalism produces poverty, inequality, environmental destruction, and war. We need an international struggle against this system.
- ✪ Repeal corporate "free trade" agreements, which mean job losses and a race to the bottom for workers and the environment.
- ✪ Solidarity with the struggles of workers and oppressed peoples internationally: An injury to one is an injury to all.
- ✪ Take into public ownership the top 500 corporations and banks that dominate the U.S. economy. Run them under the democratic management of elected representatives of the workers and the broader public. Compensation to be paid on the basis of proven need to small investors, not millionaires.
- ✪ A democratic socialist plan for the economy based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people and the environment. For a socialist United States and a socialist world. ✪

WHY I AM A SOCIALIST

Toya Chester
East Boston, MA
ESL Teacher and Boston 15
Now Organizer



While growing up and attending school in the 90s, I was constantly taught the importance of a college education. More and more students were attending college each year; higher education was looked at as more of the normal thing to do for working-class people.

As young as elementary school, we visited different colleges, practiced test-taking skills and wrote sample college essays. By the time I got to high school, I thought I was completely prepared. After about one month of applying to different universities throughout the country, my mother had to sit me down and explain to me that she wouldn't be able to afford those schools. She said maybe it would be best if I only applied to the state schools in Massachusetts.

Four years later, I graduated from Framingham State and set out to look for a job. Due of the lack of jobs in my field and the growth of low-wage jobs, I waitressed for the next four years and obtained an overwhelming debt. I had

no health insurance and lost more and more hope for better days.

I am a socialist because there is no reason that anyone should not be able to attend any college or university simply due to a lack of funds. I am a socialist because no one should have to start their adult life thousands of dollars in debt. I am a socialist because I see the need for a fundamental change in the health care system. But most of all, I am a socialist because capitalism cannot solve any of these problems.

Go to SocialistAlternative.Org for Articles on Union Struggles at Boeing and Volkswagen



SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

At SocialistAlternative.Org, you can find articles about the struggles of union machinists at Boeing against the drastic cutbacks to workers' benefits proposed by the company. Also, check out our socialist analysis of the defeat of the auto workers' union drive in Chattanooga, Tennessee at a Volkswagen factory. The website will host daily updates and reports from activists around the country and a working-class analysis of current events.

In addition to these two excellent pieces on union struggles, you can find two new pamphlets at SocialistAlternative.Org. One goes into detail to explain Kshama Sawant's victory in becoming Seattle's socialist City Councilmember. The pamphlet is written by her campaign manager, Ramy Khalil. Also featured is a pamphlet on the socialist strategy to win a \$15/hour minimum wage in Seattle written by Patrick Ayers. Email info@socialistalternative.org to get bulk orders of these pamphlets for your union, community organization, 15 now action group or Socialist Alternative branch.

Amid Shallow "Recovery" and Political Instability

A New Revolt is Coming!

Bryan Koulouris

Working people in the US are fed up. After six years of mass unemployment and colossal cuts in education and social programs, we are told a "recovery" is under way. But the truth is that over 90% of the new wealth created has ended up in the pockets of the richest 1%. Profits are at record levels. Meanwhile, the majority of new jobs created are in the low-wage sector. Worldwide, an economic slowdown is underway in China, and the European markets continue to falter in crisis. A new financial reckoning and even full-scale depression is possible. Even during the current "recovery", there is no feeling of lasting stability or substantial growth.

Working People want a Bigger Share

It is no wonder then that working people are beginning to demand a larger share of the wealth created in the recovery. "Raise the Wage" groups are gathering steam throughout the country, and 15 Now in Seattle and nationally stands as a shining example of determined struggle for low-wage workers. There is a mass discussion in US society taking place on the subject of economic inequality.



Obama is calling for a national minimum wage of \$10.10, fully knowing that Congress won't pass that legislation. Many Democrats might focus on economic inequality in rhetoric, but this will be limited because of their nature as a party dominated by Wall Street and corporate America. They may actually turn away from the subject of inequality because they have little concrete solutions to offer, and

they don't want to create too many expectations among low-wage workers. Still, a movement from below is developing, and it won't be going away.

Simmering Anger

In addition to hundreds of actions demanding minimum wage increases, various other issues have triggered protests. In the

first few months of 2014, we've seen protests and direct action against the environmental destruction of BP and Keystone XL. In Albuquerque, New Mexico, there have been determined protests against police brutality, led by African-American and Latino youth. Women's groups protested against CEO attempts to avoid providing the limited reproductive health care required in some Obamacare programs. There is growing anger among immigrant workers at the massive scale of deportations under Obama. And the corporate offensive against public education is still going strong despite growing disillusionment among parents with "education reform". While the labor movement has suffered a series of defeats and continues to decline in numbers, a wing, inspired by Occupy, is beginning to assert itself and is developing a more aggressive approach to fighting for working people's interests.

These are the warning shots of the massive battles against corporate domination that are on the agenda this year and going forward.

Political Uncertainty

The Supreme Court's recent ruling continued on p. 11

Why I Was the Only Vote to Keep the NSA Out of Seattle



By Kshama Sawant, Seattle City Council Member and member of Socialist Alternative

As a socialist, I believe that democratic rights cannot develop or exist under a state of perpetual surveillance. For more than a decade now, the Department of Homeland Security has been actively expanding surveillance and domestic spying capabilities. At the same time, it has financed the brazen militarization of local police forces

on the ground. Both trends are unacceptable and inconsistent with the needs of working people. We have to push back.

Recently, I cast my first "No" vote on a council bill that expands the City of Seattle's facial recognition capabilities. The \$1.6 million Homeland Security grant also goes toward funding the Washington State Fusion Center, which coordinates data-sharing among state and local police, the National Security Administration (NSA), and private corporations for "counter-terrorism" purposes. I was the sole council member to vote "No."

First, I am unequivocally opposed to further empowering the Seattle Police Department with new technologies when excessive force and police brutality remain an unresolved issue in this city. A 2011 Department of Justice investigation found that Seattle police use excessive force a full 20% of the time. The report also documents discriminatory policing during pedestrian encounters, which is exactly where this expansion of facial recognition technology would be deployed by officers, (DOJ, "Investigation of the Seattle Police Department," 12/16/2011).

And police abuse is not my only concern. By implementing this facial recognition technology and providing additional funding to the Washington State Fusion Center, Seattle is playing an active role in

the expansion of the NSA's unlawful and unjustifiable domestic surveillance.

While claiming that their only focus is "counter-terrorism," in practice these Fusion Centers and their supporting agencies – the Department of Homeland Security, the NSA, and others – have systematically targeted activist organizations and social movements on behalf of both the federal government and big business. Revelation after revelation from whistle-blowers like Edward Snowden, Julian Assange, and Glenn Greenwald have shown that these surveillance programs are explicitly designed to maintain U.S. political and economic domination and to aid in the crackdown on domestic resistance.

For example, leaks from the Joint Threat Research Intelligence Group (JTRIG) illustrate some of the tactics the NSA and other agencies use to undermine activists. These include setting up a "honey-trap" (luring an activist into an illicit romantic affair and then exposing it), using an activist's social media accounts to send damaging messages to allies, and identifying and exploiting fracture points in activist groups (JTRIG, "The Art of Deception: Training for Online Covert Operations"). The ruling elite are forced to use these despicable tactics because they are unable to directly counter the strength of our ideas.

While mass online surveillance and

warrantless wiretapping began under the Bush administration, it has been greatly expanded under Obama to include data stored by Google, Facebook, Apple, YouTube, Skype, AOL, and additional telecommunications giants.

Obama claimed that his administration was going to be "the most transparent administration in history." He even encouraged whistle-blowing in 2008 when he described it as "acts of courage and patriotism ... which should be encouraged rather than stifled as they have been during the Bush administration," (The Guardian, 6/7/2013). In practice, the Obama administration has prosecuted more whistle-blowers than all previous presidents combined. And after Edward Snowden leaked thousands of documents revealing spying beyond everything previously imagined, Obama initially defended these programs before voicing the need for minor reforms that simply aim to legalize these practices.

The Democrats prove, time and again, that they are more interested in protecting the political and economic domination of the corporate elite than in protecting the basic rights of citizens. Only a new party of working people, free from the corrupting influence of big business, can fight back against this kind of surveillance and lay the groundwork for transforming society. I urge you to join the struggle.

Democratic Party Leadership Plays Politics with the Minimum Wage

Patrick Ayers

The Democratic Party leadership is staging a series of votes in the Senate on issues that would benefit the "pocketbooks" of working people in the US. The centerpiece is a proposal to raise the federal minimum wage to \$10.10/hour phased in over three years.

However, the main motivation for moving these proposals is not the needs of working people. Instead, the Democrats are desperate to mobilize their demoralized voting base for the midterm elections.

Historic inequality

More than 46 million people now live in poverty in the US. In 2012, the 1 percent took their largest share of national wealth since 1917. This has spurred a growing discussion in the US, helped by the explosion of Occupy Wall Street in 2011 which introduced the language of the 1 percent and 99 percent.

These historic levels of inequality also present a serious problem for the corporate elite and political establishment. On the one hand, some US

capitalists fear for the health of their own economic system, and see raising the minimum wage as a way to jump-start the ailing economy.

"Raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour would inject about \$450 billion into the economy each year," wrote multimillionaire investor Nick Hanauer. "That would give more purchasing power to millions of poor and lower-middle-class Americans, and would stimulate buying, production and hiring." ("The Capitalist Case for a \$15 Minimum Wage," bloombergview.com, 6/19/13)

On the other hand, the more far-sighted political thinkers among the elite fear the yawning gap between rich and poor could undermine the political establishment and capitalism itself.

"Reform is less risky than revolution, but the longer we wait the more likely it will be the latter," wrote Robert Reich, former Labor Secretary under President Bill Clinton. With MoveOn.org, Reich has sponsored a petition calling on President Obama to support raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour. (robertreich.org, 1/25/14)

However, the vast majority of the 1

percent opposes raising the minimum wage. One of the co-founders of Home Depot, billionaire Ken Langone, compared the Democrat's increasing talk about inequality to the rhetoric of Nazi Germany! (politico.com, 3/18/14)

Low-balled

Raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 over three years is better than nothing. But, \$10.10 is hardly enough to live on and will only make a small dent towards addressing the needs of millions living in poverty.

