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SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



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SYSTEM CHANGE

NOT

CLIMATE CHANGE!



LEFT CANDIDATES GAINING SUPPORT

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

Lyndsey K
Santa Cruz, CA
Warehouse Operations Worker



I am a socialist because our current capitalist system has left the United States in debt, corrupted by big business, impoverished, extremely economically divided, with unjustified wars and the slow disintegration of the public sector. I identify as a socialist because I believe in organizing within a community for the purpose of equally distributing resources. Our current capitalist state of mind does not cultivate an atmosphere of unity and equality.

As long as I can remember, our capitalist system has been detrimental to my life and my parents' lives. My mother was laid off from her long-term job with a food processing company in the early 1990s. When the company she worked for shut down, production was shifted to a border town near Mexico. She lost her health care, 401K, pension, and everyday security. This maneuver was made possible through NAFTA, which is just another negative characteristic of capitalism.

Knowing capitalism has failed is the easy part, but it was difficult to know what to do after I realized this. With the media coverage surrounding Seattle's first socialist councilmember, as well as the minimum wage increase campaigns all over the U.S., I quickly researched SA and what it was all about. It was at that time that I joined Socialist Alternative and knew my place in organizing was just beginning.

At 31 years old, I am still putting myself through college and working full-time. I have done so for almost five years now. I have acquired student loan debt and, although I make above minimum wage, I find that I am just making enough for basic survival needs. I fear I cannot be successful and stable under a capitalist construct. For me, socialism brings hope to my future and gives me something to look forward to in a political environment that needs to be redesigned. ✦

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! ✦

Interview with Brazilian Activist



Socialistworld.net is the website of the Committee for a Workers International, a worldwide organization in political solidarity with Socialist Alternative. Activists from over 45 countries send reports and socialist analysis of events around the world to this site that is updated daily.

This past summer, the Committee for a Workers International held a world school in Belgium that brought together hundreds of

activists. At this event, Socialist Alternative supporters were able to interview Dimitri, an activist in Brazil who participated in the recent mass movements there surrounding the World Cup. In the interview, Dimitri talks about the next steps in Brazil for working-class struggle and socialist politics. The interview appears on SocialistAlternative.org. ✦

For Mass Struggle Against Environmental Destruction

What Are We Waiting For?

All Out to Sept. 21
Environment Rallies!
PEOPLE'S CLIMATE MARCH

Toya Chester

In 1977, President Carter declared that the U.S. would be using 20% renewable energy by the year 2000. This pitifully low number has yet to be reached. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, U.S. energy consumption is only 10% renewable! In 1987, the Montreal Protocol, signed by 24 nations including the U.S., stated that countries would “phase out” ozone depletion by the magic year of 2000. Well, it is now 2014 and global climate change is looking like a runaway train. The question – and it is a huge one – is whether the level of CO₂ in the atmosphere can be kept below a level that will prevent a global catastrophe. We can be sure that if we continue with current trends, it won't!

Society Heading in the Wrong Direction

Here in capitalist America, we can be sued if we do not allow oil companies to have a free-for-all in our backyards. Not only do we have no say, but there are basically no standards set for fracking, a process that has produced thousands of tons of air pollution. Shocking? Well, it gets worse. People have been forced to give up their land in order for private companies to frack or build pipelines, on the grounds of eminent domain. The justification is that these oil companies are making use of land for public interest. Yet if it is for public interest, why is it privately run?

The elected officials serve the interests of corporate America and the big energy companies. Disregarding public outcry and the fact that the EPA, NASA scientists, and even 50 Democrats in Congress have said that further research must be done on the adverse effects of the Keystone XL pipeline, tar sands extraction is still being pushed through. Although tar sands extraction will produce 17% more greenhouse gases than conventional oil production, it is being sold to the public as a lesser of two evils compared with coal production. Corporations claim that it will boost the economy because of the job opportunities that come along with it. It is predicted that 20-40,000 American jobs will be created. How could one argue with thousands of jobs for



Years later, the Deepwater Horizon tragedy still affects the Gulf of Mexico.

ordinary Americans? But what if we could create, say, 4.5 million jobs in the U.S.? That is how many jobs could be put into the economy by 2030, according to the American Solar Energy Society, if the government “got serious about tackling climate change” and invested in green energy, (*Estimating the Jobs Impact of Tackling Climate Change*, 2009).

Growing Movement

Real change requires mass movements, and we are now seeing the beginnings of a mass movement to oppose environmental devastation. In New York State, over 50 municipalities have banned fracking, and the Lakota people, an indigenous group whose sacred lands have been devastated by big oil, voted to stop the pipeline coming through their land. Throughout last year, we not only saw protests directed against the Obama administration over the XL pipeline but numerous acts of civil disobedience across the country, where people physically fought to stop pipeline construction. In March 2014, close to 400 youth were arrested at the White House where they had created a “human oil spill.” A month later, the Cowboy and Indian March rode into town to emphasize the disparity over which areas of land are affected by the pipeline construction. The small

victory of 15,000 people delaying Obama's decision in 2011 on the XL expansion by encircling the White House shows what just .005% of the American population can do when they organize together.

Last year, the biggest climate rally to date happened in Washington D.C., when 50,000 people gathered to protest the pipeline. But this September's climate change rally in New York City promises to bring more than twice that many onto the streets as leaders of different nations meet at the UN headquarters with the alleged goal of “mobiliz[ing] political will for a meaningful legal agreement in 2015,” (www.un.org). We have seen this before – at every other climate summit. Broken promises, laughable standards, and lip service to the issues is what we can expect. We *cannot* sit around and wait for these “civil servants” to negotiate change based on a timetable dictated by corporate interests. We need to hold the biggest climate rally in history and stand together and demand that they address the real issues.

