



We Need a Party of the 99% - p.3

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



Issue #5 - July-August 2014

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## AFTER THE SEATTLE VICTORY...

Socialist Alternative supports **15 NOW**.ORG



# BUILD A NATIONWIDE MOVEMENT TO END POVERTY WAGES





# WHAT WE STAND FOR

## 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.
- ✦ Unions 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

**Jay Monaco**  
Temple, NH  
Retail Worker



I'm a part-time retail worker earning nine dollars an hour. Even in salaried, "professional" jobs I've held in the past – benefits and all – I was in a horribly precarious and insecure position with regard to my employment and my finances.

I've been hearing since the days of Bill Clinton that if I "work hard and play by the rules," everything will basically work out for the best. Such rules don't seem to be much of a factor for the great capitalists of American finance who gambled with the fortunes of billions and lost – faced not a single legal consequence. They don't seem to be much of a factor for mainstream politicians who start wars, spy on social justice movements, and enact policies designed to crush workers – which is to say, people like me and you.

I'm tired of low expectations, and my spirit will not be deflated. I'm thirty years old, I've come to terms with my identity as a worker, and it's time for me to stand up for my interests and yours.

At the same time, this is not and can never be a struggle of individualism or isolation. The time has come for organization and unity, to speak with one voice as much as we can. Socialist Alternative's platform matches up with our interests and even our dreams as workers. This is an organization that is serious about actively forming a left-labor opposition movement that represents all of us, right here in the US of A.

I choose socialism; I choose to fight on behalf of all those oppressed because the only alternative is to take the side of oppression and injustice. I am a socialist because, at thirty years old, I've come to terms with who I am. It's time for my action to be consistent with my identity. Solidarity. ✦

## Help Fund the Fight Against Corporate Domination

Socialist Alternative played a decisive role in pushing forward independent anti-corporate politics in 2013 with viable and even victorious campaigns. Since then, we were at the forefront of the fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage and the historic victory in Seattle. We've shown that Socialist Alternative gets results! We need your help with a donation this summer.

We are establishing new branches throughout the country. We aim to set up more offices of Socialist Alternative and to put out our newspaper more frequently. We need money to fund speaking tours, local campaigns, and a National Convention at the end of this summer.

Please dig deep and donate today!

PO Box 45343  
Seattle, WA 98145

[socialistalternative.org/donate/](http://socialistalternative.org/donate/)



# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Socialist Alternative is a national organization fighting in our workplaces, communities, and campuses against the exploitation and injustices people face every day. We are union activists fighting for workers' rights and militant, democratic labor unions; we are a diverse organization combatting racism, students organizing against sweatshops and war, ordinary people demanding full legalization for all undocumented workers, women and men fighting sexism and homophobia.

We campaign for the building of a mass workers' party to represent the interests of workers, youth, and the environment against the two parties of big business. We see the global capitalist system as the root cause of terrorism, war, poverty, discrimination, and environmental destruction. As capitalism moves deeper into crisis and recession, a new generation of workers and youth must join together to take the top 500 corporations into public ownership. We believe the dictatorships that existed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were perversions of what socialism is really about. We are for democratic socialism where people will have control over their daily lives.

Socialist Alternative is in political solidarity with the Committee for a Workers International, a worldwide socialist organization in 47 countries, on every continent. Join us! ✦

Letter from Kshama Sawant

# We Won – Now Let's Spread the Struggle!



Dear readers of *Socialist Alternative*,

I'm so proud to stand with all of you, celebrating the success of our movement. The \$15/hour minimum wage victory in Seattle was the result of workers, community organizers, and labor activists joining together to build power.

After decades of setbacks, attacks on workers' rights and living conditions, and the ongoing greed of the richest 1%, this is a historic moment. 100,000 workers in Seattle will see a raise in their wages. \$3 billion will be redistributed from business into the pockets of working families over the next ten years. Across the country and around the world, millions are inspired by this important first big step to bridge the chasm of income inequality.

We did not achieve everything we fought for – but we fought hard. This movement has every reason to be proud of our achievement.

For me, there are three main conclusions to highlight.

**First, when workers organize, we can win.** The courage of the fast-food workers who went on strike was decisive in raising expectations and putting the fight for \$15 on the agenda. Like the Occupy movement before it, these strikes expressed and pushed forward the deep popular rage at class inequalities in America.

What made Seattle unique – and allowed us to transform the slogan of fast food strikers into a reality for 100,000 workers – was that we built a well-organized grassroots movement, *15 Now*. Open to everybody and democratic, so activists had ownership over the struggle, *15 Now* mobilized working people to stand up for their own interests. Wherever

you are, I urge you to join *15 Now*, donate at [15Now.org](http://15Now.org), and help spread this grassroots movement nationally.

**Second, workers cannot rely on the two parties of big business to represent their interests.** We have to build our own independent political alternative.

When I was sworn into Seattle City Council on January 6, I announced the launch *15 Now* in Seattle. Just six months later, the council voted in a \$15/hour minimum wage ordinance. The speed of this victory is virtually unprecedented in Seattle politics. It happened because my organization, *Socialist Alternative*, and I used our newly won position to build a grassroots movement outside the council chambers.

This can be done in cities across the country. We need more independent left working-class candidates, linked to building movements and challenging the big business politicians of both parties. We must avoid the trap of lesser-evilism, the idea that we can rely on the Democrats to stop the Republicans. In reality, the Democrats never deliver without pressure from below, and this pressure is all the greater if we are prepared to challenge them in both the streets and in elections. Just look at Obama's empty call for \$10.10 with no strategy to win, no attempt to build a movement – and compare that to how we won in Seattle.

**Third, you don't have to be a socialist to fight back – but it helps!** A real mass movement must welcome everyone who wants to join the struggle, but history has shown again and again that movements are most effective when they have a core leadership who refuses to accept the limitations of capitalism and who can build mass support behind a vision of an alternative.

In my election campaign last fall and in the movement for \$15, I learned that working people are inspired by an unapologetic, principled approach. Let's demand what people need to live a dignified life, not just what the political establishment says is "realistic." To push things forward, we've got to provide a vision of what's possible with the huge wealth working people create – and not confine ourselves to the crumbs this broken system of capitalism can "afford" to give us.

I'm confident we can build a powerful socialist movement in this country. But it requires everyone who rejects the dominance and greed of the 1% to join us in boldly calling for a socialist alternative. Join us today; you can sign up at [socialistalternative.org/join](http://socialistalternative.org/join). Become a part of the growing movement that links today's campaigns for economic justice with a fundamental change in society, to replace corporate dominance with a democratized economy.

The victory in Seattle was an excellent first step. We must use the energy to spread the fight for \$15 nationally and to expand the struggles on other key issues facing working-class communities. If we organize with a bold perspective and a socialist vision, we have a world to win.

Solidarity,

Councilmember Kshama Sawant

## Can a Left Alternative to the Two Corporate Parties be Built?

Ty Moore

The potential to build a mass party for working people in the U.S. has maybe never been higher. Last year, 60% said the two parties didn't represent them and that they would support a third party. For the first time, a majority in Congress are now millionaires! No wonder support for them has collapsed to under 10%. Class inequality and corporate corruption at every level have deeply eroded confidence in American capitalism and its two parties.

Then Kshama Sawant's election last year sparked fresh optimism. The pessimists who

said it wasn't possible to win mass support for independent working-class and socialist politics are silenced. Now the victory for \$15 has convinced thousands of Seattle workers that bold class-struggle tactics, combined with complete political independence from the Democratic Party, is the most effective strategy to win bread-and-butter victories.

Yet most discussion on the growing potential for building a mass left party remains abstract. What are the immediate next steps? How can local left electoral efforts be linked to a national strategy? How can we assemble the forces necessary to build a credible working-class party on a

national scale?

There is no blueprint, and important local or national political breakthroughs could emerge from any number of struggles. Yet it would be a historic mistake for the U.S. left to take a "wait and see" approach. There is huge potential now.

### Bernie Sanders

Imagine the response, for example, if Senator Bernie Sanders, who is considering running for president in 2016 as a left independent, called a major conference to discuss building a left political alternative.