It would take three years for the minimum wage to reach \$10.10, and although ultimately a 40 percent increase, the federal minimum wage would still be far lower than it was in 1968 when adjusted for inflation.

If workers' wages had kept up with tremendous gains in workers' productivity over the past forty-five years the minimum wage would be more than \$20/hour today. In many cities where the cost of living is far too high for workers

to scrape by on \$10.10/hour, fast-food worker protests and strikes have been demanding \$15/hour.

Strategy Fail

On top of this, the Democratic Party leaders do not have a serious strategy to achieve even a modest increase in the minimum wage. They will hold a few symbolic votes in a dysfunctional Congress with no vision beyond turning out votes for the November midterms.

The minimum wage vote will fail, "but in doing so," wrote Politico.com, "Democrats can blame Republicans for obstructing poll-tested legislation during an election year and stoke progressive opposition to the GOP." (3/26/14)

Nearly 70 percent of voters support raising the minimum wage including more than half of all voters who identify as Republicans. The Democratic Party leadership wants to tap this popular support merely to provide a "contrast" with the Republicans.

The cynicism of the Democratic Party is shown wherever they are in power. In Minnesota, where they control the Governor's office and both houses of the state legislature, the Democrats barely passed a watered down \$9.50 minimum wage,

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New York: The Limits of De Blasio's Populism

Leon Pinsky

The election of populist Bill de Blasio as mayor of New York City a few months ago raised real expectations among working-class New Yorkers, who understandably celebrated the end of 12 years of multibillionaire Mike Bloomberg's direct rule on behalf of Wall Street. In his first months in office, de Blasio has set out to fulfill some of his campaign promises and has, predictably, faced serious resistance, mainly from his fellow Democrat, Governor Andrew Cuomo. But the outcome of the loud debate with Cuomo also shows the limits of left populism and the need for serious social struggle in order to win victories.

Progressive Measures

The essence of de Blasio's campaign for mayor was a clear message: NYC represents the tale of two cities, that is,

massive and growing social inequality. De Blasio's campaign reflected pressure from below and a shift to the left in the city. But it also reflected a division in the elite about how to respond to the new situation, with one wing seeing a need for some limited reforms - partly to stave off more serious unrest - while the other wishes to pursue unrelenting class war against the 99%.

Since being elected, de Blasio has indeed set out to enact a series of progressive measures, albeit with serious limitations. For example, he rapidly announced the significant scaling back of the hated "Stop and Frisk" policy of the New York Police Department. This was a real step forward, although not quite the "end the era of stop-and-frisk policing" promised during his election campaign. In March, de Blasio also signed a bill that extends the right to paid sick leave to a further 500,000



De Blasio promised to end the racist "Stop and Frisk" policy

workers in the city. He has supported raising the minimum wage and has backed a bill in the state legislature to

let NYC raise its own minimum wage higher than the state's, although he hasn't stated a figure for what he wants

Why Bernie Should Run As an Independent

Bernie Sanders for President in 2016?

By Tom Crean

It is becoming increasingly clear that the economic and political situation in the US has created a massive opening for authentic left politics, probably the biggest opening in several decades. After six years of mass unemployment and savage austerity, people are utterly fed up. Occupy changed the political discourse and now the main issue in US society is the staggering scale of social inequality and what to do about it.

The "House of Representatives", dominated by right wing Republicans elected in gerrymandered districts, is totally unrepresentative of ordinary people. Meanwhile the Democrats under Obama have paid lip service to helping those suffering from the effects of capitalism's crisis. But in practice they bailed out Wall Street and have caved in to the right on issue after issue. Disillusionment with the dysfunctional political system has led a majority of the US population to identify itself as "independent".

Last fall nearly 100,000 people in Seattle voted for an openly socialist candidate, Kshama Sawant. In Lorraine County, Ohio a slate of labor-backed candidates most of whom ran independently of the Democrats, was swept into office. Now potentially viable left and socialist candidacies are being announced in other cities. And within the

Democratic Party itself there is the emergence of a populist wing including Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren and newly-elected New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio.

This massive political opening on the left is what makes the announcement by independent Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, in interviews for Time and The Nation that he is seriously considering running for president, so significant. Socialist Alternative welcomes the fact that Sanders is seeking a dialogue with progressive and left activists inside and outside the Democratic Party about whether he should run and if so whether he should run in the Democratic primaries or as independent left candidate.

Bernie Sanders, a genuine progressive

Sanders was first elected as Mayor of Burlington Vermont in 1981; he then went on to be an eight term member of the House of Representatives before being elected to the Senate in 2006. He has consistently stood up on issues directly affecting the interests of working people. He has been a prominent and consistent advocate of a universal health care system and "single-payer". He opposed the bailout of the banks in 2008. He has also spoken out strongly on a range of

environmental issues.

In raising the possibility of running for president, Bernie correctly states that "somebody has got to represent the working-class and the middle-class of this country in standing up to the big-money interests who have so much power over the economic and political life of this country." He talks about the need for a "political revolution" in the US in order to "empower people to take control over their lives."

A self-described "democratic socialist" he states that "I do not want to see the United States significantly dominated by a handful of billionaire families controlling the economic and political life of the country... I do believe that in a democratic, civilized society, all people are entitled to health care as a right, all people are entitled to quality education as a right, all people are entitled to decent jobs and a decent income, and that we need a government which represents ordinary Americans and not just the wealthy and the powerful."

While Bernie Sanders clearly stands out as a genuine progressive and a champion of ordinary people, Socialist Alternative does not agree with him on all issues. For example, he argues that the model for socialist policies is the Nordic countries, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway. The reality is that while these societies had highly evolved welfare states, the social gains made by working



Senator Bernie Sanders from Vermont helps working people organize

people there have been under attack as in all capitalist countries from neo-liberals often with the support of social democrats.

Also while Bernie honorably opposed both the Patriot Act and the invasion of Iraq, he has on numerous occasions voted for military appropriations. Regrettably, he did not oppose the war in Afghanistan and his position on the use of drone strikes has been ambiguous at best. These and other issues would clearly need to be discussed through in laying the basis for a presidential campaign of the left.

But our most pressing difference is on the Democratic Party. Bernie Sanders has remained formally independent of the Democrats, but in reality he has not posed the need

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De Blasio Continued from p. 4

as a new minimum wage.

Wall Street Pushes Back

However, de Blasio's biggest fights to date have centered on education policy. He came out swinging in January for his proposal to tax the wealthy to pay for universal pre-K in New York City. However, this required approval in Albany, the state capital. He also said that he would begin to charge rent to charter schools that are "co-located" with public schools in public school buildings. Under Bloomberg, they had received a free ride as wave after wave of school closings were pushed through to create space for ever more charters. This was all part of the corporate drive to privatize public education.

But de Blasio's modest proposals met with a ferocious push-back from Governor Cuomo and charter school leaders, backed by Wall Street and hedge-fund managers, who play a big role in bank-rolling charters. Cuomo was clearly representing the majority of the corporate

establishment, and Wall Street in particular, who want no challenge to the status quo and have set out to clip de Blasio's wings.

De Blasio Takes a Hit

De Blasio did not initially back down, but neither did he mobilize the students, teachers, and parents in public schools, who vastly outnumber the charter supporters and are overwhelmingly opposed to charter "co-locations," endless budget cuts, and high-stakes testing. This allowed the corporate charters to move on the offensive with a \$5 million advertising blitz.

De Blasio was outgunned, and he began "reaching out" to the charter school supporters. By the end of March, Cuomo had gotten the Republicans and Democrats in the state legislature, as part of budget negotiations, to agree to fund pre-K out of general education funds - without raising taxes on the wealthy. The Albany politicians also agreed to give charter schools even more access to public school buildings by requiring the city to provide space to new

and expanding charters or contribute to the cost of renting private buildings.

The Need for Serious Struggle

De Blasio can fairly claim that without his push there would be no prospect of a significant expansion of pre-K next fall. However, the failure of de Blasio and the teachers' union to mobilize working people to defend public education and push for a massive increase in funding for education left it open to Cuomo, Moskowitz, and their hedge-fund buddies to pretend that charter school students and parents were being attacked and to confuse the issues.

Socialist Alternative fully supports higher taxes on the rich, raising the minimum wage to a level that would really allow hundreds of thousands to begin to escape poverty, ending police violence, reversing all the cuts to education, and a moratorium on further charter schools. But these gains will not be achieved without serious social struggle. Fundamentally, neither the Democratic Party as a whole, nor its populist wing represented by de Blasio, nor, unfortunately, the bulk

of trade union leaders are prepared to countenance this path.

Next up for de Blasio is addressing the legitimate demands of city workers for retroactive pay increases after years in which Bloomberg basically refused to negotiate new contracts. The word is that de Blasio may agree to some retroactive pay in return for making workers pay more for health care - the usual approach of establishment politicians.

The hope of millions in New York and around the country cannot be realized by electing Democratic populists into office. The victory of Socialist Alternative candidate Kshama Sawant in Seattle and the development of a serious grassroots campaign for a \$15/hr minimum wage in that city points to the need for a clean break with the Democratic Party. As we can see in New York, Wall Street and their representatives will step in as soon as they perceive even a minimal challenge to their interests. Only a movement from below, built and organized by working people, can challenge the major corporations and their parties.

Socialist Strategy for Struggle

How We Can Win \$15 an Hour in Seattle

Steven Klements

15 Now and the fight for 15 won the public debate earlier this year. 68% of people polled in Seattle support a raise of the minimum wage to \$15 per hour – without loopholes and exemptions

Then a University of California, Berkeley study commissioned by Seattle Mayor Murray's Income Inequality Advisory Committee showed that the claims about job losses due to wage increases were not backed up by any evidence. To the contrary, higher wages are linked to job creation.