How Can We Stop Climate Change?

It is clear that we will never save the environment within a system where profit steers all. We can't

make real change if we can't hold our legislators accountable for their promises. And with the deforestation and eventual desertification created by tar sands extraction and the rising sea levels from melting ice caps, the damage may be irreversible.

It is time for the movement to escalate its challenge to corporate interests. This requires the mobilization of working people, who have the social power to force the hand of the ruling elite. One of the most promising aspects of the September protests is that a number of

trade unions are actively mobilizing their members to get on the streets.

We can no longer continue to fight on the defensive side. We need to ban fracking and then go further by taking the energy industry into public ownership. Only in this manner can we guarantee that profit is eliminated from the equation, which will allow for democratic planning of energy production.

The youth today are often criticized for their supposed lack of political activity. This is not true. They are politically conscious, but they are generally uninterested in electoral politics because they are given just one option: Democrats/Republicans, who have only the interests of the 1% at heart. This is why it is so urgent to build a political alternative to the two parties of corporate America. We need to run candidates who make the environment their number one priority, like Jess Spear of Socialist Alternative, who is running for the Washington State House of Representatives. She is a climate scientist who understands the root causes of climate change.

We rally together in September with the understanding that we are all affected by climate change. We must focus both on immediate demands but also on the necessity of fundamental system change, a change that could create jobs and a safe, healthy environment for us and generations to come. A complete transformation in society – a change to socialism – the only way to save the planet and our futures. ☘

New Socialist Alternative Publication
COMING SOON!

Fight Environmental and Economic Destruction
A Socialist Strategy

by Jess Spear

Check back at SocialistAlternative.org for updates.

Seattle Socialist Alternative

Jess Spear Challenges Corporate-Backed Democrat

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

 Check VoteSpear.org often
for campaign updates.

Jess Spear is running for Washington State Representative in the 43rd District, taking on the state's most powerful legislator, the corporate-funded Democrat Frank Chopp. Below is a shortened version of an article that appeared on the campaign website after the primary election on August 5.

This campaign achieved fantastic results – with over 20% in the primary – and we will go on to present a viable challenge in the November election. We achieved this result while accepting no corporate money, with only two months to build, and against a 20-year incumbent backed to the hilt by big business and the political establishment. We convinced 1/5 of Seattle primary voters to cast a conscious vote for a socialist, for rent control, for ending corporate welfare, and for a fossil-fuel-free Washington.

Our campaign boldly set the agenda for the primary and forced Frank Chopp to respond point-by-point, including an agreement that the state ban on rent control should be lifted. We will continue to do this in the general election, and we'll demand that his promises on the campaign trail – and behind closed doors to unions and other progressives to secure their endorsements, despite widespread disquiet within their ranks – be reflected by action in Olympia.

We've started a growing debate about rent control and other real solutions to Seattle's affordable housing crisis. At the July 31 protest against the oil trains, we drew attention to the reckless endangerment they represent to Seattle and our environment. As a direct result of our action, the city acknowledged that it had no emergency response plan and began putting one together.

As with the movement that won the \$15 minimum wage, this again demonstrates that direct action and grassroots movements are far more powerful than Chopp's all-too-familiar approach of backroom negotiations and insider deals. In protesting the oil trains, we called for a larger protest in Seattle on September 21, in solidarity with the largest-ever climate change protest in New York City, which now has a growing list of endorsers, including the Green Party, Divest UW, and 350.org.

At our primary election night party, Jess announced that she will step up the fight for affordable housing and rent control by launching #RentersRiseUp. We invite Seattle residents to share their stories of rent increases and join with other renters fed up with the skyrocketing housing costs.

Join us as we move forward to the general election, with already 170 campaign

volunteers and growing.

What Does the Primary Result Mean?

If you read only the mainstream media, you would think that support for an alternative to corporate politics is "ebbing." *The Stranger* wrongly suggested that our vote shows that anger at the status quo and the base of support for left-wing and socialist candidates is waning. This is rather curious considering Kshama Sawant only got 11% of the vote against Chopp in 2012 – with their endorsement – and this year Spear won 20% with no major endorsements.

Our campaign volunteers, who have been in daily discussions with working people, know well that anger, frustration, and deep resentment at the political establishment is growing. The day-to-day problems facing working people in this state – and around the country – have not substantially changed: the recovery remains primarily a recovery for the 1%. The rest of us still face skyrocketing housing costs, a prevalence of low-wage jobs, underfunded schools, cuts to social services, and record levels of student debt.

As pointed out by Goldy, a well known Seattle journalist, our campaign received the second-highest vote of any challenger in a Seattle legislative race. This was in spite of the full weight of the establishment being thrown behind Frank Chopp as he ran his most serious campaign since the 1990s.

The Seattle Times acknowledged this in their brief coverage of the results, pointing out that Frank Chopp pushed back hard against socialist challenger Jess Spear. The Chopp campaign, heavily financed by corporations, spent over \$60,000 in the primary, sending three mailers and cashing in every chip at Chopp's disposal to demand that unions, environmental groups, and other progressive organizations endorse him.

The promotion of Chopp by *The Stranger*, the "Progressive Voter Guide," unions, environmental organizations, etc. gave him credibility as a progressive, particularly to the majority of unengaged voters. They are not innocent bystanders; but have a critical role to play in educating voters about the reality of Chopp's pro-business record and supporting



Jess Spear was arrested in Seattle protesting the passage of highly explosive oil through the city.

those who are fighting for ordinary people.