With Sanders' influence and bold, barnstorming campaign to build it, such a conference could attract thousands of serious trade unionists, immigrant rights organizers, environmentalists, and others feeling deeply betrayed by Obama and the Democrats. On this basis, the backbone of a powerful 2016 presidential campaign and a new left party could be rapidly assembled.

Unfortunately, it appears more likely that Sanders will run within the Democratic Party primaries, a tactic that the left should firmly warn is a dead-end trap. Yet this is not a

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# The Fight Against Inequality Reaches New Heights

Bryan Koulouris

This spring, working people in Seattle won a colossal victory in establishing a \$15 an hour minimum wage. Within days, an offensive struggle took off throughout the country to win back a chunk of the wealth that Wall Street stole from workers. In San Francisco, Chicago, and even New York – three crucial cities – 15 is being discussed in a real way. After the triumph in Seattle, a large opening is developing for mass struggle and independent working-class politics.

Income inequality is the central issue in political discussions. This is evidenced by the fact that a massive new book called *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Thomas Piketty has become a bestseller. The book deals with inequality, attacks aspects of capitalism, and puts forward the need for more sharing of the wealth. Piketty is not a genuine socialist, and the book has big weaknesses. However, its popularity is an important indicator of the mood to discuss and alleviate the vast historic wealth gap. The fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage is the most active and effective expression of the mood to fight against inequality.

## Raise the Wage

After the victory in Seattle, the movement for a \$15 an hour minimum wage is taking off. A section of the union leaders, in cooperation with left Democrats, are making



Fast-food workers in New York on strike.

bold minimum wage proposals but they often limit their tactics by not carrying out a full mobilization of working people. Still, this provides the political space for the democratic, visible, grassroots tactics of *15 Now* across the country to get a big echo. Instead of depending on Democratic Party politicians in Seattle, *15 Now* focused on mobilizing working people with credible threats of mass referendums, working-class candidates and targeted protest actions.

In San Francisco, a \$15 with fewer loopholes than Seattle is possible. Of course, this wouldn't be the case if the example hadn't already been set. San Francisco is also experiencing an economic boom compared to the rest of the country; this means that big business there is more willing to grant concessions. The Bay Area has many radical union leaderships backing the effort in a stronger way than unions backed *15 Now* in Seattle.

In Chicago, eight Alderman – their version of City Councillors – are backing legislation for \$15. They will be up against a corporate hack in union-busting Democratic Mayor Rahm Emmanuel. To be successful, this movement needs coordinated neighborhood action committees to support 15 and hold the politicians accountable. These committees could petition, hold actions, plan

strike support, and back independent working-class candidates.

These potential offensive victories, coming in a period of decline and defeat for the labor movement, can be a shining beacon for future struggles. The movement for \$15 has taken off far more than imagined by the initial SEIU-supported organizers in New York. The clarity and bold nature of the demand was central. The strike actions captured imagination. The issue links up naturally with fights against racism and sexism as well as with the labor movement. The success in Seattle took it to a whole new level. This shows the centrality of even small socialist forces in turning things around for working people. In this situation, it is an urgent task to build *15 Now* to help spark a wider resurgence of the workers' movement.

In 2013, Socialist Alternative pointed out perspectives that a movement like Occupy would develop, except on a higher level with clearer demands and goals. Currently, this process is reflected most prominently in the fight for \$15 and other struggles to raise the minimum wage.

## After Seattle

The days of strike action called by major unions have spread and become larger every time they are called. Future plans for strikes will

likely see continually increasing participation. However, there seems to be no serious attempt to unionize the fast-food workers in the determined struggle that would be necessary to achieve large-scale organization.

From OUR Walmart to Raise the Wage, the unions have set up many pre-union formations to organize low-wage workers. However, their business union approach has combined with lower levels of struggle and consciousness to make it difficult to organize on a large scale. In order to achieve union recognition, there would likely need to be coordinated mass strike action. Consciousness and organization are not yet at this level. However, this can change, and unionization will require determined tactics and an inspirational vision of how working people can transform the world.

At this point, strikes can back up fights for increased wages on the legislative plane. However, we shouldn't limit our demands to what

the billionaires and their servant politicians are willing to give us. We need to make demands that mobilize workers and youth into action.

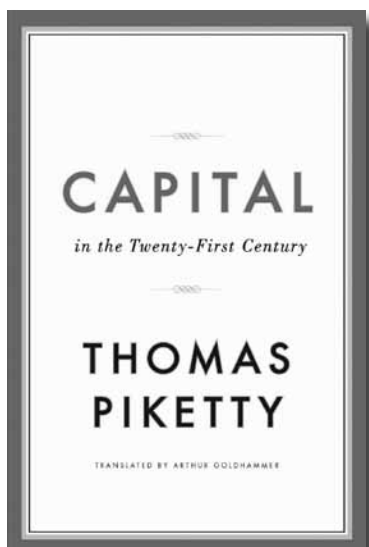
Faced with the difficulties of "organizing the unorganized," SEIU and other unions, even the AFL-CIO as a whole, are funding campaigns to increase the minimum wage across the country. These are often limited to symbolic actions and giving a platform to Democrats. Still, with the ruling class split on how to deal with the economy and its growing worry of social unrest, gains can sometimes even be won without a strong movement from below. However, the wage increases will be larger and the lessons of the struggle clearer with a force like *15 Now* coming to the fore.

The limitations of depending on Democrats to get wage increases have been shown this June in Rhode Island. A *Business Week* story showed how Democratic politicians there are trying to block a referendum on \$15 from going to the ballot in November because they know that it would have widespread support.

## Changed Political Terrain

The fight against economic inequality and for higher living standards for low-wage workers will dominate politics and prove crucial to give strength to all political fights against the injustices of capitalism. Independent left political campaigns should build the fight for \$15 and vice versa.

Economic inequality remains as the key galvanizing national issue, and the fight for 15 can become the centerpiece of this discussion. This underscores the urgency to build a profile for *15 Now*, the only organization in this battle with a consistent approach to building struggle and grassroots participation. ✪



Thomas Piketty's book exposes income inequality as a basis of capitalism in the 21st century.

A Socialist Alternative Publication

## Manifesto of the Fast-Food Worker

by Brent Gaspaire and Tony Wilsdon

Online at [www.SocialistAlternative.org](http://www.SocialistAlternative.org)

Print: \$5.00

*(includes shipping and handling)*  
Send check or money order to:  
Socialist Alternative  
PO Box 150457  
Brooklyn, NY 11215



Interview with Jess Spear

# Seattle Could Elect Another Socialist

the bidding of corporations; I've got experience organizing movements – movements that win concrete gains for working people, not giant handouts for corporations that are already making record profits.

It is as your question implies: Frank Chopp, as one of the most powerful politicians in this state, represents the corporate domination in Olympia. He oversaw a record-setting handout to Boeing – to the tune of \$8.7 billion – while the state remains in criminal violation for failing to adequately fund education. His 20 years in the legislature have left us with the most regressive taxes in the country, while the biggest corporations in the world are again and again given massive tax handouts. Frank Chopp is clearly the king of corporate welfare.

**White:** Ok, so focusing now on your district. What's needed for the people in the 43rd?

**Spear:** While Chopp is representing the bosses of Boeing, Microsoft, and Amazon, I will represent working-class people and their families. I will fight to end the corporate domination of Olympia and will demand we fully fund education and expand funding for transit and clean energy projects to put us on a path to 100% renewable power.

Renters in Seattle face the fastest rising rents in the country. I demand rent control and affordable housing. The WA State Legislature under Chopp's leadership, is not only failing to represent renters' interests, it's blocking measures like rent control from being implemented locally in Seattle!

I'm running to give a voice to bus riders that are facing drastic cuts. As a climate scientist and socialist, I see this as the

fundamental choice Olympia faces on transit: Will they provide affordable and massively expanded public transit? Or will politicians like Chopp continue to underfund Metro, forcing working people into expensive and environmentally destructive ways of commuting, while simultaneously destroying good jobs at Metro?