Still, big business is increasingly pushing back with daily propaganda in the mass media and a clever strategy of hiding behind small businesses and spreading false rumors about 15 now proposals, claiming that we want to "abolish tips."

After three months with hardly anything happening on the Income Inequality Advisory Committee or the City Council, the real demands of business were revealed in early April: A phase-in for big business over years and a nine year (!) phase-in for small businesses. The advocates of poverty wages are insisting on tip penalties and "total compensation" (which allows employers to pay less than that minimum if they pay for health care, discounts on meals, vacation time, or paid sick time off). Both tip penalty and total compensation are corporate loopholes designed to allow business to avoid paying a minimum of \$15 in actual practice.

Rebuilding Labor Through a Mass Campaign

A strong, united labor movement, based on active trade unions, community and campaign organizations could use the huge public support in Seattle to set a nationwide

example, raise the minimum wage to \$15, and lift 100,000 Seattle workers plus their families out of poverty.

15 now and Socialist Alternative are organizing to build a grassroots movement. Action groups in neighborhoods, workplaces and campuses are needed to argue the case for a strong \$15 and against all the slanders that are being and will be brought up.

Kshama Sawant, Seattle's socialist city council member, has outlined how such a movement can be part of rebuilding labor, strengthening the workers' movement and encouraging workers to get organized in trade unions.

This can be an inspiration and a model for the rest of the country. The minimum wage debate can develop into a turning point. After decades of decline, labor could start to rebuild its forces and regain momentum to defend wages as well as working and living conditions.

Where are the Labor Leaders?

But labor's leaders are far from being united to support these efforts. Some trade unions, like WFSE, the local AFSCME affiliate, support 15 Now energetically with money and resources. Other leaders support a mass movement, but cautiously.

However, the main strategy of labor leaders, among them the influential co-chair of the Advisory Committee and President of SEIU 775, David Rolf, is to get a deal with local businesses for a minimum wage increase through negotiations. To avoid big business and Super-PACs from stepping into the battle, they have argued for trying to appease business. This means that they often avoid mobilizing working people into action if they think it will disrupt negotiations.

Beginning the mass signature collection



Sarah White and Jess Spear filing the ballot initiative in Seattle on April 14.

effort for a Charter Amendment is the best tool currently available to organize and systematically educate hundreds of thousands in Seattle in May and June. Still, labor leaders have argued against taking such a step out of a fear that it will provoke big business into filing their own counter-initiative and unleash tens of millions of dollars in an effort to defeat us.

But did these labor leaders' strategy of "concessions" and "corporate partnership" help to prevent attacks of corporate US America over the past three decades? Not at all. The strategy of avoiding mobilizing working-class people resulted in a decline of union activism and unrelenting attacks on good jobs and labor rights. This is the basis for further set-backs.

We have to end this vicious cycle of corporate attacks without an organized struggle for working people. The national debate about income inequality and raising the minimum wage is a historic chance to do so.

Organizing to Win

With 15 now's campaign to collect 50,000 signatures in May and June to get a charter amendment on the November ballot - a popular vote to add a minimum wage of \$15 plus annual cost of living adjustment to

the city's charter - the ingredients are there to build such a movement.

Through organizing a grassroots effort of regular tabling, door knocking, house parties and neighborhood meetings, thousands can be brought into activity. Many workers and students who are currently passively supporting \$15 can be brought into energetic support to collect signatures in their workplaces and schools, among their family and friends, and in their churches and mosques. On this basis, 15 now aims to bring hundreds of new workers and youth can be brought into activity and go from 11 to 50 neighborhood action groups and establish democratic structures for the movement to build in Seattle and spread nationally.

15 now is organizing this intense effort to counter the pressures of corporate control of politics and the media. A 15 now conference in June will then bring the activists together to draw conclusions: if the City Council does not deliver a real \$15, and the movement is strong enough to go ahead, then the signatures will be handed in to trigger a popular vote in the November election. On the other hand, if the City Council establishes a meaningful increase in the minimum wage, then the movement will go on to address many more issues to make Seattle affordable: rent control, taxing the super-rich to fund

The Charter Amendment for \$15 in Seattle

The proposal for a Charter Amendment endorsed by 15 now and Socialist Alternative puts forward a strong \$15/hour minimum wage. It includes a clear "NO!" to "total compensation" and "tip credits". It will force big business to pay a minimum of \$15 per hour in Seattle, starting with January 1, 2015. Small businesses and non-profits will be phased-in from \$11 to \$15 with a cost of living adjustment over 3 years. On January 1, 2018, all workers in Seattle will benefit from a minimum wage of \$15/hour annually adjusted to the cost of living. This will lift 100,000 workers in Seattle out of poverty wages.

This is a first step to make Seattle affordable for all.



15 Now in Seattle

Onto the Ballot, Into the Streets!

Below, Ginger Jentzen interviews 15 now Organizing Director Jess Spear to discuss the movements successes and next steps.

Ginger: How did 15 Now get started?

JESS: During the Sawant election campaign, we had over 400 volunteers discussing rent control, a millionaire's tax, and a \$15 minimum wage with potential voters, all over Seattle. Bolstered by the fast food workers moving into action, walking out on 1-day strikes, the \$15 minimum wage issue received a tremendous echo.

Following the election campaign, our newly elected Councilmember Kshama Sawant helped to launch 15 Now to organize the support for \$15 into a grassroots movement. The support for this strategy was shown by the successful launch rally on January 12th, where fast food workers, union leaders, organizers of the SeaTac Prop 1, and many others spoke on the need to rely on the strength of our movement, not the political establishment or the Mayor's Income Inequality committee. This message received thunderous applause and standing ovations in a union hall filled to capacity (and overflowing into the hallway) with activists, former Sawant volunteers, and local unions and community groups, like Casa Latina, Teamsters 118, WFSE Local 1488 and members of the King County Labor Council. It is through our organizing and development of deep roots in the community that we can successfully answer the corporate campaign sure to come -- big business spent around \$1 million against the \$15 initiative in SeaTac last year -- and the disinformation they'll spread to protect profits.

In the US, there's tremendous anger

against the massive income inequality we're experiencing. For the majority of us, the "recovery" has yet to come, while news article after news article reports that corporations are raking in record profits and CEO pay continues to increase. Obama's \$10.10 proposal shows that the Democrats recognize that demands for a higher minimum wage aren't going away, that the movements will continue to grow.

Sawant is one socialist on a city council of 9, and she's only as strong as the movement supporting a push for a higher minimum wage. To win \$15 and begin rebuilding the worker's movement, it was crucial to continue to build on the momentum from the fast-food strikes over the past 2 years, the passage of SeaTac prop 1, and the Sawant victory. Real gains are made only when workers get organized and demand their rights, in the streets.

In January, labor conducted a poll that showed 68% of likely Seattle voters supported a full \$15/hr, no exemptions, no delay. To turn this passive support into worker power, 15 Now organized workshops and a rally on February 15th, with over 400 people in attendance. District Action Groups were launched out this "Day of Organizing, Education, & Music," and committees formed to organize a week of action leading up to a massive march on March 15th. Green Party 2012 Presidential candidate Jill Stein spoke alongside supporters from El Comité (a local immigrant rights organization). The enthusiasm to build support for \$15 was electric.

On March 5th, the Seattle city council held its first town hall meeting for public testimony on \$15/hr. After 4 hours and over 94 public comments, it was clear: the sea of red shirts and 74 speakers in support (compared

to 11 against a full \$15), Seattle demands a strong \$15/hr.

Immediately after the town hall, 15 Now Action Groups were visible all over the city, with banner drops, protests, and tabling to mobilize supporters to the March 15th March for \$15.

The take-away message from March 15th was that the 15 Now movement in Seattle is strong and vibrant, but there is tremendous potential to spread this movement nationally. All workers need a raise. Living costs across the country are rising faster than worker's wages. The inspiration and confidence workers feel across the country is connected to the growth of Seattle's movement, and a victory here will ripple out, sparking new grassroots movements for \$15.

Ginger: Why go for a ballot initiative?

JESS: We recognize that big business is going to use every resource available to them to fight for their interests, to protect their profits. The threat of a credible ballot initiative, with hundreds and hundreds of supporters collecting signatures and threatening to put it on the November ballot, gives workers the power to continue pressuring elected officials until they make a decision in late June. They are essentially signalling to the politicians: if you don't pass a strong \$15, without loopholes and needless delay, we will put it to the voters. This tactic will be put to the April 26th conference, where 15 Now activists will democratically decide the direction for 15 Now.

For socialists the movement is also about raising the consciousness and building the fighting capacity of the working class. We have to recognize that working class people

have been beaten back over decades, after a history of defeats to the labor movement, and the economic recession. Many people accept the capitalist limitations for what workers can get from the bosses.

Winning a 61% increase in wages would set the sights of the union rank and file much higher and will make it much harder for their leaders to bring them contracts with penny wage increases and cuts to their pensions. A win in Seattle, achieved by a grassroots movement, will have a wildfire effect on the confidence of the worker's movement across the U.S. and around the world.



15 Now Campaign Growing Nationally

By Ginger Jentzen

Inspired by the call for \$15 and a union put forward by striking fast-food workers two years ago, the 15 now campaign for a \$15/ hr minimum wage was launched in Seattle last January with the support of Socialist Alternative city council member Kshama Sawant alongside numerous union and community members. In March, 15 now organized demonstrations across Seattle, and called for a national week of actions to invigorate the growth of 15 Now chapters in cities across the US.

The 15 Now National week of action, spanning from International Women's day on March 7th to a March for \$15 on March 15th saw actions in 21 cities across the country, ranging from speak-outs which highlighted

the effects of poverty pay on women workers and their families (66% of minimum wage earners are women), to marches at fast-food chains like Subway and McDonalds, to public meetings to discuss \$15/hr as a key struggle for immigrants' rights and the fight against racial and gender inequality. Among other cities, actions were held in Boston, MA; Brooklyn, NY; Columbus, OH; Davis, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Minneapolis, MN; Mobile, AL; Spokane, WA; Worcester, MA; Grand Rapids, MI; Madison, WI; Tampa, FL; Portland (both ME and OR); Tacoma, WA; and Chicago, IL.