Over 170 people signed up to volunteer for our campaign. We raised \$38,000 from ordinary working people who want to see a working-class political alternative to the Democratic Party establishment. With volunteers door-knocking, postering, talking to folks on the street – and with our mailer to 30,000 voters – our campaign was able to win thousands of votes by informing voters, not misleading them about who and what we represent.

Interpreting the results as reflective of the public's sentiment is also limited by the low turnout. Only 22,000 people had registered their approval or disapproval of Frank Chopp by election night. This is only 26% of registered voters. The vast majority – over 70,000 – did not vote or have not had their ballots yet counted. The primary electorate – and, in particular, those that vote early – are disproportionately the most party-loyal and economically privileged parts of society. In contrast, the most downtrodden, poor, young, and struggling sections of the population do not typically vote in the primary election – or at all.

In fact, the strategy Frank Chopp employed

in his campaign contradicts the prevailing analysis of the public mood on rent control, affordable housing, and ending corporate welfare. One of the visible impacts of our campaign was on Chopp's own political material. His mailer and advertisements proclaim Chopp a community organizer, an activist fighting to close corporate loopholes, for progressive taxes, for more affordable housing, and as an advocate for working people. Frank Chopp hopes to confuse voters by painting himself as an activist just like Jess Spear.

Chopp understands that the voters in the 43rd District want a representative willing to fight for the interests of working people, and he adopted the strategy of recasting himself in the mold of his opponent. Nowhere in his campaign material did he ask for people's votes on the basis of giving Boeing \$9 billion, presiding over a dysfunctional and regressive tax system, or being supported by big oil and big coal.

Frank Chopp and the political establishment recognize the threat represented by the Jess Spear campaign and by Socialist Alternative. The announcement that ACLU lawyer Alison Holcomb is likely to run against Kshama Sawant in 2015 is another signal that the political establishment is beginning to fight back in earnest. They recognize that the 2014 election is not only about securing Chopp's seat. It's also to cut across the challenge Socialist Alternative presents to their hold on power in Seattle.

"We've Only Just Gotten Started"

We haven't just echoed popular opinion. This campaign has raised the confidence and awareness of ordinary people and built a movement. That's how we won \$15, that's how real gains for women's rights, civil rights, LGBTQ rights, and environmental protections have come about.

At the election night party, 100 people came out to watch the results with us. We raised another \$7,900 and signed up more volunteers excited to elect Seattle's second socialist. A worker at the Vermillion was so inspired he donated \$200!

Let's send a message to Olympia that giving \$9 billion to Boeing while our schools are criminally underfunded doesn't come without a political price.

Over the next three months, our campaign will continue to build support for rent control, taxing the rich to fund social services, a fossil-fuel-free Washington, and ending corporate welfare. We will continue building an alternative to corporate politics and supporting the struggle for a just, equitable, and sustainable world – a socialist world. ✪

Karen Lewis for Mayor of Chicago?

Working-Class Challenges to Big Business Democrats

Bryan Koulouris

Discussion about campaigns of the 99% against the corporate domination of both parties has picked up in recent weeks. This is a welcome development for socialists, community activists, union organizers, environmentalists, anti-racists and those campaigning for a \$15 an hour minimum wage. The Democrats have failed us, and we need an alternative.

Karen Lewis, President of the Chicago Teachers Union, is considering a run against the pro-corporate, union-busting Democratic Party Mayor Rahm Emmanuel. Lewis, a proponent of “bottom-up” union activity, has led actions and even a strike against Emmanuel’s administration. Lewis can inspire a base in both the unions and the African-American community. Amazingly, polls indicate that she would defeat Emmanuel by nine percentage points if the election was held today.

This can ignite a discussion about how to organize when Democrats disappoint progressives and union activists. It is also important that Lewis comes out of the labor movement and the black community. We would strongly urge that Karen Lewis run independently of the Democrats. In this way, her campaign could be a step toward what is really needed: a new party of working people.

If Lewis ran as a Democrat, then she would be more prone to pressure from big developers and the super-rich. A Democratic Party candidacy would also fail to push forward the labor movement to fight in its own interests by running independent candidates against the local governments that are cutting budgets and attacking unions.

Massive Vacuum

There is a massive vacuum on the left of U.S. politics. Poll after poll shows that the millionaires in Congress are out of touch with the concerns of workers, immigrants, African-Americans, and young people.

Most people are in favor of guaranteed living-wage jobs, against military adventures abroad, and want a political alternative to the two parties. The system is stacked against working-class people, with corporations pouring millions into the political process while politicians and judges provide a host of laws that make it difficult for ordinary folks to assert themselves in elections. Still, it is possible to defeat the big business agenda with a strong organization, a clear program, and a determined campaign.

Last year, Socialist Alternative showed that the establishment can be defeated by getting Kshama Sawant elected, with over 90,000 votes, to Seattle’s City Council as an open socialist. We also nearly won another City



Chicago Teachers Union leader Karen Lewis is considering a run for mayor.

Council campaign, with Ty Moore running in Minneapolis. After Kshama was elected, she used her platform to build struggles of working people, including the successful movement for a \$15 an hour minimum wage.

Inspired by Socialist Alternative’s campaigns last year, many other left-wing activists are stepping up to challenge the two parties of Wall Street.

2014 Campaigns

Socialist Alternative is again running a candidate in Washington state, with Jess Spear challenging Frank Chopp, the pro-corporate leader of the state legislature with the most regressive tax system and biggest corporate handouts anywhere in the country. See page four for more about this campaign.

More left candidates have come onto the scene this year than at any time in recent memory, from Jorge Mujica in Chicago to Howie Hawkins in New York, and Dan Siegel in Oakland to Eugene Puryear in Washington, D.C.