**White:** So you kick Chopp out of office. How will things change in Washington State's Capitol?

**Spear:** Removing another out-of-touch corporate politician would not only rock the political establishment here for the second time this year – after the election of Kshama Sawant – it would give working people across the country the confidence that we can reject politics as usual by electing our own independent representatives. A \$15 minimum wage was advanced and won in Seattle by building a grassroots movement. We would take that lesson and apply it to issues we want advanced at the state level. Kshama Sawant and *15 Now* brought the movement for \$15 into the City Council, and working people won! Let's bring a movement for rent control and a movement for mass transit into the Capitol in Olympia!

**White:** Sure, a socialist in Seattle, but Olympia?

**Spear:** [laughs] I think people across the political spectrum are fed up with what is coming out of Olympia and are looking for an alternative to politics as usual. The fall of Republican House Majority leader Eric Cantor is another example [in addition to Kshama Sawant] of people fed up with politicians that serve big business. Here in WA

## Donate to Help Us Win

As a Socialist Alternative candidate, Jess is challenging Olympia's Speaker of the House, Frank Chopp, who oversaw the largest corporate tax break in U.S. history.

**VOTE JESS SPEAR**  
SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE  
for State House, 43rd LD, Pos. 2

Electing the second socialist in two years, on a bold pro-worker, pro-environment platform, would also generate a serious discussion about building a new political party for the 99% that represents the interests of people, not corporations.

Jess won't take a penny from corporate interests, while her opponent is already building a war chest funded by the likes of Boeing.

Donate today at [VoteSpear.org](http://VoteSpear.org) – and sign up to follow the campaign's ongoing events in this exciting race.

[www.VoteSpear.org](http://www.VoteSpear.org)

we have record breaking tax handouts for corporations on top of the most regressive taxation in the whole nation! They convene special sessions to give Boeing billions – and House Speaker Frank Chopp can't even get a minimum wage proposal of \$12 an hour out of committee, pass a transportation package, or fully fund education? Not with me, not with us. Socialists fight for what working people need, not what we is "politically possible" – which is code for what business is willing to accept – or what the system "can afford." We forced business and the political establishment to concede to \$15, a demand that was considered unattainable just one year ago. We can win more! As a socialist, I'll fight for every single improvement for working people and link it to challenging this exploitative system of capitalism. The clock is ticking on Chopp in Olympia! ☘

An interview by Sarah White, Socialist Alternative Seattle

Coming off a historic win for the \$15 minimum wage in Seattle, Jess Spear, 15 Now Organizing Director, sits down to talk about her campaign for Washington State House in which she'll run against House Speaker, Democrat Frank Chopp.

**Sarah White:** First off, congratulations on \$15!

**Jess Spear:** Oh, thank you! But really, the movement for \$15 made this happen. The fast food strikes, Kshama Sawant's campaign, the hundreds of people involved in action groups across the city: these were the real power behind \$15.

But isn't it exciting and incredibly inspiring? The win for \$15 in Seattle was one of the first offensive wins for working people in a long time. And now we're starting to see it spread to other cities! Successive wins for \$15 will only embolden more and more working people to demand and fight for their rights, and from there, as Kshama Sawant said, reflecting on what happened in Seattle, "We have a world to win!"

**White:** And now you're running against Frank Chopp. He's got power, experience...

**Spear:** Look, Chopp's got experience doing

## Cantor's Fall – A Terrifying Prospect for Corporate Politicians

Jess Spear, Socialist Alternative candidate challenging the Washington State House Speaker

A political earthquake shook the ground beneath the Democratic and Republican party establishment when Republican House Majority Leader Eric Cantor was stunningly defeated by an unknown economics professor, Dave Brat.

The swift takedown of business-backed Cantor revealed the alienation of ordinary people from the political establishment. Brat even used a certain rhetoric against "crony capitalism" to attack the former House majority leader. However, he linked his attacks to anti-immigrant propaganda and his populist Tea Party-style agenda.



Republican House Majority Leader Eric Cantor lost in the GOP primary. His opponent painted him as an advocate of crony capitalism.

### Wall Street vs. Main Street

Though Brat's immigration ideas were

prominent in his campaign and he painted himself as more conservative than Cantor, at its core this defeat was about kicking out a corporate politician who was too close to Wall Street.

Even on the issue of immigration, Brat's opposition to reform was focused on exposing corporations' desire for low-wage labor: "Eric Cantor doesn't represent you; he represents large corporations seeking a never-ending supply of cheap foreign labor," (*The Nation*, 6/11/2014).

Cantor raised \$5.5 million in contrast to Brat's \$200,000, and Cantor spent around \$1 million in the final week. Nonetheless, Brat's populist message of challenging the out-of-touch politicians energized working people in Virginia. Dave Brat won because

his anti-establishment message connected with working people's discontent.

### Rebuild the Left

For progressives and workers on the left, Cantor's defeat shows, on the one side, the potential for real grassroots campaigns on bread-and-butter economic issues. On the other side, it reveals the threat that right-wing populists like Dave Brat, Ron Paul, and Rand Paul – who offer no real economic solutions to rising income inequality, lack of jobs, and the all-sided social crisis – pose to working-class rights if the left fails to build a viable alternative. Help us build Socialist Alternative and a new mass left alternative to the two parties of big business. ☘



# Low-Wage Worker

## How Seattle Won a \$15 an Hour Minimum Wage

*Kshama Sawant and Socialist Alternative put forward a strategy to win: Building on the fast-food workers' struggles, we took up the huge anger about income inequality. We used the electoral success of Kshama Sawant to build and lead the movement. All of that paid off. Together, we can do this all around the country.*

**Patrick Ayers, Seattle Socialist Alternative**

Seattle is the first city to pass a \$15/hour minimum wage. 100,000 workers will eventually see a significant increase in their wages. On April 1, 2015, workers at McDonald's, Burger King, Starbucks, and many big businesses will see a raise to \$11/hour, and all workers will go to \$18/hour in 2025. This equals a \$3 billion transfer from business to the poorest parts of the working class in Seattle over the next ten years. More importantly, we have shown the vital role of grassroots struggle and transformed the debate on the minimum wage across the U.S.

### “Quickly as a Lightning Strike”

“In the end,” wrote Arun Ivatury and Rebecca Smith for CNN.com, “the outcome in Seattle demonstrates what history has proved time and time again: When workers are well-organized and there is broad support for higher wages, even businesses that resist the idea are ultimately forced to pay more.” (5/15/2014).

Fast-food workers themselves lead the way. After Occupy Wall Street, they began striking for a \$15/hour minimum wage, first in New York City and then spreading across the country.

The fact that Seattle became the epicenter of this national movement for \$15 has a lot to do with the socialist strategy put forward by Kshama Sawant, newly elected city council member, and her organization, Socialist Alternative.

“Who had heard of [Sawant] before last August?” wrote *Seattle Times* columnist Jonathon Martin, who declared Sawant the winner of the minimum wage debate. “For that matter, who (aside from Socialist Alternative newspaper subscribers) had a quick jump to a \$15 wage on their radar a year ago? Yet the political fear of Sawant's organizing skill has put a radical economic policy on greased rails. In process-loving Seattle, the minimum wage is happening as quickly as a lightning strike,” (4/29/2014).

### Independent Movement

Sawant's election occurred at the same time that voters in the nearby suburb of SeaTac approved a ballot initiative for a \$15/hour minimum wage. By the end of January 2014, such was the momentum that the debate on the number fifteen had been won, and 68% of likely Seattle voters supported \$15/hour in a poll.

Businesses were forced to accept \$15/hour, at least in words. Hotel owner Howard Wright III, who fought against \$15/hour in SeaTac, became a “supporter” of it in Seattle. He told the *Seattle Weekly*: “I was motivated by the way the minimum wage happened in SeaTac. I wasn't opposed to \$15 as an eventual goal. But I didn't like the fact there was no phase-in.... I thought, OK, there isn't a question of if this is coming to Seattle, it's really a question of getting out in front of it,” (5/20/2014).