During the week, Seattle's Action Groups performed banner drops, phone banked, leafleted at super markets, and as a result were able to mobilize 750 people to Seattle's March for \$15th on March 15th. The



15 Now rally in Chicago

Action Groups discuss the ever-changing situation in Seattle, increase the pressure from below on the city establishment in organized actions like the protests against Starbucks' CEO Howard Schultz, who used small business as a prop to protect his \$9,000/day paycheck, saying "Starbucks can afford [15] but I worry about the small businesses and non-profits." The creation of these grassroots community councils, sourcing campaign

activity and democratic discussion about the next stages of the movement, flows from a socialist perspective and the benefit of drawing-out lessons while engaging in an historic struggle for a \$15 minimum wage.

Organized actions from the district groups is essential to visibility in the fight for \$15.

START your own action group! Don't know where to begin? Contact info@15now.org or check out the "Action Groups

Answering Corporate Propaganda

Calvin Pope

The growing movement for a \$15 an hour minimum wage has inspired millions of workers and activists around the country. The most crucial battle is centered in Seattle, where massive support has developed for \$15 and the issue prepares to go in front of the city council.

While the struggles of low-paid workers put the \$15 demand on the table, the impetus in Seattle has been the election of socialist Kshama Sawant to the city council on a platform of \$15 an hour, the victory of the \$15 an hour minimum wage initiative in nearby SeaTac, and the major strides made by the new grassroots organization 15 now.

Corporate Counteroffensive

Business has been on the back foot since the election of Kshama Sawant and the launch of 15 now, with a poll in February showing 68% of likely voters in Seattle supporting \$15 with no exemptions or delay. Recognizing that \$15 could not be opposed openly, business settled on a strategy of trying to riddle the minimum wage with loopholes - in particular, supporting \$15 in name but calling for a "smart" approach that includes tip penalty and something they call "total compensation."

The counteroffensive has ramped up, with The Seattle Times increasingly providing a bullhorn for business, and in recent weeks three business coalitions were launched to oppose \$15. These coalitions - with progressive-sounding names like Forward Seattle, Sustainable Wages, and OneSeattle - all hide behind small business as a strategy to whip up fear and play on genuine sympathies for small proprietors. All three purport to support raising the minimum wage - but in the "right" way. In reality, their purpose is to unleash millions in corporate cash against \$15 in Seattle. It was recently leaked in The Stranger newspaper that OneSeattle is a front

for Chamber of Commerce members like Starbucks, McDonald's, Amazon, and the notoriously right-wing Washington Restaurant Association.

Total Compensation - Doing \$15 Right?

At the heart of the business propaganda war is the attempt to engineer a gaping loophole in the minimum wage called "total compensation." Total compensation seeks to do nothing less than redefine the word "wage" by including tips, health care, pensions, and other benefits in the calculation of \$15 an hour, thereby effectively gutting the minimum wage.

The net effect of total compensation would be that many workers would get little or no raise, with numerous deductions against their wages. It would also open the door wide to wage theft, as most workers would not be able to tell whether they were being paid the legal minimum or not, with deduction after deduction obscuring their real wages. Wage theft is already rampant, with 25% of low-wage workers experiencing it. It is particularly widespread in states that allow a lower minimum wage to be paid to tipped workers, with the bosses required to make up the difference if those tips don't bring workers to the minimum. In reality, many companies simply don't pay the full minimum when it's not met by tips, quietly pocketing the difference.

\$15 Plus or Minus Tips?

A "tip penalty," which exists in most states in the U.S., would exclude many tipped workers from benefiting from \$15, as their tips would be deducted from their wages. It would also be a huge step backward in Washington State, which is one of seven states that have defended against tip penalties and where tipped workers currently get the full minimum wage plus tips.

Nonetheless, OneSeattle and other business groups have seized on the

issue of tips in an attempt to organize tipped workers around lie that 15 now is coming after their tips and calling for an end to tipping. At the same time, it argues that if \$15 is passed in Seattle it will effectively mean an end to tipping. In reality, 15 now and the Seattle labor movement have campaigned extensively against the inclusion of tips in the minimum wage and for workers to be paid the full \$15 plus tips. The argument that raising the minimum to \$15 would lead customers to stop paying tips is also completely false. There are no data showing that tipping has been undermined anywhere the minimum wage has been raised.

For more on the tip penalty, see the article on page 11 in this issue of Socialist Alternative.

The Bosses: "Do You Want \$15 or Do You Want a Job?"

Every time a minimum wage raise has been proposed, big business has made hyperbolic arguments about the threat of widespread job losses. It has simply never happened.

The mayor's Income Inequality Advisory Committee gathered extensive data from past increases of the minimum wage in other cities and counties. The finding: no support for significant increases in unemployment anywhere the minimum wage was raised, while some areas showed increases in employment levels. Washington State, which has the highest minimum wage in the country, also has one of the highest employment levels.

At the same time that fear-mongering about job losses has been promoted in the corporate media, business owners in Seattle have been calling workers into closed-door meetings where they are forced to listen to anti-\$15 arguments - in particular, the threat of losing their jobs if \$15 were to pass.

The argument that raising the minimum wage would lead to widespread layoffs is always at the heart of the big business campaigns against raising the



Starbucks CEO Howard Shultz spoke out against the fight for 15

minimum wage. This is because business knows that working people constantly face the danger of unemployment under capitalism and are correctly wary of threats to the jobs they rely on.

What About Small Business?

A major argument has been concern for the effects on small businesses. Obviously, if Starbucks or McDonald's pleaded poverty, it would not have any effect. By wrapping themselves in the clothing of the individual entrepreneur trying to work his or her way to a middle-class lifestyle, big business hopes to confuse and derail our movement.

Small businesses, like working people, have suffered badly in the post-2008 economy. So, what will the effects of \$15-an-hour legislation have on small business? It is not easy to be definitive. Many will benefit from the increased buying power of consumers created by the increase in wages, while others will be squeezed. This is reflected in how some small businesses support a \$15 minimum wage for their employees, while others oppose it.

That's why Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative, and the 15 now campaign support passing legislation in the city council, and at a state level, for a tax on millionaires to provide relief and subsidies for small businesses that are having trouble



Republican politician John Boehner said he would rather commit suicide than increase the minimum wage

paying a \$15 minimum wage.

At the same time as Kshama Sawant and 15 now fight to pass a strong \$15 ordinance on the city council, they also advocate for a ballot initiative to give working people a backup option. But because of the limitations of a ballot initiative, the needs of small businesses and non-profits have to be addressed in a different way. Sawant and 15 now call for a three-year phase-in for small businesses and non-profits to allow them time to adjust to the higher minimum.

What Are the Benefits of \$15?

A recent study found that raising the minimum wage would lift more than 100,000 workers out of poverty in Seattle. Nationally, a raise to \$15 would inject \$450 billion into the struggling U.S. economy, currently stagnating due to lack of consumer demand.

Raising the minimum wage to \$15

is both an urgent measure for underpaid workers and an essential move to address the economic crisis.

The minimum wage is a "price floor," and raising it will not only benefit low-wage workers but will also generate raised wages and higher standards of living for many other workers. So, you might ask, if this is true, who will the minimum wage hurt, and why is there opposition to it? The answer is that poverty wages are an important source of profits for big business, and that is why big business strongly opposes it.

The movement to raise the minimum wage to \$15 is of great national and international significance. Winning \$15 will be one of the biggest victories for the U.S. working class in decades, and it will inspire millions of workers globally. It will spur on the struggle against the massive inequality created by capitalism, and lead in the direction of a socialist world based on the needs and aspirations of the immense majority.

A Woman's Case for Rejecting the "Tip Credit"

Anh Tran, Seattle

As it turns out, the fight for higher wages has been a women's rights issue all along. Women are taking leading roles in the minimum wage struggle, putting their bodies on the line, and joining their voices with the multitudes of workers because a higher wage floor of just a few dollars means 7.4 million families headed by single mothers could be lifted from the most extreme poverty. It means women could afford another year of rent and utilities, another year and a half of groceries, another year and a half of child care, or another two years and 10 months of student loan payments. It means narrowing the gender wage gap that is costing every woman almost half a million dollars by the time she retires. (National Women's Law Center, 4/3/2013).

Fighting for \$15/hr is a matter of survival for the women who compose 2/3 of the low-wage workforce. But as the minimum wage debate rages on, tip credits and other

exemptions have been propagandized as the necessary compromise between workers and business owners. So women have found that they hold a special interest in defending a \$15 minimum wage not just in name, but also in substance.

What Would a Tip Credit Mean for Working Women?

The tip credit allows employers to count tips toward the minimum wage, thereby allowing businesses to pay the federal tipped sub-minimum wage of only \$2.13/hr (Department of Labor, 2014). This wage has been frozen since 1991 and has, therefore, lost 58% of its value as costs of living skyrocketed. We need to call the tip credit for what it really is: a tip penalty for all workers, but especially women and people of color.

Tipped work is one of the lowest-paid occupations, in addition to being one of the fastest-growing. The tip penalty will undermine the potential of a \$15 minimum wage

to lift out of poverty the tipped restaurant workers that make up almost 50% of sub-minimum-wage workers. Women, in particular, are 71% of restaurant servers and 66% of all tipped workers that are forced to feed families on these unstable incomes, (Restaurant Opportunities Center United, 2012). A tip penalty will further entrench the depressing poverty rate among women working in restaurants, a rate which is already three times higher than men in the same industry.

A tip penalty will intensify the wage theft crisis. In states with tip penalties, the employer is legally required to pay the difference if workers do not make the minimum wage with their tips. Despite this, 26% of workers still don't earn the legal minimum because these laws are replete with loopholes, are frequently broken, and are rarely enforced (Puget Sound Sage, 2014). Women are especially harmed, being 50% more likely to face wage theft than men. And people of color are two to four times

more likely to have wages stolen (National Employment Law Project, 2009).