None of these candidacies will have the nationwide and movement-building implications of Sawant’s victory last year. Still, this step forward can be important toward building the confidence of working people to step into the political arena.

If Karen Lewis declared a campaign now for Chicago mayor now, independent of the Democrats and corporate money, then the political discussion in this country could be shifted significantly to the left in the aftermath of the mid-term elections. The election is in June, and a victory would give massive confidence to labor

movement activists and working-class people in general to challenge “politics as usual.”

Socialist Alternative’s Role

To really take on big business and win, we need to motivate and mobilize masses of working-class people. This process is not simply electoral. The strikes of fast-food workers and the protests against environmental destruction this fall will play important parts in building the consciousness and organization of workers and youth. To defeat big business and their political servants, we need to provide a vision of society without exploitation and war. More than that, we need a program that can move people into action now and link this to the fundamental transformation of society. Socialist Alternative’s campaigns have been unique in connecting this approach to a tightly knit organization with clear ideas and links to the labor movement and community groups.

Since Occupy was driven from city parks across the country through coordinated police attacks, Socialist Alternative argued to bring Occupy’s message and determined struggle to working-class communities. When we were able to, we did exemplary work in trying to show how this could be done, with Occupy Homes defending homeowners against big bank and police evictions. Likewise, we brought the message of the 99% to the electoral arena.

We called for 200 independent Occupy candidates in 2012 to give a sense of what was possible, to call on people to take a clear position against the Democrats, and to provoke debate with the “anti-politics” elements in Occupy. This call reflected the vacuum that

existed, and we proved the possibilities for independent working-class politics with Sawant’s victory.

Elections, while stacked against working people, are also looked upon as a key part of politics in the U.S. This provides an important platform for struggles against the injustices of the capitalist system. Socialists need to use this organizing opportunity to engage with working-class people, build the general fight-back against corporate domination, and expand the forces of the socialist movement. Election campaigns can sometimes play an important role, offering a protest vote to educate thousands of workers, providing an alternative and establishing an initial base of support. Still, with the limited resources of a small socialist movement in the U.S., it is best to focus on the campaigns that can make the biggest impact.

However, we are not an organization that exists for the sole purpose of running candidates. We seek to build movements of the 99%, articulate a way forward to victory, and deepen the influence of socialist ideas in the labor movement. We also aim to educate new generations of young people in the history of the struggles to overthrow capitalism internationally. Elections are only one small facet of how we can raise consciousness, mobilize, and educate working people moving into action.

Next Steps

The momentum of having over a dozen serious independent left campaigns needs to be built upon. Socialist Alternative supports these electoral efforts, but we need plans to go further.

The left needs to use debate around what Bernie Sanders should do in his planned presidential run to put forward the need for a mass working-class alternative to capitalist domination. We can engage with a far larger audience that just the existing activists in a discussion about how to have the strongest left challenge in the presidential race of 2016.

These campaigns can be important steps toward what is really needed: a mass party of working-class people that campaigns not only in elections but in the streets, workplaces, campuses, and communities against the injustices of capitalism. A new party would not just be a combination of existing small left groups; it would reflect thousands of new activists stepping into struggle. A new workers’ party will become viable when a section of the Democrats’ working-class voting base begins to support a left alternative.

An independent Karen Lewis campaign would be a huge step toward both inspiring left campaigns and rebuilding the labor movement. ✪

Shallow “Recovery” for Working People

Where Is the U.S. Economy Going?

Tony Wilson

What’s wrong with the U.S. economy? That’s a question being asked not only by average working people, but also by the so-called experts. The economy declined a shocking 2.9% in the first three months of this year – the worst performance since 2010. Payrolls have increased by an average of 200,000 a month in the last five months. Yet, at the same time, the percentage of workers now employed in the economy is at a 36-year low of 62.8%. Is the economy about to really pick up, or is this another false dawn?

Beth Ann Bovino, chief U.S. economist for Standard and Poor’s, states: “It has been the worst recovery in 55 years. We’ve had incredibly slow growth.” As a result, tens of millions of working people remain long-term unemployed. Over 19 million workers remain unemployed, marginally attached to the workforce or involuntarily working part-time, (Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 2014).

Central to this failure of the U.S. to grow has been its inability to create living-wage jobs. The economic sectors that provide living-wage jobs, manufacturing and construction, have stagnated. Nearly 40% of jobs created since the recovery began – about 1.7 million – have come from three low-wage sectors: food services, retail, and employment services, (*The Washington Post*, 2/28/2013).

Low-Paid Jobs

A recent National Employment Law Project report states: “Mid-wage occupations, paying between



The majority of new jobs created since the recession are low-wage, part-time, service sector jobs.

\$13.83 and \$21.13 per hour, made up about 60 percent of the job losses during the recession. But those mid-wage jobs have made up just 27 percent of the jobs gained during the recovery. By contrast, low-wage occupations paying less than \$13.83 per hour have utterly dominated the recovery, with 58 percent of the job gains since 2010,” (*The Low-Wage Recovery and Growing Inequality*, August 2012).

This weak recovery has failed to turn around the key problems plaguing U.S. society: low wages and record levels of poverty. Not only has it left tens of millions of workers in a desperate situation,

but these workers don’t have the spending power to give a boost to the economy. Considering that close to 70% of economic growth comes from consumer spending – that is, workers’ wages – this spells out the central flaw of those who say that the economy is about to rebound strongly.

Without increased spending from somewhere, the economy can’t boom. Not only has federal and state spending been slashed, but the Federal Reserve is scaling back its monthly injection of money into the economy due to the emergence of new financial bubbles. With no big boost from imports, that only leaves business spending to boost the economy.