While it was fast-food workers, socialists, and the movement that put \$15/hour on the agenda, the Democratic Party and Mayor Murray brought business to the table to water it down. The mayor formed a business-dominated advisory committee to come up with proposal, and a City Council dominated by corporate politicians had the final approval.

Therefore, working people needed their own tools to push back. We launched *15 Now* as a grassroots organization. We built links with labor and community groups, but we also built action groups all across the city and organized public protests to promote the needs of workers in the debate.

### An Alternative Strategy for Labor

While a tremendous step forward, there is no reason to deny that what passed the City Council in Seattle bears the fingerprints of big business, with loopholes like a decade-long phase-in that puts off a \$15/hour minimum wage in 2017 terms until 2025 for a lot of workers. It includes training wages and a tip penalty, allowing a slower increase of the minimum wage for tipped workers – while still offering an increase on April 1, 2015, for each and every one of us.

This was not inevitable.

Unfortunately, the strategy of those leading the main labor unions was not focused on building the movement from below; instead, it



*A packed Seattle City Council Chambers celebrates the passage of a \$15 an hour minimum wage, 6/2/2014.*

was oriented towards the Mayor's process of negotiating with big business.

The setbacks for the labor movement over the past years have understandably lowered the confidence of working people as well as organized labor. But, the times have changed. Socialist Alternative campaigned for a strategy that could help rebuild a fighting labor movement by laying down radical traditions of mass campaigning. In particular, our threat to mobilize around a ballot initiative created enormous fears among Seattle's political and corporate elite. *The Seattle Times* commented: “The threat of a 15 Now charter amendment created a sense of urgency among city leaders and on Mayor Ed Murray's Income Inequality Advisory Committee where labor and business leaders were pressed to reach a compromise on raising the minimum wage or face the charter amendment on the November ballot.” (6/12/2014).

If labor had backed the threat of a ballot initiative for a stronger \$15/hour ordinance without loopholes or unnecessary delays, then big business could have been forced to concede much more.

Labor unions in the U.S. have tremendous resources and political weight. They have millions of dollars and millions of members that could be mobilized behind a bold campaign. A glimpse of that was visible in the fast-food strikes. But the movement could be much stronger if the unions ended their reliance on the Democratic Party and independently mobilized the full power of their members and larger groups of working people.

Decades of trying to appease big business by accepting concessions have only

encouraged big business to demand more concessions. If the resources of labor were redirected behind campaigns like *15 Now*, giving democratic ownership to the grassroots activists themselves, then the tide could be turned and workers could start to effectively fight back against the rapacious powers of capitalism.

### Join the Socialists

Seattle demonstrates the effect a single socialist on the Seattle City Council could have with the right approach. Imagine if there had been two, three, four socialists on the council. Imagine what we could achieve with dozens of elected working-class representatives at the local, state, and federal level, all linked to a powerful mass party of working-class people that uses these positions to build mass movements of working people for higher wages, good union jobs, equal rights, and renewable energy.

Socialist Alternative supports every possible reform that can be won in a capitalist system. The fight for \$15 has shown that when we organize we can win. But this fight has also shown that, under a system based on profits, big business will always fight tooth and nail to defend its wealth and power. Capitalism is by nature unequal. The fight for better wages, education, health care, housing, environmental and social justice must also be a struggle for the socialist transformation of society, based on genuine equality and human need.

Donate today and help us fund this struggle. If you want to be part of this movement, join Socialist Alternative today! ☘

Photo Credit Alex Garland



# Workers Need a Raise!

## Building 15 Now Nationally A Call to Action!

**Jesse Lessinger,  
National Organizer  
for 15 Now**

The victory for a \$15 an hour minimum wage in Seattle is a story of how working people organized, took a stand against corporate power, and won. And now is the time to spread that success nationwide. At the center of battle was *15 Now*, launched and led by Socialist Alternative.

*15 Now* is part of the growing movement of low-wage workers to fight for better wages and working conditions. There have been strikes and actions in over 100 cities across the country, but it was Seattle that raised the minimum wage to \$15 because of bold plan of action developed by *15 Now*.

Since Occupy first drew our attention to the unprecedented inequality in the U.S., our movement has now begun to turn the tide. But no victory is guaranteed, and big business will resist as they did in Seattle. What we win depends on the strength of our movements. That's why we need you to get involved with *15 Now* today.

You can join an existing chapter or start a new one in your area. See [15now.org](http://15now.org) for more information. Below we publish a few brief reports from local *15 Now* organizers about the work of new *15 Now* chapters around the country.

### **15 Now Philly**

Median income in Philadelphia hovers at \$31,000 per household, or about \$15/hour. With over 30% of the city living in official poverty and 12% in deep poverty, an increase in the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$15/hour would completely transform the city and region.

*15 Now* Philly launched in February, with our first action on International Women's Day. *15 Now* Philly paved the way for a coalition with the SEIU fast-food organizers at Fight for

15 and a statewide coalition called Raise the Wage PA.

Through April and May, *15 Now* Philly hit the streets with a petition aimed at local and state politicians. This petition for \$15 was met with tremendous enthusiasm and opened conversations with more than 1,500 community members, laying the groundwork for a broad campaign.

At our first Open Assembly on Tuesday, May 20, we moved to launch three neighborhood committees in South, North, and West Philly. These meetings will form the backbone of *15 Now* Philly action groups and further strategy to agitate and organize.

The critical strength of *15 Now* Philly involves our diverse organizing committee, including low-wage workers from fast-food, retail, and home health aid industries. *15 Now* has generated excitement across the spectrum in Philly. We're ready for real change and a new way forward for working people. Now we can point to the success of Seattle to show people that it's possible to win.

### **15 Now Massachusetts**

**Jack Zhang**

The fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage is heating up in Massachusetts. Thanks to the workers who paused to sign our petitions, *15 Now* New England has collected almost all the signatures required by the state to put a nonbinding \$15 an hour question on the ballot in six districts.

Our petitioning events have opened up a dialogue with our fellow workers about the minimum wage and the rising cost of living. Almost everyone agrees that the current minimum wage of \$8 an hour is too low. In Massachusetts, the state Senate is proposing a phase-in to \$11 an hour over three years.



**15 Now demonstrations from around the country. Clockwise from upper left: Portland, OR; Mobile, AL; Philadelphia, PA; and Davis, CA.**

This would be a step forward, but only small one. Neither of those figures represents a living wage. In a city like Boston, \$15 is just the starting point for livable, and that's cutting it close. Working people signing our petitions have mentioned this key point to us again and again: They agree with other minimum wage initiatives because any increase is good, but those initiatives don't even come close to a living wage. That's why low-wage workers all over the country are demanding \$15.

To empower the working people of the districts we're campaigning in and build the foundations of a movement, *15 Now* New England has started monthly neighborhood meetings in Boston.

These neighborhood meetings are open to the broad public. We encourage participants, especially newcomers to *15 Now*, to lead the discussion and speak up about community problems. Seattle showed us that empowering working people to take matters into their own hands is the way we can win.

### **15 Now New York City**

**Daniel Kroop**

The *15 Now* campaign is growing in New York City! After the victory in Seattle, we quickly saw the Speaker

of the city council suggest she also supported \$15. Yet Seattle showed that we can't rely on promises from politicians but have to build pressure from below. With a movement, we can push "Tale of Two Cities" Mayor Bill de Blasio and the city council to act.

We have held major interventions across the city. *15 Now* marched in the "St. Patrick's Day for All" parade, and we have held two energetic rallies and marches, joined by Green Party candidate for Governor Howie Hawkins, who has made \$15 a key demand in his race for governor.

On May Day, *15 Now* organized a solid contingent in Union Square for a day of activities and took part in a noisy march, shutting down parts of Manhattan. On May 15, we joined striking fast-food workers at high-energy, internationally publicized protests.

The response to *15 Now* has been very positive in New York. Although the State of New York holds the power to set the minimum wage, in order to win the endorsement of the labor-backed, left-leaning Working Families Party, Governor Cuomo promised this would be changed. This represents a big opportunity for the campaign.