The tip penalty will aggravate the already appalling gender pay gap in the restaurant industry, where a full-time female server can only expect to earn 68% of the wages of her male counterpart. For black women, the figure drops to 60% (National Women's Law Center, 2011). The reasons for this pay gap are numerous, including discriminatory practices of employers and the de facto gender discrimination embedded in the federal sub-minimum wage. In addition, women are concentrated in the lowest-paid positions (host, counter attendant, food prep, and server) within the lowest-paying restaurants (fast-food and family style). They tend to work morning/afternoon shifts with fewer opportunities for tips due to shouldering responsibilities for child care and care for the elderly during the rest of the day. And they face more obstacles in

Tip Credit continued on p. 10

The Ukraine Crisis: Sharpening Imperialist Rivalry

Pete Ikeler

As we go to press, the U.S. media is using continuing tensions in the Eastern Ukraine and the possibility of a further Russian military incursion to whip up anti-Russian sentiment. This comes in the wake of the formal annexation of Crimea by Russia on March 18. There are dire warnings of a new Cold War. U.S. politicians have been almost unanimous in describing the annexation of Crimea as “unacceptable,” “illegal,” “outrageous,” and a slew of similar descriptions about this shift in political geography that could limit corporate America’s global “sphere of influence.” But what is the truth? Is the annexation of Crimea a naked power grab by Russia, an attempt to undermine the new, “democratic” Ukrainian regime? Or is Putin’s Russia, as some on the left contend, a force for good in the region and a necessary counterweight to U.S. domination in the world?



was hugely popular among the majority of Crimeans, due to the reactionary character of the new Kiev regime.

Putin’s Russia, however, is by no means an impartial force for “good,” an unbiased “savior” of potentially threatened ethnic Russians. Despite all the talk in the U.S. media about a new Cold War, Russia in 2014 is a thoroughly capitalist country run by a clique of obscenely wealthy oligarchs – a far cry from the former Soviet Union which, despite the totalitarian domination of the Stalinist bureaucracy, had a state-run, planned economy. Because of this, the new rift emerging between the NATO countries and Russia - with India and China remaining cautiously “neutral” - resembles less the U.S.-Soviet Cold War than the inter-imperialist rivalries between the U.S., U.K., and Germany that boiled over into World War I a hundred years ago.

Socialists recognize that capitalist countries of whatever stripe have nothing to offer working people – and certainly not those of Ukraine – other than varying types of exploitation. The stated goal of the U.S. and its West European partners is to help bring “democracy” to Ukraine. This same slogan was used in the imperialist interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Western powers are primarily concerned, not with the political freedoms of the Ukrainian - or Iraqi, Afghan, Venezuelan, etc. - people, but with the freedom of their privileged corporations to extract resources and cheap labor. In fact, it has been made clear that Western aid to the Ukraine to help it out of its dire economic situation will be conditional on the adoption of a massive austerity program which will make the lives of ordinary people substantially worse.

The Role of Imperialism

For its part, emergent Russian imperialism – also capitalist in nature – simply seeks to exploit and extract on the same world level, starting with what its leaders - Putin first among them - see as their traditional “sphere of influence”: Eastern Europe. The unremitting warlike propaganda from U.S. media seeks to obscure a fundamental truth about Russia’s annexation of Crimea: From the standpoint of Russian imperialism, by far

continued from “TipCredit” and Sexism

obtaining higher-paying positions in the industry. Women fill only 20% of higher-paying chef and head cook positions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Men also dominate positions in fine dining, where tips are substantially higher.

Women For 15, Now or Never!

Multiple cities and states across the country are moving toward raising the minimum wage because grassroots movements like 15 now are commanding the political landscape. So far this year, three states and the District of Columbia have proposed legislation or ballot initiatives eliminating tip penalties. Policymakers are confronted with the inarguable numbers: States without tip penalties see 40% lower poverty levels among restaurant servers. They experience greater restaurant sales and employment growth than states with tip penalties. Restaurant employment in Washington State is projected to grow by over 10% in the next decade, compared to 9.1% in states with tip penalties (Puget Sound Sage, 2014). Nonetheless, minimum wage proposals with tip penalties are gaining ground in the debate on the \$15 minimum wage in Seattle. Women must reject the regressive precedent a tip penalty will set.

Seattle is the epicenter of the movement for \$15/hr, where 15 now is leading the call for \$15/hr without tip penalties. But even the dozens of volunteers flowing through our offices every day will be hard-pressed in the fight against the rumored \$30 million war chest big business is prepared to spend to defeat our movement. 15 now will need the masses of workers by our side, especially working-class women, for whom liberation is inextricably linked to the movement for higher wages. Women everywhere, let us keep up the onward march for \$15/hr, understanding that this is only the beginning of the war for our livelihoods.

socialistworld.net



Socialist Alternative stands in political solidarity with the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), a global socialist organization in over 40 countries throughout the world. Socialist world.net, updated daily, is the website of the CWI. In May and June, socialistworld.net will carry reports and analysis from both the European elections and the likely historic upcoming elections in South Africa. In both contests, it is possible that CWI members will be elected to office to use those platforms to forward the interests and struggles of working people. As we go to print, socialistworld.net is carrying featured articles from mass movements in Spain, the Ivory Coast, and Taiwan. There is also regular material on the website about worldwide struggles against environmental destruction and a socialist solution to the crisis facing humanity. See socialistworld.net for indepth analysis of the situations in Venezuela and Nepal as well as the case for independent working class organization. Make socialistworld.net your homepage!

the junior force on the world scene, it was a defensive act taken to prevent loss of one of its key military and shipping ports to the U.S.-backed government in Kiev. Despite promises by Western powers in 1991 to respect the boundaries of the then-NATO zone, the U.S. has continually pushed the boundaries of NATO further east with plans to construct a massive “missile defense system” from Romania to the Baltics – right against Russia’s borders.

This does not make Putin’s overall position any more supportable from the socialist point of view. The domination of Ukraine by Russian imperialism is not a “lesser evil” to the domination of Western imperialism, but it is in this context of creeping encroachment that Russian imperialism has become more assertive on the regional stage. In a longer perspective, it is also against the backdrop of a historic decline in the power of U.S. imperialism.

With its international credibility undermined and its military resources stretched after two long and unsuccessful wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – not to mention a domestic population that has no stomach for further military adventurism – the U.S. is clearly a hobbled giant in world relations. As mentioned above, rising powers such as India and China have refrained from taking sides in the current spat. They are keeping a close eye on events to see whether U.S. imperialism can still enforce its will or make good on its threats, which it failed to do in Syria last year despite Assad’s apparent crossing of Obama’s “red line.”

The way forward for working people in Ukraine and Crimea, as well as in Russia, the U.S., and elsewhere, is not to side with this or that gang of capitalist powers. Whichever group of these thugs gains the upper hand, it will only allow them to more efficiently exploit the workers under their dominion. Instead, the only way out of poverty and unemployment for the mass of Ukrainian workers is to build a movement across ethnic lines to take the key sectors of the economy out of the hands of the oligarchs and into public ownership, so that the resources of the country can be directed towards creating good jobs and a better life for all.

The Limits of “Obamacare”

By Marty Harrison
Registered Nurse and PASNAP Member
Philadelphia, PA

Over 71 million people previously without health coverage now have insurance despite Republican objections and sabotage. Many will see this as a clear victory against the right-wing politicians. However, there are limits to what “Obamacare” can provide, and the biggest benefactors are insurance companies.

Since March 31, enrollment in the Affordable Care Act insurance plans has closed, and anyone still without health insurance will be charged a penalty on next year’s tax bill. The Obama administration has repeatedly assured the public that this deadline, unlike deadlines for business compliance with various provisions of the Act, will not be extended. The penalties start at \$95 per adult and \$47.50 per child this year, but swell to \$695 per adult and \$347.50 per child in 2016.

The insurance corporations demanded the narrow enrollment period to prevent people from buying health insurance only when they need it. They want your money all year, whether you need their insurance all year or not.

There is clearly a place for catastrophic health insurance: You get hit by a bus, and 12 ICU days, two surgeries, and one complete blood transfusion later, you are discharged to home with a \$250,000 bill.

But car insurance doesn’t pay for oil changes. Is insurance really the best way to pay for ongoing, preventive health care?

Accessibility to routine care with health care providers keeps costs down and people healthier. People with chronic conditions like diabetes and asthma can avoid many costly inpatient hospital stays through regular contact with their providers and consistent access to their medications. Babies and children benefit from their well-baby check-ups to monitor their development and to intervene as appropriate.

Women and men need access to reproductive health care throughout their lives. People need sound, scientific advice about diet and nutrition to make sense of “health food” advertising. And until modern medicine discovers a cure for aging, even the healthiest will need access to primary



care as their bodies change. Why not pay for such care directly? No insurance corporations, no CEOs making millions, no billions in profits, no competing insurance plans advertising for customers. Just health care being paid for through a system that already exists, works well, and has minimal administrative overhead costs. It’s simple: Medicare for all, birth to death.

continued from A NEW REVOLT

allowing unlimited spending by individuals in federal elections confirms the growing view of the majority of Americans: that the political parties and the political process are dominated by a handful of superrich individuals. This sharp disillusionment of tens of millions with the system, fed by bailouts for the banks and mass unemployment and austerity for the working class, is creating enormous political volatility in society.

Uncertainty reigns in establishment politics. As this year’s mid-term elections approach, both corporate-dominated parties are divided and without clear strategies. Neither the Democrats nor the Republicans are exciting the ranks of their activists. Obama’s ability to deeply inspire millions of workers and youth is long gone, and the Tea Party is an isolated joke in most areas of the country.

The issue of Obamacare will not go away due to Republican attacks and uncertainty about how aspects of the legislation will be implemented. 7.5 million signed up for health care through Obamacare, but tens of millions still remain uninsured, and they will be forced to pay a penalty for the “crime” of not being able to afford health care. While a small majority say they’re against Obamacare, less than ¼ of those polled want the legislation repealed. After the debacle around the government shutdown, even those skeptical of Obamacare don’t want to see a Republican-led political crisis. Still, the Republicans will find ways to use this issue in the mid-term elections.