Neil Irwin, a senior economic correspondent at *The New York Times*, writes: “Five years into the economic recovery, businesses still aren’t plowing much money into big-ticket investments for the future. Nonresidential fixed investment – what businesses spend on equipment, software, buildings and intellectual property – still hasn’t bounced back to its pre-crisis share of the economy, let alone made up for lost ground from the record lows of 2009,” (7/21/2014). “Growth of capital spending during this recovery is about 30 percent below the average of the prior five recoveries, according to Bank of America Merrill Lynch,” (*Business Week*, 5/20/2014).

Instead, in a repetition of trends in the 1990s and the 2000s, new bubbles are being created. Neil Irwin writes: “Around the world, nearly every asset class is expensive by historical standards. Stocks and bonds; emerging markets and advanced economies; urban office towers and Iowa farmland; you name it, and it is trading at prices that are high by historical standards relative to fundamentals ... Worldwide, more money is piling into savings than businesses believe they can use to make productive investments,” (*NY Times*, 7/8/2014).

Capitalist Crisis

The reason is rooted in contradictions inherent to capitalism. Unlike in the period of U.S. dominance from 1880 to 1970, when investment in industry drove forward overall economic growth, today’s economy is dominated by financial markets. Investing their super-profits in financial markets may boost corporations’ own earnings, but it does little for the overall economy except create new bubbles.

It’s not that these corporations have no money to spend. According to Matthew Philips, associate editor for *Bloomberg Businessweek*: “Cash on corporate balance sheets has increased almost 70 percent over the past four years to more than \$2 trillion, the size of

Russia’s economy. Profits are high, and employee compensation as a percentage of GDP fell to a 65-year low last year,” (5/20/2014).

The failure of the CEOs of these financial giants to invest in industrial production demonstrates the inability of capitalism to solve this crisis in a way that can “lift all boats.” Despite the economic devastation caused by the real estate bubble crash of 2008, these big banks have been getting massive government handouts in the form of loans at low interest rates.

Economic recoveries under capitalism are supposed to overcome losses inflicted during previous recessions. But there was a zero net job gain between 2000 and 2009. No previous decade going back to the 1940s had a job growth of less than 20 percent. The failure of this recovery to support a growth in the real economy and living-wage jobs is emblematic of this new parasitical phase of capitalism.

Economic Perspectives

With world markets saturated, the logic of capitalism – to maximize short-term profits – will continue to boost stocks and bonds, which are overwhelmingly owned by the wealthiest 1% and 0.1%. With both Republican and Democratic parties dominated by these same gigantic banks and corporations, we cannot expect any change from their policies. This means that, at best, the economy will stagger along for a period. At worst, these new bubbles will burst, tipping it into a new deep recession.

As socialists, we demand that the economy serve the needs of the vast majority of society. We need to raise our voices and demand nothing less than a living-wage job or a decent standard of living for all working people. We demand the restoration of all cuts to public education and public transportation, as well as full funding for necessary social services – for the sick, the disabled, the young, and the elderly. We demand a massive public program of investment in green technology to provide living-wage jobs for all and to address climate change. If capitalism is unable to provide these things, we demand a change in the system and the introduction of a democratic socialist system that can do this. ☛

Surveys Show: Joblessness Continues

Despite this so-called economic recovery, a recent survey by The Associated Press found that “four out of five U.S. adults struggle with joblessness, near-poverty or reliance on welfare for at least parts of their lives, a sign of deteriorating economic security and an elusive American dream.” Nationwide, the count of America’s poor remains stuck at a record number: 46.2 million, or 15 percent of the population. While poverty rates for blacks and Hispanics are nearly three times higher than whites, poverty is growing fast among whites as well, (*The Huffington Post*, 7/28/2013).

Supreme Court Attacks Women's Rights

Is Voting Democrat the Answer?

Kelly Bellin

This summer, the Supreme Court caught the outrage of millions as women's rights took a brutal attack through three devastating rulings. The "Buffer Zone" ruling struck down a Massachusetts law requiring protesters at abortion clinics to stay 35 feet away from the entrance in order to protect women entering the clinics. The Supreme Court undermined the ability of overwhelmingly female home health care workers employed by the government to gain union representation. But most infamous was the "Hobby Lobby" ruling, which gutted the contraceptive mandate under the Affordable Care Act.

By claiming it violates their religious freedom as employers, the Hobby Lobby ruling allows companies to avoid complying with the requirement to cover all forms of contraception approved by the government without charging workers a co-payment.

In the United States, 57 million women are covered through employer-sponsored health insurance. The Hobby Lobby ruling is a devastating attack on working-class women, and it directly targets low-income women, who cannot afford reproductive health care without their employer-provided coverage. As Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, put it in her minority statement, "It bears note in this regard that the cost of an IUD [intrauterine device] is nearly equivalent to a month's full-time pay for workers earning the minimum wage." Women of color will be most impacted by the Hobby Lobby ruling, because with lower incomes and wealth on average, they are less likely to be able to afford to pay for their contraception out of pocket.

In the days following the ruling, Democrats called on women to not forget the role of Republican politicians in attacking women's rights in the upcoming midterm elections, which typically have very low turnout. Women were decisive in Obama's election victories, which were both against Republican candidates who made pathetic attempts to win the "women's vote" amid a continuous war on women's rights driven by their own party.

But throwing our weight behind the Democrats is a false start to fighting the ongoing attacks on women's rights. While Democrats have generally spoken out against the Hobby Lobby and Buffer Zone rulings, some quite forcefully, their party's defensive strategy has allowed Republicans to define and dominate the debate on women's rights for decades. For women to protect past gains or make new ones, a defensive approach is not enough! As history demonstrates, it is



Protesters against the Hobby Lobby decision outside the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C.

through mass struggle, organized resistance, and political independence that working-class women have forced politicians to make concessions.