*15 Now* NYC plans to continue

gaining petition signatures, gaining endorsements, and building a movement to demand \$15. It is still the beginning of our NYC campaign, but we look forward to building immense momentum over the summer.

### **15 Now Portland (PDX), Oregon**

**Michael Cathcart**

On May 15, roughly 40 people marched into the downtown McDonald's and read a letter aloud to the workers, customers, and bosses in solidarity with the global strike of fast-food workers.

However, thanks to the restaurant lobby, since 2001 Oregon state law has preempted cities from raising the minimum wage locally. This means that any effort for \$15 will require a coordinated statewide effort, or a repeal of the state's preemption.

On June 11, members of *15 Now* PDX will give a brief testimony in front of the city council, highlighting the need to raise the minimum wage and presenting them with 1,000 signatures in support of a \$15 minimum wage. We know that real change doesn't come from the top; it has to be demanded from below. ✪

A Look at Glenn Greenwald's Book *No Place to Hide*

# Exposing the NSA Surveillance State

By Clay Showalter

A year ago, Glenn Greenwald and Laura Poitras began exposing the shocking extent of foreign and domestic spying carried out by the National Security Administration (NSA). Now, in *No Place to Hide*, Greenwald goes well beyond the contents of the leaked documents to examine the political landscape that gave rise to the surveillance state.

Spying and surveillance have been happening for decades. But it was Edward Snowden, a former private intelligence contractor, who revealed how the NSA recently began to apply its unofficial motto of "Collect it All" to domestic surveillance. After leaking thousands of documents to Greenwald and Poitras, Snowden fled to Russia for political asylum and continues to face increasing threats of persecution by the U.S. government.

## Growing "Need" for Surveillance

Greenwald writes: "It's not hard to understand why authorities in the United States and other Western nations have been tempted to construct a ubiquitous system of spying directed at their own citizens. Worsening economic inequality, converted into a full-blown crisis by the financial collapse in 2008, has generated grave internal instability."

It is the growing resistance to capitalism – the rejection of a system built on inequality, racism, and sexism and wracked with economic instability – which has led to the expansion of domestic surveillance. Greenwald writes how, when faced with "strikingly intense levels of discontent with the political class and direction of society," the political elite have "two options: to placate the population with symbolic concessions or fortify their control to minimize the harm it can do to their interests."

Recent history is rife with examples of the political elite attempting to fortify their control when political discontent manifests

into social movements. In November 2011, there was the coordinated, nationwide effort to crack down on the Occupy movement. And the Washington State Fusion Center, supported by the Department of Homeland Security and the NSA, is currently involved in a lawsuit for using a government spy named John Towery to infiltrate activist groups such as Port Militarization Resistance and Iraq Veterans Against the War, (*NY Times*, 6/24/13).

## Disillusionment With Obama

Snowden, like millions of other Americans, had hoped that the election of Obama would lead to change. After being elected, Obama vowed to reform the surveillance abuses that had been previously justified by the Bush administration during the War on Terror. Snowden remained silent in 2009 as he waited for the Obama administration to smooth over some of the roughest edges of the surveillance state and military abuses.

"But then it became clear that Obama was not just continuing, but in many cases expanding these abuses," Snowden told Greenwald. Snowden watched as Obama prosecuted more whistle-blowers than all prior presidents combined, and specifically targeted investigative reporters from the Associated Press. All this comes from a president who had lauded 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*, 6/7/13).

And just as the Bush administration used the War on Terror to justify illegal spying, Obama and top intelligence officials continue to defend the NSA by claiming that counterterrorism is the main focus. But the leaks by Snowden systematically reveal "economic espionage, diplomatic spying and suspicionless surveillance aimed at entire populations," alongside the specific targeting of activists. Greenwald makes it clear that the

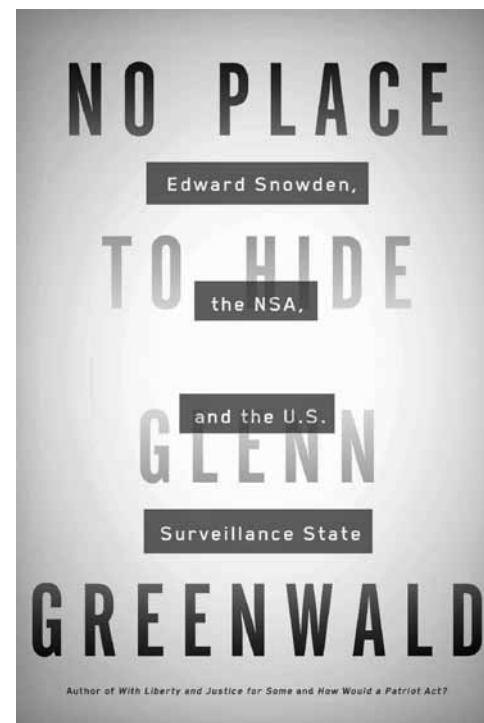
primary focus of the NSA is suppressing internal dissent and increasing the power of corporate America across the globe.

## Targeting of Activists

Alongside targeting journalists and whistle-blowers, the NSA and its partners systematically attempt to undermine activist organizations and social movements. A leaked document called "The Art of Deception: Training for Online Covert Operations" describes how the targeting of activists is guided by the four D's: "Deny/Disrupt/Degrade/Deceive." Tactics used to undermine activists include setting up a "honeypot," luring an activist into an illicit romantic affair and then exposing it; hijacking an activist's social media accounts to send damaging messages to their allies; and identifying and exploiting fracture points in activist organizations.

Despite the elaborate systems of surveillance constructed by the NSA, and the despicable tactics used against activists, social movements continue to rise up and win substantial victories. The Occupy movement focused the national dialogue on wealth inequality and emboldened a new wave of young activists. The election of Socialist Alternative candidate Kshama Sawant to the Seattle City Council, on a platform of fighting for a \$15/hour minimum wage, rent control, and taxing the rich, was a historic victory that echoed around the world. And then, just six months later, a \$15/hour minimum wage was won in Seattle by socialists, a grassroots movement, and organized labor.

Greenwald concludes the book by emphasizing the importance of building social movements: "Even the most committed activists are often tempted to succumb to defeatism. The prevailing institutions seem too powerful to challenge; orthodoxies feel too entrenched to uproot; there are always many parties with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. But it is human beings collectively, not



a small number of elites working in secret, who can decide what kind of world we want to live in."

## Building an Alternative

Greenwald's newest book, and the revelations he is likely to make after its publishing, are important for activists. They illustrate that, despite the widespread nature of the surveillance state, working people have the potential power and numbers to win victories against the ruling class, their political representatives, and their repressive forces.

It is clear that we cannot rely on the Democratic Party – or any party that represents the interests of the ruling elite – to fight for our basic rights. Only by coming together, building social movements, and establishing our own political representation can we begin to create the fundamental change that is so desperately needed. ✪

## Can a Left Alternative Be Built?

continued from p.3

forgone conclusion, particularly if, over the next year, left forces take bold initiatives to demonstrate in multiple regions the same potential already shown in Seattle.

Undoubtedly, the preferred scenario would be for the unions and other social movement groups that enjoy a significant base in the working class to break their ties to the Democratic Party and launch a new mass workers' party. This would be a massive breakthrough raise class consciousness and dramatically increase the power of workers to fight for their interests in both the political and economic arenas. While the powerful statewide and national unions are not on the verge of breaking from the Democrats, there is space opening for vigorous debates in many union

locals, especially where viable left electoral challenges provide a concrete choice. These local debates can push the process forward nationally.

### Run Independent Left Candidates

The deep popular rage at the political establishment means immediate opportunities for left electoral challenges. These shouldn't be squandered because of misleadership of the unions or other "base constituencies" of the Democratic Party that would, in the long run, need to be won over to establish a new mass party.

There is clearly a basis now, in hundreds

of cities across the country, for local left electoral challenges to win mass support. This was demonstrated not only in Seattle and Minneapolis, but also in Richmond, CA, in Jackson, MS, in Lorain, OH, and beyond. Even where campaigns are not winnable, the basis exists to run strong left challenges that can push the process forward.