Earlier this year, the divisions in the Republicans were on full display when Boehner said he “didn’t care” what the Tea Party thought of his budget deal with the Democrats averting another government shutdown. Although the Republican agenda is increasingly out-of-touch with the vast majority of people in the US, the low voter turnout at the mid-term elections favors their chances in November. Still, they will have their own internal battles with right-wing PACs gearing up to challenge “moderate” Republicans.

The Democrats are not without their rifts as well. While many are building support to run Hillary Clinton for President in 2016, more populist-inclined Democrats are talking about the need for Elizabeth Warren or even left-wing Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders to challenge her. These divisions will be seen in the primaries this year as well, and this reflects the pressure from below for the Democrats to deliver concrete gains for working people. This would energize a voting base that is far-from-excited about Obama’s policies and the establishment as a whole. Still, many Democrats prefer stability and low expectations to an energized base of trade unionists, youth and people of color. Many mainstream Democrats will propose a strategy of just attacking the Republicans as “extremists” to win skeptical voters.

Shallow Base of Both Parties

It is telling that both of the main political parties try to whip up support mainly just by attacking each other rather than proposing concrete policy to get voters out to the polls. The political establishment and the system they represent has no fundamental way to get out of the economic crisis inherent in their system.

The question is how a new politics based on the interests of the 99% can be forged. Kshama Sawant showed the way by standing as an open socialist, refusing to take a dime of corporate donations and still defeating a powerful Democrat in Seattle.

The struggle against corporate politics must be linked to development of social struggle. The fast food worker strikes and Kshama’s election laid the basis for the massive fight underway in Seattle today for a \$15 an hour minimum wage, something nobody in the establishment was talking about a year ago.

The two-party system is weaker than it appears. Both parties have declining support in society, and over half of those polled said they wanted a new party when asked during the government shutdown. Their support will decline further as the economy fails to deliver and their lies are easier to see through.

Dead Duck?

Obama wants to avoid living out the final two years of his Presidency as a “dead duck” like his predecessor George W. Bush, who was completely discredited after the 2006 mid-term elections. The only things preventing this from being reality is the weakness of the Republicans. With workers demanding more from the recovery, the 1% is divided. This is a tremendous opportunity for socialists and the labor movement to organize. This is reflected in the huge interest in the possibility of Bernie Sanders running for President, possibly independent of the Democrats and in the rapid growth of the movement for a \$15 minimum wage.

Successful struggles, particularly around the minimum wage, can increase the confidence of workers to fight against all the injustices of capitalism. We should remember that the victory of the Civil Rights movement paved the way for the anti-Vietnam war radicalization, the women’s liberation movement, the black power struggles and the radicalization in the labor movement during the late 60s and early 70s. In the same way, big victories for the low-wage workers, some of the most oppressed people in society, can build the confidence of broader sections of workers to organize unions, transform existing unions, protest discrimination and build independent working-class politics to challenge the two parties of big business.

A Year On, “Moral Mondays” Going Strong



Andy Moxley

On Saturday, February 8, tens of thousands of workers, activists, and youth from across the Southeast traveled to Raleigh, North Carolina, for the “Moral March” on the State Capitol. The march itself was a convergence of the annual Historic Thousands on Jones Street march called by the North Carolina NAACP – based on its “14-Point People’s Agenda” and the “Moral Monday” movement.

Moral Monday is a movement of youth and workers, called by the NC NAACP and by its president, Rev. William Barber, that began in the spring of 2013, originally against attacks on labor rights in North Carolina. The protests quickly grew into a broader movement against attacks on women’s, immigrants’, and workers’ rights by the Tea Party-dominated state legislature and Republican Governor Pat McCrory.

The movement earned its moniker based on acts of civil disobedience in the State Capitol on Mondays of every week when the legislature was in session in 2013, beginning in April. Over the course of 2013, Moral Mondays grew enormously to over 10,000 on the demonstrations and a total of 1,000+ arrested for acts of civil disobedience.

Saturday Rally

The rally and march on February 8 were

seen not just as a protest against the repressive political attacks being thrown down by the NC legislature but were also characterized by numerous contingents pushing causes to advance the position of workers and youth in the upper South. Most notable was the large organized force of low-wage workers from Raise Up North Carolina and Georgia calling for a \$15/hr minimum wage.

Socialist Alternative mobilized from around the country – including Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Massachusetts – to make a bold intervention in the demonstration. In contrast to charges of “Southern exceptionalism” to the ideas of socialism, SA members were enthusiastically received – selling 100 newspapers in a couple hours. Also, scores of contacts signed up to get more information about socialist ideas and activism, with the seeds sown for potential new branches in Charlotte and Raleigh, North Carolina, as well as Johnson City, Tennessee.

Socialist Alternative’s transitional approach to political consciousness led to our success, limited only by our resources. This method, outlined most notably by Leon Trotsky in The Transitional Program, seeks to connect what people are thinking about in their day-to-day struggles with broader demands and methods of winning the battles faced by the working class, leading to the conclusion of the need to overturn the system of capitalism.

Developments

Since February 8, the NAACP and its allies have made a Moral Monday tour across the state, visiting various towns on various issues, such as the environmental catastrophes created by Duke Energy. Moral Mondays have also spread into other states, with Georgia seeing a recent protest including 40 civil disobedience arrests.

The “Moral Movement” is impressive with its direct action, diversity, and spirit of ongoing struggle. However, it has the danger of being funneled into the election efforts of the Democratic Party. The language being used by Barber and others of branding the NC legislature as “extremists” is true, but it reflects the unwillingness of some of the Moral Monday leadership to take steps out of the center and, ultimately, out of the Democratic Party. The movement faces the need for a concrete alternative to be posed in terms of independent working-class candidates and a struggle in workplaces, streets, and communities both against the assaults of the right and for a \$15/hr minimum wage.

Socialist Alternative stands in solidarity with the working people of the upper South in fighting back against the assaults of the far right and the ruling class and will continue to build the forces of socialism in the South to help win not just this battle but the longer-term struggles of the working class.

continued from BERNIE FOR
PREZ

clearly for an alternative to be built to the two parties of corporate America. He supported Clinton, John Kerry and Obama’s presidential campaigns. Now, however, he is raising the central issue of whether progressives in the US should continue to try to “reclaim” the Democrats or try to build a new party.

Why Bernie should run as an independent

It will be argued by some that running against the two corporate parties in a presidential campaign is a hopeless, quixotic endeavor. But as Sanders points out in the recent interviews, a serious independent left campaign would not primarily be aiming to win but to build a new political movement and a new political party.

The question Sanders and many others ask is whether this is viable. Our view again is that there has not been a more propitious time in modern American history to begin to build a pro-working class political force. Kshama Sawant’s resounding success is a very small indication of what could be possible if progressive forces and especially a section of the labor movement decided to make a decisive break with the Democrats. We are not of course pretending that a mass party of the 99% could be built overnight but if Sanders decided to run as an independent left candidate for president on the basis of using his campaign to help galvanize the forces to launch such a party it would be an enormous step forward. Concretely, his presidential run could be linked to a national effort to stand a slate of credible left candidates in local and national races in 2016 on an independent basis.

This is not an easy road but it is the right road. What is, however, certain is that running in the Democratic primaries, while it would galvanize many progressives and gain a lot of media attention, would also feed the cruel delusion that the Democratic Party can be “captured” by progressives. There is no way the ruling class of this country will allow one of its parties to be taken over in this way. The overwhelming likelihood is that this effort would end as many have before it in demoralizing another generation of activists. This must not be allowed to happen.

Bernie Sanders has stated that he wants a dialogue with progressive activists before deciding on whether to run for president and on whether he should stand as an independent or within the framework of the Democratic Party. As a first step, we would urge Bernie to organize a genuinely representative national conference of progressive, community, and labor organizations to discuss the way forward in late 2014 or early 2015. This conference could become the focus to galvanize all those who want to build a new authentic working-class politics in America. Such momentum would, we hope, persuade Bernie Sanders to take the historic step of running as an independent left candidate for the presidency in 2016.

Supreme Court Gives Super-Rich Even More Political Influence

Stephen Price

The United States is a democracy, a government by the people. Every two or four years we cast our ballots for the candidates of our choice. Each of us, whether we are rich or poor, gets one vote per candidate. The candidates with the most votes win. Nothing could be fairer. Such is what we are taught in grade school.

Then we grow up.

Eventually we learn the rich are allowed to give money to political candidates and groups to influence the outcome of our elections. The poor are perfectly free to do the same, except they don’t have the money.

Then we learn the word “plutocracy,” a government by the wealthy.

No one publicly espouses plutocracy, but some people surreptitiously behave as if they do. Unfortunately, “some people” happen to be five men on the U.S. Supreme Court.

In the infamous 2010 case Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, the Court lifted campaign limits to corporations, claiming these entities have the same rights as individual persons.

On April 2, 2014, the same five men supported an Alabama businessman Shaun McCutcheon, in the case McCutcheon et al v. Federal Election Commission, by striking down campaign finance limits on the

aggregate amount of money one can give to candidates and political groups. While a contribution limit to an individual candidate or group remains in place, there is now no limit to how much a person can give to a combined number of candidates and political groups.

Chief Justice John Roberts, who wrote the majority opinion in McCutcheon, claims that money is speech and that putting a dollar cap on how much a contributor wishes to give to multiple candidates and political groups is tantamount to limiting that contributor’s First Amendment right to free speech.

Roberts’ reasoning might be a bit more persuasive if each of us had the same amount of wealth and income. The problem, of course, is that we don’t.

If money is speech, what exactly does Justice Roberts think contributors are saying to politicians when they donate unlimited amounts of cash? Are they talking bribery? “You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.” Extortion? “You scratch my back, or else I’ll scratch your opponent’s back.” According to Roberts, the claim that lifting contribution limits will lead to bribery and extortion is “speculative.” (www.supremecourt.gov). That politicians are known to take bribes and be influenced by money is apparently unknown to the Chief Justice. On the

other hand, he seems to be on a first-name basis with the Tooth Fairy.

Rather than McCutcheon being about free speech, we suggest it is more about the sacred tenet of capitalism – private property – including the right of the super-rich to spend their money as they see fit, even if it results in the further disenfranchisement of the vast majority of Americans.