The Supreme Court rulings will increase the level of poverty for working-class women and reinforce the various forms of violence that women face in all aspects of life. The withholding of health care assistance will deny the genuine right to choose for many women, and it will withhold life-saving options for women who are otherwise economically dependent on a violent partner. Yet Hobby Lobby is just the most recent attack on the social services that disproportionately serve women.

Slashed Services

The ongoing and massive cuts at the federal, state, and local levels, which the Democrats have largely supported if not spearheaded, carry devastating consequences for a whole range of programs that provide crucial services for women and people of color.

Even the legacy of the 1976 Hyde Amendment, which banned the use of Medicaid funds for abortions and effectively took away the genuine right to choose for many poor women, can be partially laid at the feet of the Democratic Party. While the Hyde Amendment was a Republican initiative, the House of Representatives had a 291 to 144 Democrat majority at its passing! Even worse, the Hyde Amendment is still in place - renewed even in the years when Democrats had full control. In 2010, Obama used an executive order to include Hyde language into the Stupak-Pitts Amendment to the Affordable Health Care for America Act, as a political maneuver to secure Rep. Stupak's vote. Even as Republicans have led the charge on the

most brutal legislative attacks on women, Democrats have played politics with women's lives while covering the real anti-women effects of their policies with their rhetoric about women's rights.

Most recently, Obama willingly included the initial religious exceptions to the Affordable Care Act for women whose employers are religious hospitals, colleges, and charities - which serve huge sections of society. This concession sparked outrage and opened the door for future exemptions like the Hobby Lobby ruling itself. In early 2012, Obama used the tightening of religious exemptions to appease mass anger for overruling the FDA's decision to give Plan B over-the-counter status. At the time, he again echoed right-wing arguments, stating that he didn't want young women picking up Plan B "between the bubble gum and the batteries."

Beyond Defensive

Mainstream women's organizations direct the anger of millions into votes for Democrats, who overwhelmingly combine basic talking points for equality alongside a compromising, backsliding approach. This paralyzes the women's movement from organizing the mass resistance necessary to take on the onslaught from Republican politicians and a section of corporate America.

To move beyond a purely defensive strategy, the women's movement must be independent from the capitalist system and its political representatives. While Democratic politicians have clearly differentiated themselves on the Hobby Lobby ruling, among other key votes at the federal and local levels, we can't avoid the reality that the Democratic Party is fueled by big business and will never mount a serious challenge to the oppression

of women, which remains a pillar of the capitalist system. Their support for massive austerity has hit women, people of color, and immigrants the hardest. The Democratic Party will continue to hold back a bold movement to challenge the corporate domination of politics and deepening inequality.

Successful attacks on women's rights only invite attacks on other oppressed groups. Days after the Hobby Lobby ruling, the Department of Education granted a religious freedom exemption allowing George Fox University to ban a transgender student from receiving on-campus housing. The reverberations of Hobby Lobby have already emboldened dozens of religious organizations - even a former Obama White House official - to request that a similar exemption be allowed for discrimination based on gender orientation on a large scale, (*The Atlantic*, 7/2/2014).

The mass outrage exists to build a women's movement that truly represents all women and that stands in solidarity with the struggles of the LGBTQ community, immigrants, and people of color. We must unite in struggle with other movements, as our oppression is so inextricably connected and, for many women, overlapping.

The Supreme Court rulings demonstrate the urgent need for a mass movement with a fighting strategy to capture the anger of millions and organize against inequality. To do this, labor and women's organizations must break from the Democrats and mobilize independently to fight for women's rights - including the ones we've just lost. ☘

Strike Shuts Down Largest U.S. Port

L.A. Truckers Taking a Stand Against Spiraling Wage Theft

This article, written by Rob Rooke, tells the important story of unorganized truckers at the port of L.A. who went on strike in July of this year. To read the rest of this article, visit www.SocialistAlternative.org.

On Monday July 7, 120 Port of Los Angeles and Long Beach truckers at three companies put their truck keys in their pockets and picked up picket signs. These non-union drivers, with the support of Teamsters Local 848, were done taking it. For many of these workers, this was their first-ever strike. ☘

HOW WOULD

And How C

Peter Ikeler

Humanity is at one of the most important crossroads in its 200,000-year history. Having spread across the globe by about 30,000 years ago, we advanced through various stages of hunting and gathering to develop agriculture and animal husbandry 20,000 years later. This began a shift from *human* muscle power to *animal* muscle power as our primary source of energy. But it is only in the last 300 years that another massive shift has taken place: from animal power to fossil fuels - coal, oil, and gas - which dovetails precisely with the rise of industrial capitalism.

This period has seen an explosion of technological progress, economic output, and world population. Yet the carbon-emitting basis of this impressive run, combined with the rapacious individualism of competitive - and later monopoly - capitalism, now clearly threaten all advances made with an impending and ever-more-palpable environmental catastrophe. For many, this ominous threat calls into question whether “industrialization” was ever such a good thing in the first place.

A Dual Crisis

At the same time as this ecological crisis is coming to a head, a social crisis is increasingly obvious to all: the failure of capitalism to make good on its promise of rising living standards and freedom from daily drudgery. Instead of “rising standards,” workers have seen stagnation or major declines, despite fantastic income growth for a tiny elite. Instead of “freedom from feudal drudgery,” daily life is increasingly consumed by mind-numbing busywork: filling out forms, making calls to settle endless bills, commuting hours to work, buying groceries, picking up kids/loved ones, etc. Not to mention the experience of work itself, which is increasingly made as meaningless, monotonous, and tenuous as employers can get



In an occupied factory, workers meet regularly to democratically make decisions.

away with. The financial collapse of 2008 and the ensuing world recession are only the most recent signals of such slow-burning decay.