Imagine if, over the next two years, we elected just 50 left-wing and socialist candidates to local offices, state legislatures, or even Congress. Imagine if, alongside left community and labor leaders, these 50 left elected officials were united in calling for a new mass party for working people.

This type of scenario, while by no means automatic, is not outside our grasp if the

wider U.S. left took an audacious, smart approach to seize the opportunities. It would be a strong foundation for calling a national conference to initiate a serious process toward forming a broad left party, bringing together socialists, Greens, and thousands of unaffiliated activists in the unions, community campaigns, immigrant and anti-racist struggles, women's rights and LGBTQ groups, environmental campaigns, and others. Just as importantly, this would be a powerful basis to wage a serious campaign within unions and social movement organizations to break from the Democratic Party. The time for taking the initiative is now. ✪



## Net Neutrality Under Attack

# Broadband Companies Crack Down on Internet Freedom

By George Martin Fell Brown

We assume that everyone online - from political bloggers to big businesses to people posting videos of their cats - will reach their audiences roughly the same way as everyone else. This is the principle of net neutrality. New regulations proposed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) will undermine net neutrality - to be replaced by outright net discrimination, with profound consequences for online freedom of speech.

These new regulations come after a successful lawsuit from the cable company Verizon. Tom Wheeler, newly appointed chair of the FCC, was formerly a top lobbyist for the cable and wireless industry. Wheeler's new regulations formally entitle broadband providers to discriminate in what information they allow across their networks. This represents a serious attack, further paving the way to a two-tier Internet. In 2007, Obama publicly claimed to be a "strong supporter of net neutrality" and warned that without it we'd get "much better quality from the Fox News site and you'd be getting rotten service from the mom and pop sites," (cnet.com, 10/29/2007). But now he's allowing such a scenario, further revealing the president's hypocrisy.

## What is Net Neutrality?

Net neutrality is the principle that governments and businesses should treat all data on the internet equally, not discriminating or charging differentially by user, content, site, etc. It is an important safeguard to protect free speech on the Internet.

The Internet is often portrayed as inherently prone to freedom. But the functioning of the Internet is dependent on a vast physical network that transfers information from place to place, and the architecture of that network can have a major impact on what goes across. The most blatant violation of net neutrality is the so-called "Great Firewall of China," where the Chinese state uses the architecture of the Internet to directly censor criticism of the government.

According to companies like Verizon, net neutrality is itself a government attack on Internet freedom. However, the freedom Verizon is concerned with is the freedom for broadband companies to have "the ability to enter into individual negotiations with content providers ... in a commercially

reasonable manner," (*The Washington Post*, 4/23/2014). To interpret: net neutrality threatens the freedom of capitalists to threaten the freedom of everybody else.

Without net neutrality, the broadband companies are empowered to determine what information does and doesn't go across the network. For example, in Canada in 2005, members of the Telecommunications Workers Union were locked out by their employer, Telus, a large phone company and Internet service provider. During the course of the lockout, Telus blocked access to several pro-union websites from any Telus customers' Internet connections. Without basic net neutrality protections, we can expect to see incidents like this appearing a lot more frequently, especially where struggle breaks out.

But perhaps more frequent than outright censorship will be consigning websites to oblivion, through the creation of a two-speed Internet. The main "right" that Verizon was demanding in its lawsuit was to divide online traffic into a "fast lane" for those who can afford to pay, while those who can't would be stuck in a "slow lane." Such an arrangement would disproportionately undermine individuals and others who cannot pay.

## Inter-Capitalist Rivalry

During the course of the dispute, a number of digital companies have come out in defense of net neutrality. An open letter signed by Google, Microsoft, eBay, Facebook, and others argued that the proposed changes represent a "grave threat to the Internet." Netflix has come into a number of public conflicts with Comcast and AT&T over the issue, even going so far as to put anti-Verizon messages on Netflix buffering screens. This has given the impression that these companies are "good" capitalists, defending the underdog.

However, it would be a mistake to think that Netflix, Google, Microsoft, etc. are acting out of altruism. This is, in reality, a battle between those capitalists who provide content for the web and those who provide infrastructure.

Companies like AT&T, Verizon, and Comcast specialize in the physical network of cables that make the Internet work. Requiring that network to be neutral is a direct threat to their profitability. Companies like



Activists protest outside the FCC during the vote to end net neutrality.

Netflix, Google, and eBay, on the other hand, specialize in the actual content that gets transmitted across those cables. Their profits depend on their ability to easily get information across the Internet with as little difficulty as possible.

While content-providing companies may oppose the FCC changes, they also act to undermine online freedom of expression. While Google promotes itself as a do-gooder, from 2006-2010 it operated a Chinese version of its search engine, Google.cn, which self-censored websites that were offensive to the Chinese state. When Google pulled out of China in 2010, it was only after a series of cyber-attacks against its servers. Other search engines such as Yahoo! still operate censored versions of their services in China.

Different sectors of the capitalist class often find themselves in conflict with one another, but in the last analysis they have the same class interests. Capitalism naturally tends toward monopoly. In the field of communication, that monopoly often takes the form of "vertical integration" between different sectors of the economy. As online shopping sites start their own warehouses, search engines start their own lines of smart phones, and movie-streaming sites start filming their own shows, the common class interests of the different sectors of the economy become clearer. In 2010, Google and Verizon formed a partnership, and Google significantly watered down its net neutrality policy to be more agreeable to both parties.

## Beyond Net Neutrality

The attack on net neutrality is an attack on Internet freedom. But this does not mean that net neutrality is a guarantee of Internet freedom. A single law regulating one sector of the economy can't stand up against the entire capitalist system. In their dispute with Netflix, Verizon and Comcast deliberately lowered the speed of their Internet connections to pressure Netflix into signing a deal. Moreover, the deal they ultimately made was over a private network, placing it outside the domain of any net neutrality legislation.

Columbia Professor Tim Wu, who coined the term "net neutrality," admitted that he never accounted for these issues in defining the term. He saw net neutrality, not as a political problem, but as "solving a joint technical challenge" to make the Internet work as well as possible. But solving a joint technical challenge is far more suited to a planned economy than a system where big businesses are competing to maximize profit. As long as the Internet is run by capitalists, Internet freedom will be continuously under attack.

- ✪ No to the new FCC regulations. Defend net neutrality.
- ✪ For free, publicly funded broadband access. For a massive program to expand the broadband network.
- ✪ Nationalize the broadband companies under democratic control. ✪

#YesAllWomen:

# A Feminist Response to Tragedy

Kailyn Nicholson

The misogynistic massacre of Santa Barbara, California, is yet another horrific expression of a society that is based on the constant oppression of women. However, this expression of hatred also triggered a massive backlash. A storm of tweets around the Twitter hashtag #YesAllWomen showed not only deep-rooted anger but also the potential to build a powerful mass movement against sexism. The enormous outcry reveals that, together, we DO have the power to resist hate crimes against women, end domestic violence, and fight for equal rights in our workplaces – and to fight for a new society based on gender equality, social justice, and solidarity, a socialist alternative to the oppression we experience every day in capitalist society.

A horrifying massacre took place May 23 in Santa Barbara, California. Elliot Rodger, the 22-year-old son of a once-wealthy Hollywood producer, stabbed three people to death in his apartment before driving to a nearby sorority house and shooting two women there. He then drove around town shooting at people, killing one more and injuring 13, before taking his own life.

Perhaps the most horrifying parts of this tragedy are the youtube videos and 141-page “manifesto” posted by the young man before the attack. The manifesto clearly reveals a combination of sexist, racist, elitist ideas. It expresses violent hatred toward all women for not giving him the attention and sex he felt entitled to.

He also proclaimed hatred for all men who were “inferior” to him, including those with less money or darker skin, who received attention from women. He believed it was his right, as a descendant of a once-wealthy British noble family, to lead a life of privilege and constant gratification. With his desires for sex and female attention going unfulfilled, Rodger considered men from lower-class backgrounds – and in particular men of color – getting female attention to be a grave injustice against him personally. He referred to his killing spree as “The

Day of Retribution” for these supposed offenses. In his own words, “How could an inferior, ugly black boy be able to get a white girl and not me? I am beautiful, and I am half white myself. I am descended from British aristocracy. He is descended from slaves. I deserve it more.”