Since the Republican National Committee joined McCutcheon as a plaintiff in this case, its members were obviously ecstatic with the Court’s decision. Democrats, on the other hand, were in high dudgeon over the ruling, appalled by the increasing encroachment of money into their political process. But the Democrats immediately ceded the moral high ground when Nancy Pelosi, the leading Democrat in the House, said they will not “unilaterally disarm” and, before you could say “George Soros,” they, too, were on the phone begging for dollars, (NY Times, 4/5/2014).

Every Republican and Democratic member of the U.S. Senate, House, and Presidency is pro-capitalist. Not one advocates replacing a system based on the unsustainable accumulation of wealth for the few with a system whose goal is the amelioration of all.

Capitalism and plutocracy are handmaidens or, better yet, soul mates. Why aren’t we taught this in grade school?



continued from Democrats and MIN WAGE

phased in over three years and including a long list of exemptions.

Similar legislation or ballot initiatives are being proposed by Democrats in a number of battleground states across the country. These initiatives are more about boosting turnouts for elections, not waging a real fight for the needs of working people.

Disillusioned voting base

Even with the popular support for raising the minimum wage in the US, there is no confidence the Democrat’s midterm election strategy will succeed. Obama’s approval ratings remain at one of their lowest levels since he first took office, and populist appeals from the present Democratic leadership ring hollow to many.

Obama recently used his limited executive authority to raise the minimum wage for federal contractors to \$10.10 and expand unemployment benefits for new job classifications. But for many people this is too little too late

from the president who bailed out Wall Street by the trillions and oversaw the largest expansion of domestic spying in history.

There is widespread disillusionment in the base of the Democratic Party. Millions of workers, young people, women, and people of color – the very people who turned out in high numbers in 2008 and 2012 to vote for Obama – appear likely to stay home this fall.

Incredibly, the Republicans are poised not only to defend their majority in the House, but could even take the majority in the Senate. This does not reflect any growing strength of the Republicans; they have far higher disapproval ratings than the Democrats. In fact, historic levels of anger exist with both parties.

The disappointment with Obama leaves a vacuum in US politics. Because leaders of unions and progressive movements continue to support the Democrats and offer no genuine pro-worker electoral alternative, the space has been left for the right to make gains.

Big Business Party

The entire approach of the Democratic Party on the minimum wage – low-balling what working people need and cynically using anger at inequality to mobilize votes – reflects the character of the Democratic Party as a party of big business. They appeal to working people during election time, but serve their big business backers once in power.

This fact was illustrated in early March when Obama went to Manhattan to promote a \$10.10/hour minimum wage. On the same trip Obama collected \$1.5 million from two fundraisers hosted by Wall Street executives, the Blackstone Group – one of the largest private investment firms in the world. (NY Times, 3/11/14)

Nowhere are the Democrats seriously prepared to mobilize the mass support for raising the minimum wage. Nowhere are they backing a strategy that could bring the tremendous social power of working people to bear against their big business backers.

The Seattle Alternative

In Seattle, where there is strong momentum for raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour, the movement is largely outside the control of the Democrats. Last fall, 93,000 people voted for Kshama Sawant of Socialist Alternative for city council. We didn’t take a dime from corporations.

A new organization – 15 Now – has been set up to organize a grassroots campaign in Seattle independent of the Democratic Party. That’s why Seattle is poised to win the strongest minimum wage in the country.

Working people have had enough symbolic votes and hollow election rhetoric.

We have the social power to turn the tide against big business and redistribute billions from the profits of the 1 percent to the wages of workers. To unleash our power, we need to break from the big business-dominated Democratic Party, build independent movements, and run our own candidates as a step toward building a new party that fights for the millions, not the millionaires.

Join Socialist Alternative!

Socialist Movement Grows Rapidly



By Kelly Bellin

Kshama Sawant's election victory has received repeated national media attention, helping to revive interest in socialist ideas and establishing Socialist Alternative as a pole of attraction for workers and youth looking to get active in the struggle against capitalist crisis. Since November, our work has been covered regularly by Seattle media and has also been featured in MSNBC, The Washington Post, The Nation, and even on the front page of The New York Times.

Sawant's victory and the heightened national profile of Socialist Alternative come at a time when people are searching for a political alternative to the two corporate parties on a scale not seen in decades. Across the country, we're growing at a faster pace than we ever have before. Our membership has increased by over 200 since our election victory - and more than half of that growth has been in areas where, previously, Socialist Alternative did not have established branches.

Victories in Seattle Spark Growth

Kshama Sawant and Socialist Alternative have shown that we are capable of using our elected position not just as a platform to popularize socialist ideas, but also to energize grassroots movements. Sawant is using the momentum of our election victory to lead the \$15 campaign, which is poised to win the highest minimum wage in the U.S.

As a result, people across the country have been convinced that socialist ideas are an effective guide to strategy for winning real gains in living standards. In March, 21 cities across the U.S. participated in a week of action for a \$15/hr minimum wage, culminating in an enormous day of action on March 15. Branches

of Socialist Alternative, including brand-new branches, led these actions in support of a truly historic step forward for working people.

Requests to join poured in by the hundreds on our website following Kshama Sawant's election victory, which was featured in national and international news - and again following her appearance on Democracy Now!. But the largest flood of interest came after Kshama Sawant gave a response to President Obama's State of the Union address in January. The Sawant response was viewed online by nearly 100,000 people - more than either the Republican or Tea Party responses!

This shows the demand for an alternative to the pro-capitalist policies of the two major parties, and it is an example of the potential for independent working-class politics right now in the U.S. The political impact of Kshama Sawant has spread far beyond the city of Seattle!

Socialist Alternative Spreads to 45 New Cities in the U.S.

With our profile in national media and the thirst for socialist ideas, people are joining our organization in brand new areas of the country. In 2014, people have joined Socialist Alternative from 45 new U.S. cities - and several of them have already developed new groups in their areas. We're on track to more than double our membership this coming year through recruiting working people across the country who are leading campaigns and struggles in their communities.

New groups of Socialist Alternative members have formed throughout the U.S., giving our organization a national reach like never before. From the Bay Area, California, to Birmingham, Alabama; from Portland, Oregon to Portland, Maine; and from Washington,

D.C., to Honolulu, Hawaii, new members are organizing in their workplaces, campuses and communities! In February, Socialist Alternative held our first Southern Regional Conference with activists from Florida, Alabama, and Louisiana. You can find a full list of our branches and contact info for your region at <http://bit.ly/SABranches>

Socialist Alternative's first member in Hawaii, Thomas Nishimura, joined after seeing the coverage of the election victory of Kshama Sawant on Al Jazeera. He explains that he was looking for "a presence that has the direction and strategy to help lift the people of Hawaii out of the fog and to break free from the chains of corporate imperialism. The time is right to build a strong force of workers to oppose the two-party system in Hawaii!"

People across the U.S. are seeking out a socialist alternative to the global crisis of capitalism. Carolyn Elerding of Columbus, Ohio, is building a new branch of Socialist Alternative in her community because "it seems that more and more people want to work together to address the inequalities built into our current system."

Our ability to grow is a reflection of both the victories and political leadership of Socialist Alternative and a testament to the dysfunction of the Democrats and the Republicans in their loyalty to a system that serves the 1%. Globally, working people are standing up and fighting back, with protests of over a million in Spain against austerity and the formation of new working-class parties to contest elections in South Africa.

In reality, our numbers are still small considering our massive goals to transform society, but our recent growth shows the tremendous trajectory of Socialist Alternative. In the coming year, we aim to achieve a real political impact in cities across the U.S., as we've already developed in Seattle. We are rapidly preparing an organization that can push forward and help lead future movements and struggles of working people that will break out in the U.S. in the coming years.

This year, we will play a key role in Seattle and beyond in the fight to increase the minimum wage. We are also well-positioned to be the left wing of the coming move toward independent working-class politics. Within this process, we will be educating hundreds of new activists in the methods of socialism and working-class action. Please join this growing movement today! To join Socialist Alternative, sign up online: <http://bit.ly/SAjoin>

Find Socialist Alternative in Your Area

With our recent explosive growth, we no longer have space in this newspaper to provide all our contact information for local areas. Please visit SocialistAlternative.Org to and click on "In Your Area" to meet with a member near you.

Learning from the Radical Legacy of May 1st

Katie Quarles, Shop Steward, Minnesota Nurses Association

Beginning with May Day this year, the fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage can spread like wildfire. This can become a catalyst to rebuild the labor movement and traditions of mass struggle. As we fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage, we need to learn the lessons of past victories to win our struggles today.

Workers have always had to fight for everything we have, from the weekend to the eight-hour day to less dangerous working conditions. Not to mention every wage increase we have received.

Every year on May 1, workers in many countries get the day off and unions organize large demonstrations and celebrations for International Workers Day. May 1 commemorates events that occurred during the struggle for the eight-hour day in the U.S. in 1886.

At that time, workers across the United States were commonly working 10-16 hours a day, six days a week. A general strike was organized across many parts of the country on May 1. Much like the demand for a \$15/hr minimum wage today, many businesses claimed a 40-hour workweek was unreasonable and would be too expensive for them. The strike went on for several days. A number of workers were shot by police and the National Guard in cities like Chicago and Milwaukee. Then, on May 4, a bomb exploded during a rally at Haymarket Square in Chicago. Labor activists were blamed, with seven of them sentenced to death. Nevertheless, the strike was a victory, with many workers getting their workdays shortened to eight or 10 hours a day

without loss of pay.