Given these predicaments, it is fair to say that humanity faces a *dual crisis*: massive inequality and stagnating growth, on the one hand, and an ecological nightmare, on the other. Some would argue that the two problems - as well as police brutality, gender oppression, war in the Middle East, Ukraine, etc. - are separate and distinct, requiring “individual” analyses and piecemeal solutions. From a socialist perspective, however, both crises flow from the exploitative logic of capitalism. “Exploit workers” is the first imperative of a system designed to squeeze value from the labor of others; “exploit nature” is the second, heeded by firms seeking low costs for the material and refuse of production.

The solution, therefore, to both crises is the replacement of capitalism with a rational, planned, and democratic economy - otherwise known as socialism. But how, exactly, would this work? While a growing number of Americans, particularly those under 30, show an interest in and openness to socialism, there

remains considerable confusion as to what it would actually look like. In this article, Socialist Alternative spells out as clearly as possible the key features of socialism, how these differ from the deformed structures of the Soviet Union, and how such a system could immediately be used to stop global warming.

Public Ownership

The defining feature of socialism is public ownership of the main economic resources. These include major corporations such as Walmart, Exxon-Mobil, General Motors, and Apple, which are currently publicly *traded*, but in fact *owned and controlled* by tiny cliques of investors. But economic resources include not only factories, inventory, production technology, distribution networks, and infrastructure, they also include *money capital*, overwhelmingly concentrated among a small number of banks: Goldman Sachs, J.P. Morgan, Citigroup, Bank of America, etc. These would also be taken into public ownership.

But what is “public ownership”? This is the key distinction between

socialism and capitalism. Under capitalism, most of society’s resources are owned and controlled by private firms, which carry out their functions - be they production, distribution, financing, or services - for one reason: to make profit. GE, for example, is ostensibly an “electrical equipment manufacturer,” but in 2013 it reaped more than half its profit from financial operations - lending money at interest - rather than from the production and sale of goods, (GE 2013 Annual Report). This shows how the goal of capitalist organizations is not to produce goods or services *per se*, but to produce profit. However, they achieve this - be it by making and selling quality products, by mass-producing shoddy ones, by monopolizing scarce resources, or by lending out money - is a secondary question.

By contrast, publicly owned enterprises can operate on a much longer timeframe and even at an economic loss. Their primary goal, if properly administered, is to produce goods and services that meet social needs. They do not have to make profit (or surplus) and if they do, this can be reinvested to expand that enterprise or start new ones. With the majority of firms under public ownership, the door would be open to large-scale cooperation, coordination and a drastic reduction in waste.

Democratic Control

A keen observer might say that although public ownership sounds good, its actual practice in the Soviet Union was highly inefficient and often yielded inferior goods. Socialist Alternative would not dispute this. The difference, however, between the command economies of the Soviet Union, Maoist China, etc. and the planned economy we advocate is *who is doing the planning*. Any complex social system requires feedback. Under capitalism, this is imperfectly provided by consumer “choice” (though many markets, particularly for utilities and housing, offer few real choices).

In a socialist economy, the planners and decision-makers would not be an elite caste of state officials, as in the Soviet Union after 1923, but elected representatives of workers and consumers empowered to express rank-and-file needs and correct any shortfalls. This also distinguishes the public enterprises we’re fighting for from existing, top-down ones, such as urban public school systems. In every workplace, school, hospital, and neighborhood, daily oversight would be in the hands of working people organized into councils to facilitate direct democracy. Local - for example, workplace - councils would then elect delegates to larger bodies that could manage entire enterprises in coordination with each other and consumers’ councils. To prevent careerism and bureaucratic behavior, all delegates would be paid no more than an average workers’ wage and be subject to frequent re-election and immediate recall.

Sound like a lot of work? Council-based democracy would indeed require time and effort from all participants. But this would be all the more possible given a *drastic reduction of work time*. Capitalists currently make profit by squeezing every last drop from some workers while relegating millions to unemployment or underemployment. By providing jobs for everyone, we can easily reduce the workweek, eliminating both unemployment *and* overwork. When no one has to work more than 30, 25, or even as little as 20 hours a week, there will be ample time left for leisure, self-education, and grassroots democracy.

To be clear, council democracy is not something dreamed up by Marx, Engels, or any other theorist. It was invented by workers in the course of struggle - first in the Paris Commune of 1871, then again in the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, during Germany’s 1918-19 upheaval, and, in smaller form, during the 1934 Minneapolis general strike. In each case, the dysfunction of capitalism and

Could Socialism Work?

Could It Help Stop Climate Change?

workers' strike action forced workers to devise alternative ways of administering society. Of these examples, only in 1917 in Russia did this lead to the wholesale overthrow of capitalism.

Internationalism

The third component of socialism is internationalism. Capitalism long ago created a world division of labor, international trade - including enslaved people - and structural inequality between countries. Socialism could not turn back the clock and build a durable economy "in one country" - a prime reason for the decline of the Soviet Union. It would necessarily utilize the existing global infrastructure of production and distribution and wield it, instead of to make profits for elites, to meet human need *equally* while eliminating reliance on fossil fuels and scorched-earth resource extraction.