## Misogynist Ideas Promoted by Media

While the actions taken by Rodger are an extreme manifestation of misogynistic hatred, the ideology behind them is frighteningly widespread. Rodger was a member of numerous Internet communities devoted to disparaging and manipulating women, including The Red Pill, PUA (Pick Up Artists), and MRA (Men’s Rights Activists). These groups have grown rapidly since 2000, uniting themselves under the umbrella term “The Manosphere,” (Jeff Moniker, “The New Misogyny,” Daily Kos). This is just one of many frightening developments undermining the progress won by the women’s movement in earlier decades.

Film critic Ann Hornaday suggests that another influence on the development of Rodger’s twisted worldview was the narrow gender stereotypes still ubiquitous in Hollywood culture. “Indeed, as important as it is to understand Rodger’s actions within the context of the mental illness he clearly suffered, it’s just as clear that his delusions were inflated, if not created, by the entertainment industry he grew up in,” says Hornaday.

Of the top 250 movies released out of Hollywood in 2013, only 15% had female protagonists (Martha Lauzen, San Diego State University). Among the male protagonists, sexual fulfillment is a nearly universal theme (Hornaday).

## Gender Roles and Social Values Distorted by Capitalism

In capitalist society, we are also endlessly bombarded by corporate advertisements that prey on our insecurities to get us to buy products



#YesAllWomen demonstration in Seattle.

and, in the process, our values and images of ourselves – particularly gender roles – are constantly distorted and manipulated. Corporate ads try to make women think they need to focus almost exclusively on their sex appeal, while implying that successful men have access to lots of money, power, and sex.

The investors who control Hollywood, the music industry, and the booming Internet porn industry exploit women and male consumers for their profit, making it appear to men that it is completely natural to view women as nothing more than objects of men’s sexual pleasure. These are just some of the many complicated ways that the capitalist elite have twisted our society’s values and created an unequal, alienating society.

Although entirely inexcusable, Rodger’s violence and extreme entitlement were not, as some reports would argue, merely a result of his own mental illness or innate evil. Our entire capitalist society is in crisis, barely recovering from the worst economic shock since the Great Depression, and the crisis is having devastating social consequences. The widening chasm between the super-rich and the rest of us not only harms the working class and the poor, who are most directly suffering from declining economic conditions. The intense social pressure to succeed in the “rat race” affects all communities, including young people from

wealthy backgrounds like Elliot Rodger.

In our society, children are schooled in the values of capitalism: to compete for power and to push ahead of others at any cost. The pressure to conform to corporate-created roles is growing ever more intense. This results in more kids failing and in escalating levels of depression and mental issues, particularly among adolescents who feel alienated and scapegoated, who see little solidarity with their communities or with fellow human beings. For the most desperate and frustrated, the culture of gun violence promoted by the movie industry, the video games industry, and the military can become an attractive way out.

## Time to Renew a Powerful Women’s Movement

Clearly, there was a complex web of factors that led to Rodger taking the lives of six people. A wealthy and privileged upbringing; the racist, sexist, and hypermasculine culture of the corporate media; and the sexist, alienating capitalist society in crisis all played a role in this tragedy. How do we respond to such a complex problem?

We can start by taking a lesson from our mothers and grandmothers. The women’s movement of the ‘60s and ‘70s made incredible gains by organizing on a mass scale

and demanding far-reaching social change, but it has since retreated from mass organizing and focuses almost exclusively on working within the established legal and political framework. This retreat has allowed room for devastating attacks on previous gains, including the defunding of Planned Parenthood, strict anti-abortion laws popping up across the country, and an epidemic of sexual violence on college campuses – being shamefully mishandled by school administrators and police. A similar decline is being suffered by workers and people of color in the form of stagnant wages, pension cuts, and job losses as unions have also moved away from militant mass action.

If we want to push back against the wave of misogyny we are living through today, we need to reinvigorate the fighting roots of the women’s movement and use the same tactics that won us victories before: mass protests, marches, walk-outs, and rallies. The #YesAllWomen rallies being organized around the country are a great start.

Our movement for women’s rights will be most effective if we link our fight to the fight of the 99% against the richest 1% – the ruling class who use sexism, racism, and homophobia as tools to divide us against each other to defend their profits and power over society. Our task as women is to link up with all working people and build a mass movement, including community groups and especially the powerful labor unions, against discrimination, sexism and exploitation which are promoted by the ruling class and their economic, political, and cultural institutions and media.

The 99% must come together to get rid of the capitalist system that values profits over people. Women and all oppressed groups can win full and equal rights in a new society that guarantees the rights of all working people. We need a fundamentally new social system, one that empowers rather than exploits: a real democracy that prioritizes human welfare over profit maximization – a socialist society. ✪



# Oil War's Bloody Legacy in Iraq

Judy Beishon

As Socialist Alternative went to press, the Obama administration had sent hundreds of military "advisers" to Iraq and was threatening bombings, as well. Below is a shortened version of an article that appeared on SocialistWorld.net in mid-June. You can see the full version there or at SocialistAlternative.org.

At the time of President Bush's catastrophic and criminal invasion of Iraq in 2003, Socialist Alternative and the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) warned it could lead to the break-up of Iraq and the terrible sectarian war that is now being played out in front of the eyes of the world.

U.S. imperialism laid the basis for being faced with not one, but a number of Saddams and for the rise of al-Qaeda-type terror organizations like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) that is sweeping across northern Iraq today. This turn of events threatens to trigger a shake-up of the entire region, with profound and possibly tragic consequences for the populations.

To justify the 2003 war and subsequent occupation – in which over half a million Iraqis died, plus thousands of intervening troops – Bush and Blair claimed to be ridding Iraq of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and laying the basis for democracy. The WMDs didn't exist, and their interest was never democracy – it was the vast oil wealth in Iraq and influence in the Middle East. In pursuing their goals, they created the conditions for a prolonged period of bloody ethnic and sectarian conflict.

The overthrow of dictator Saddam Hussein – and the "de-Ba'athification" carried out – saw Sunni Muslims removed from the state apparatus and jobs. Faced with mass resistance to its occupation, and to defeat Sunni insurgents, U.S. imperialism resorted to sectarian "divide and rule," and imposed a Shia-dominated, corrupt government that greatly worsened the division.

ISIS taking control of Fallujah in January and now Mosul – Iraq's second-largest city – is seen as disastrous by the U.S. government as it effectively reverses the driving out of Sunni militias from those cities by U.S. Marines in what were sustained, brutal assaults during the U.S.-led war.

## Sunni uprising

Sections of the nearly one-million-strong Iraqi army – U.S.-and-British-trained and equipped to the tune of \$30 billion – disintegrated in the path of the offensive driven by an ISIS force of less than a few thousand. In taking Mosul – a city of two million people – and a number of towns, including Tikrit, ISIS was supplemented and aided by uprisings from within the minority Sunni population which has suffered heavy discrimination and victimization under the initially U.S. imposed, Shia-led government of Nouri al-Maliki.

Former Ba'athist security personnel from Saddam Hussein's ousted regime were among those who joined the offensive. Meanwhile,



*Iraq is now spiraling into sectarian conflict over ten years after George W. Bush claimed victory.*

the Kurdish Peshmerga forces used the crisis to rapidly take the city of Kirkuk into their own hands, seeing it as a capital for a Kurdish state.

The Iraqi government was left paralyzed, with virtually no control across the entire north of Iraq, unable to even get a quorum in parliament in order to introduce emergency measures. Over half a million refugees poured out of Mosul and other captured areas, fearing government bombing raids, ISIS, or both.

There is another humiliation for the U.S. leaders – to need the cooperation of the Iranian regime, which it has been harshly punishing with sanctions and at whose hands it had many troop losses during the occupation of Iraq. Another recipient of venom from the U.S. administration, Bashar Assad's forces in Syria have, too, come to the aid of al-Maliki by launching some strikes against ISIS bases in Syria. Assad had previously turned a blind eye to much of ISIS's aggression in Syria because it was mainly directed at seizing ground from other Islamic militias that were at the forefront of fighting Assad's regime.