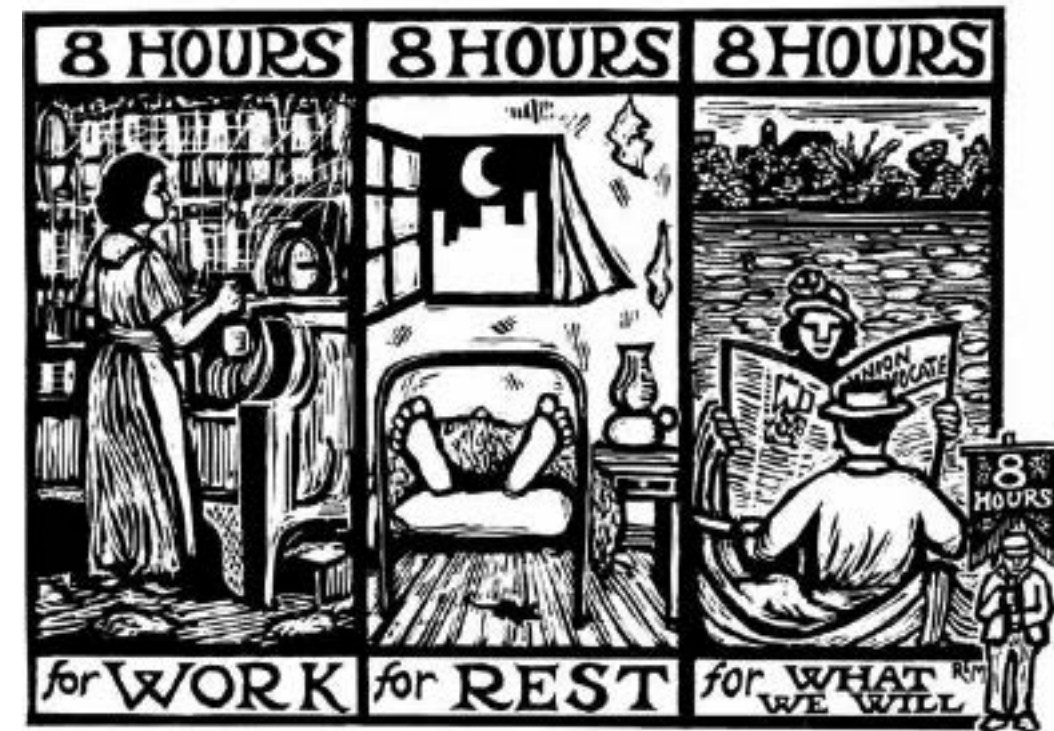
The demand for an eight-hour day helped to mobilize fighting unions, radicalizing youth and activists in political parties organizing against capitalist domination. The fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage can do the same today, bringing together labor activists, former Occupiers, and campaigners against racism and sexism. After the momentum of a victory for the eight-hour day, many felt the need to commemorate the struggle and take the movement forward. In 1889, the "First International" of working-class organizations endorsed May 1 as a worldwide day of demonstrations.

May Day Today

To this day, International Workers Day is a legal holiday in more than 80 countries and unofficially celebrated in many more, where workers mark the day by going to mass demonstrations.

With 400 Americans owning more wealth than half of all Americans combined now, more than ever, working people in the United States need to reclaim May 1 and its original spirit of struggle. In recent years, the tradition has been reclaimed in the U.S. by the immigrant rights movement. Then, Occupy groups in 2012 also helped organize big rallies. This year, the fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage will be a key demand of many demonstrations.

Immigrants also played a big role in the struggle for the eight-hour day. In today's struggle to raise the minimum wage, immigrants also have a key role to play. That's why the struggle to raise the minimum wage needs to go hand in hand with the



The struggle for an 8-hour day was the initial inspiration for the May 1st holiday

struggle for immigrant rights. Organizing and fighting is easier when workers don't have to live in fear of being deported for standing up. This will make victory easier to help all low-wage workers, native-born and immigrants. May 1 can be an important day to help build the struggle for immigrant rights, linking it to the fight for a \$15 minimum wage.

When We Fight... We Win!

The concessions made to workers in 1886 were not given easily. It took the organized struggle of tens of thousands of workers, risking their lives, breaking laws in a coordinated manner, and defying police and the National Guard to win these improvements.

The very fact that workers were able to shut down large sections of the economy to win improvements in their standard of living shows the potential power of the organized working class. Despite the decreasing union density in the U.S., the potential for this power remains fundamentally the same. The power to organize to bring the economy to its knees is the power that changed manufacturing jobs from the low-skill, low-wage, unorganized jobs they were to being considered "good union jobs" now. We need to fight to make the same transformation in the low-wage service sector jobs of today.

However, every victory won under capitalism is only temporary in nature. As soon as the workers and our unions appear weaker, the bosses will try and claw back previously won gains. The profit motive as the driving factor in the economy dictates

that bosses will always try to decrease the workers' share of the profits in order to increase their own.

Workers do all the work in this society. We can run the economy and society democratically ourselves by taking the top 500 corporations into public ownership. A society run on this basis rather than the profit motive could immediately give everyone a socially necessary job, eliminate unnecessary branches of the economy and, instead, make a massive investment in infrastructure, improving and expanding free education for all, including universities; free universal health care with a strong focus on preventive care; and food production in the interests of public health rather than profit. And spreading the socially necessary work out among the entire potential workforce would decrease the number of hours everyone would have to work. No one who works would have to live in poverty, as the obscene wealth hoarded by the 1% would be made available for all.

Genuine democratic socialism would be a fundamentally different society in which the economy is democratically run through committees in workplaces and neighborhoods, which would elect people to regional and worldwide committees who would be recallable at any time and would not earn any more than the average of the people they represent.

To achieve such a fundamental transformation of society - a key goal of many of the original organizers of International Workers Day - we need to build and strengthen the labor movement and fight to get unions to break from the two parties of big business and enter the political arena with a party of our own.



SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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STOP THE DEPORTATIONS!

By Teddy Shibabaw

Obama is setting the record for the most deportations of any president in U.S. history. This is a legacy even more brutal than that of his predecessor, George W. Bush, who deported over two million immigrants, (MotherJones.com, 4/4/2014).

Spending on immigration enforcement has outstripped all other aspects of federal law enforcement – \$17.9 billion in fiscal year 2012 compared to \$14.4 billion of combined spending for the FBI, DEA, Secret Service, U.S. Marshals Service, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, (Economist.com 2/8/2014).

Private Prison Profits

A big part of the spending goes to private companies profiteering off of the misery of undocumented immigrants. For-profit prison operators hold “almost two-thirds of all immigrants detained each day in federally funded prisons as they face deportation,” (Bloomberg.com, 9/23/2013).

Private prison companies lobby for increased deportations to expand their profits at the expense of taxpayers and immigrant families. One bizarre gift Congress gave to private prisons, engineered by Democratic Senator Byrd in 2009, is a law requiring the federal government to pay at least \$34,000 for detainees per day. These kinds of policies have allowed the stock market valuations of two of the largest detention companies to double in recent years.

Apologists for the Obama administration’s

draconian deportation policy say it’s part of a strategy to win Republican support for comprehensive immigration reform. If that is the case, the strategy has failed. House Republicans refuse to seriously consider any bill that provides a path, however arduous, toward citizenship for undocumented immigrants. This is despite offers from Obama to dramatically escalate border militarization and workplace repression, while even further limiting citizenship options.

“No More Deportations!”

Immigrant rights activists are stepping up protests, demanding the president issue an executive order halting deportations. Under the pressure of protests, Obama previously issued an executive order for deferred action that effectively curtailed deportations of immigrant youth, popularly dubbed “Dreamers,” who came into the country with their parents as children.

Lack of political action is feeding frustration – especially among immigrant youth – and a new wave of heroic civil disobedience. “Since last fall, dozens of undocumented activists with the Bring Them Home campaign have staged several unauthorized border crossings, voluntarily entering federal custody to protest deportations and dramatize the often hidden violence of family separation,” (In These Times, 4/1/2014).

The most recent high-profile protest has been the hunger strike and work stoppage of undocumented immigrants at the Northwest Detention Center operated by the GEO Group in Tacoma, Washington. The strike began

on March 7, with 750 participating. In days, this number leapt to 1200 – nearly the entire population detained at the center. Inspired by news of the Tacoma strikers, the action has spread to a GEO facility in Conroe, Texas, (truthout.org, 3/20/14).

Witnessing such heroic acts of resistance, combined with inaction by Congress, most mainstream immigrant rights organizations feel pressure to criticize Obama’s deportation policy. The National Council of La Raza, who until very recently defended Obama as an ally for immigrant workers, publicly rebuked Obama, making headlines by calling him the “Deporter-In-Chief,” (Politico.com, 3/4/2014).

Now it has come out that, contrary to the Obama administration’s claims that it was targeting only violent criminals for deportation, up to two thirds of deportations have actually stemmed from minor infractions like traffic violations (New York Times, 4/7/2014).

Increasing pressure from La Raza and others compelled the Congressional Hispanic Caucus to press the president to reverse his deportation policy. On March 13, the White House announced that Obama ordered a “review” of the policy to see if enforcement can be implemented “more humanely within the confines of the law,” (Politico.com, 3/13/2014). This alone will not lead to any substantive changes, but the turn in rhetoric should hearten immigrant rights organizers and demonstrate how grassroots protest and direct action are having an impact.

A Movement of Millions

The central question facing the

movement remains its attitude toward the Democratic Party, which has proven completely unreliable in the struggle for immigrant rights. Fed up with hollow promises, young immigrants in particular may be tuning the Democrats out. The Democrats report that they are finding it increasingly difficult to register Latino voters.

The best hope for a push-back against anti-immigrant policies lies with mass protests, direct action, and other forms of resistance by ordinary people across the country. It will be necessary to rebuild a movement on the scale of the millions who protested in 2006.

Inspiring a mass movement is undermined when, at the same time, movement leaders urge support for the Democrats’ “lesser evil” policies. Instead, clear demands for an end to all deportations, workplace repression, and border militarization – and for immediate citizenship rights for all immigrants – are needed. Such bold demands for full equality are necessary to inspire a mass struggle, and they place the movement into a direct confrontation with both corporate political parties.

This May Day is an opportunity to once again raise hell against the inhumane and anti-worker policies used by American capitalism to divide working-class people and weaken our capacity to fight together against the policies of big business. Socialist Alternative will be building these protests and highlighting the demand for full rights for all immigrants, a \$15/hour minimum wage, and a wider challenge to this rotten capitalist system.