## ISIS

Some ISIS commanders have tried not to antagonize people in the areas they have seized, while others immediately issued sharia edicts telling thieves they would have their hands cut off, ordering women to cover up their bodies and avoid leaving their homes, banning political parties, and other reactionary laws. These announcements instilled fear into much of the population, including many Sunnis who initially hoped that ISIS would at least deliver them from discrimination and the arrests and torture that have been meted out on Sunnis by al-Maliki's government.

## A Way Forward

Working-class Sunnis, Shias, Kurds, and the other nationalities and ethnic and religious groups in Iraq have nothing to gain from any of the propagators of sectarian conflict, from whichever quarter. Iraqi Sunnis have previously rejected the forerunners of ISIS and driven them out of their communities, and many are now appalled at the actions of ISIS.

occupation. Grassroots building of democratic, non-sectarian working-class-led organizations is essential to organize defense of all communities and to put forward an anti-capitalist program as the only way of showing a way out of ongoing bloodshed, repression, and poverty.

That program would need to challenge and expose the self-interest and greed of all the pro-capitalist political and military leaders that are fighting for hegemony across Iraq today. It should explain the necessity of removing them from power and replacing them with democratically elected workers' representatives who will call for a socialist solution, in the interests of all workers and the poor.

Socialist Alternative and the CWI support the right of self-determination for all oppressed nationalities and groups, but we point out that the resulting states and statelets would not be economically viable unless linked up in a voluntary socialist confederation, in this case of the peoples of Iraq and the region. Only on that basis could cooperation be achieved that could lift everyone's living standards, making the best use of all the natural resources for the benefit of all. ☛

There is widespread anger among Shias at al-Maliki's corruption and sectarianism. Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds alike are suffering from the constant insecurity, lack of basic services, and poor living standards.

There have been many times, historically, when people in Iraq have shown their desire for unity against division, such as in April 2004, when 200,000 Shia and Sunni demonstrated in Baghdad against the U.S.-led

## Hospital Cuts, Transit Struggles, Working Families Party, and More at SocialistAlternative.Org

SocialistAlternative.org features daily updates from working-class struggles throughout the country. It is also the best place for in-depth analysis of the capitalist crisis and resistance to injustices.

Go there for an interview with Richard Poole, a union activist at a massive hospital in Worcester, Massachusetts. Richard talks about the attacks on his fellow union members that the struggle that he helped lead to stop layoffs.

Currently on SocialistAlternative.org, you can find a report from Karl Belin about protests in Pittsburgh to demand full funding of public transit. The demonstration was led by Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 85 and a community group called Pittsburghers for Public Transit. ATU International President Larry Hanley called this coalition of labor and community a model to be replicated throughout the country.

In New York, there is tremendous anger from labor activists against the corporate-backed Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo. Cuomo has collaborated with Tea Party Republicans while slashing budgets, attacking unions, and trying to block increases in the minimum wage from being carried out in cities throughout the "Empire State."

The Working Families Party, a group that cross-endorses Democrats through New York's "fusion voting" system, was debating whether or not to run a progressive union-backed candidate against Cuomo. SocialistAlternative.org will be carrying an article about this debate, its outcome, and what it means for independent left politics. ☛



# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Issue #5 - July-August 2014

## How Can We Stop Climate Change?



By **Toya Chester, Boston**  
and **Jess Spear, Seattle**

*"Human-induced climate change means more than just hotter weather."*

*Third National Climate Assessment*

We have all heard the horror stories of global climate change and how it will affect the world. Scientists speak of countries like Bangladesh being under water in the next hundred years, but what can we expect here in the U.S.?

In May, the White House released its third National Climate Assessment: a report by multiple government agencies that is the product of years of work by over two hundred climate scientists. For the first time, the National Climate Assessment looked at each region of the U.S., describing the current effects from global warming and what we can reasonably expect over the next century.

If you live in the Northeast, there will be coastal flooding that will affect the majority of inhabitants, as well as heat waves that will disproportionately affect urban residents, especially the poor.

In the Southeast, sea-level rise, increased risk from extreme hurricanes, and decreased availability of freshwater are expected to overwhelm the population.

In the Southwest, we can expect record numbers of droughts and wildfires.

In the Northwest, warmer winters means mountain snow caps will melt, with terrible consequences for water supply, hydroelectric energy production, and fish populations (so much for the salmon).

Air quality has dropped with the coal and nuclear power industries taking over the Midwest. And though the corn-growing season has been lengthened, extreme weather events like droughts, floods, and heat waves are offsetting any gains made in crop yields.

### A Pebble in the Path of Giants

Acknowledging the disturbing findings of the assessment, President Obama promised to make efforts to address the issue of climate change. "Those who are already feeling the effects of climate change don't have time to deny it - they're busy dealing with it," said the president last year. He has continued the trend of presidents making commitments, promises, and attempts to try to tackle global climate change and regulate CO<sub>2</sub>. Yet this same president brags about the largest expansion of oil drilling in a generation.

In a video made by the White House to address childhood asthma, Obama praises his new plan to cut emissions from coal power plants - a step in the right direction for both the environment and racial justice as, according to the Centers for Disease Control, one in every 100 black Americans has asthma

whereas, for white Americans it is one in every 1,000.

But almost everyone acknowledges that Obama's new regulation is just a pebble thrown in front of the fossil fuel giants, drunk off their profits and stumbling toward climate catastrophe. What we need instead are massive boulders and mountains preventing these giant corporations from driving society into the abyss.

Obama speaks of homes going solar and people driving their cars further on a gallon of gas. This does nothing but shift the blame of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from corporations to consumers.

However, the factories are the ones that release record-high amounts of carbon into the air - which, coincidentally, go along with their record high profits. A recent report showed that just 90 companies are responsible for 2/3 of all emissions! (*The Guardian*, 11/30/2013).

Obama and other Democrats call for "market solutions" to deal with global warming. They advocate a "cap and trade" system or carbon taxes, which attempt to incentivize private, profit-driven corporations to reduce emissions and invest in renewable energy. But because the Democrats do not challenge the capitalist system and corporations' right to profit, their market "solutions" have barely reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

If affecting corporate profits is the only

way we can stop the devastation, maybe we should reconsider whether we should have an economic system centered on profits in the first place.

### Build a Movement - Demand Green Jobs

Instead of fighting for regulations that hopefully bring about the right behavior, socialists call for nationalizing the oil, gas, and coal companies, bringing them under control of democratically accountable representatives of workers and the public to eliminate the thirst for profit and to better regulate emissions.

This would allow workers to use the resources to immediately invest in renewable energy projects, creating millions of jobs and putting our future on a sustainable path.

However, as the report indicates, both mitigation of - and adaptation to - climate change will require massive investment in renewable energy and infrastructure changes that can withstand the sea level rise, storms, flooding, and heat waves that are expected.

History shows us that radical change is only possible when tens of thousands of ordinary people unite in movements demanding their rights. Witness the recent grassroots movement, *15 Now*, that won the highest minimum wage in the country in one year. To build a powerful movement, environmentalists and labor must unite forces to demand democratic control of energy resources and investment in green jobs.

The root cause of climate change - the capitalist system centered on maximizing profits at the expense of human lives and the environment - is a barrier to a safe, sustainable future and to economic security for millions of people.

We will only be free of both economic and environmental crises if we toss the capitalist system and build a democratic socialist society in its place. The only way to guarantee a habitable planet, where every human is guaranteed a high standard of living and a clean environment, is to struggle for a socialist world.

The immediate challenge is to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people for a massive protest in New York City on Sunday, September 21 and Monday, September 22 called by Bill McKibben, 350.org, and many other organizations to demand real action from world leaders at the UN climate summit. ☘

## The Largest Environmental Justice March in World History!

September 21 in New York City.

Email [info@SocialistAlternative.Org](mailto:info@SocialistAlternative.Org) to meet us there. Read More at [SocialistAlternative.Org](http://SocialistAlternative.Org).