Indeed, the environmental crisis *demand*s a global response. Low-ball carbon emissions "targets" and so-called "cap-and-trade" policies do little more than shift fossil-fuel usage - and blame - around the world without actually reducing emissions. The competitive structure of profit-driven capitalism stymies the ability of individual countries or firms to take meaningful action: much like the conundrum of the Cold War, each fears that if they "disarm" from fossil fuels, others won't - and they'll be left at a disadvantage. Removing profits via public ownership and democratic control *at an international level* is the only way to make possible a massive redirection of investment.

Redirecting Investment

The sheer volume of wasteful and harmful spending under capitalism boggles the mind. At any given time, human societies have only a finite quantity of wealth to invest. The environmental sustainability of such investments provides a basic measure of an economy's efficiency and

long-term prospects; today's global capitalism, on this measure, scores very poorly.

To start, \$20 trillion worth of untapped fossil fuels is currently claimed as assets by big energy companies and traded on "futures" markets, (capitalinstitute.org, 7/19/2011). This sum is equal to 40% of global GDP. The emissions that would result from burning such "reserves" are well beyond what scientists believe would trigger irreversible climate change, resulting in millions of deaths and millions more being forcibly displaced, (*The Guardian*, 4/19/2013). Capitalism, quite literally, is *invested* in social destruction.

But there are many other ways in which current spending is wasteful and indirectly harmful, insofar as it withdraws resources from useful, sustainable channels. Advertising, for instance, is a \$140 billion industry in the U.S., (KantarMedia.com, 2013) which produces absolutely nothing useful - it simply persuades people to buy things they don't need or to buy one brand of a necessary thing over another. Yet the sum of money devoted to this in the U.S. alone is three and a half times what the U.N. estimates as the global cost - \$41 billion - of providing the world's population with housing, food, health care, and education. Add to this the trillions spent on national "defense" and weapons production - products solely designed to kill people - widespread use of planned obsolescence by electronics and machine manufacturers, and the subsidization of auto-dependent suburban sprawl, and we start to get a picture of the resources capitalism pours into ecological dead-ends.

A publicly owned and democratically controlled economy would provide an immediate mechanism for redirecting investment. Millions of good jobs could be created almost overnight by rebuilding energy-efficient housing and transport, retooling factories to produce the needed



The technology exists to power the world with renewable energy.

materials, and harnessing renewable energy through wind farms and desert-based solar plants, (*Scientific American*, 7/1/2013). And the needed technology already exists. In 2009, professors Mark Jacobson and Mark Delucchi published a plan to power society on 100% renewables by 2013, arguing that a "sustainable world" is "technically possible," (*Scientific American*, November 2009).

Room for Creative Initiative

One common objection to socialism, or large-scale public ownership, is that it would stifle creativity, innovation, and individual initiative. This is simply not true. Public ownership would only be necessary for those mega-corporations and banks that already control the global economy. These organizations are, right now, large, impersonal bureaucracies that strongly discourage worker and consumer input. Socialism would simply democratize and coordinate these massive institutions, giving workers and consumers a real voice in how they are run.

But beneath the mega-companies of the global economy, small businesses could coexist alongside

consumer and community cooperatives. There is simply no need to "nationalize" the local pizza joint, auto repair shop, or convenience store. The only difference would be that anyone employed at such enterprises - as well as every other member of society - in addition to being guaranteed a living wage, would also receive quality housing, health care, education, and childcare *for free*, since such necessities should be human rights, not commodities. Furthermore, the freeing of individuals from overwork, endless bureaucracy (paying the bills, etc.), long-distance commuting, and fear of financial ruin - all endemic under capitalism - *combined with* the active provision of accessible education and leisure facilities would unleash untapped potential for personal growth, creativity, and innovation.

Break With Reformism and the Democrats

The big question hanging over all of this, of course, is how to achieve it. Many in the environmental and economic justice movements hold out hope that Democrats will eventually push through reforms that could snowball into meaningful change.

Unfortunately, it is increasingly obvious that this is simply not the case. The Obama administration has established itself as a committed ally of big oil. Recently, it approved searches for oil and gas beneath the Atlantic Ocean (*NY Times*, 7/19/2014) and has previously supported hydraulic fracturing (fracking), oil drilling in the Arctic, and guaranteed major loans for nuclear energy development - despite the Fukushima disaster. Only in the face of mass protest and civil disobedience has Obama delayed his decision on the Keystone XL pipeline, which would bring resource-draining Canadian tar sands oil to the Gulf Coast (*The Washington Post*, 4/18/2014). In general, leading Democrats have flagrantly ignored and actively worked against environmental justice, despite paying it ritualized lip service to garner votes.

In the end, facts speak for themselves. There is no time to waste in taking serious action against climate change. As shown above, capitalism is deeply committed - to the tune of 40% of GDP - to fossil fuels and a wasteful economy based on planned obsolescence and worker exploitation. In order to address the dual crises of climate change and inequality - to redirect investment toward renewable energy, green jobs, and durable goods production - we have to bring the largest corporations and banks under public control. This requires taking them out of private hands and running them in a democratically planned fashion. And, although this process will likely start in one country, it must become international. This, in a nutshell, is what we mean by "socialism": a world economy controlled by workers and consumers and devoted to the needs of humanity rather than the narrow interests of investors. Humanity is indeed at a crossroads - and capitalism is in the way. We urge all members of the 99% to join in the struggle for system change to stop climate change. ☺

Socialist Alternative Goes Monthly!

Developing Working-Class Media

Socialist Alternative Editorial Board

This is the sixth issue of *Socialist Alternative*, which continues the proud tradition of two previous Marxist newspapers, *Justice* and *Labor Militant*, spanning nearly three decades.

Over the years, we have covered a very wide range of domestic and international political developments and social struggles from a working-class viewpoint, ranging from the attempt to build the Labor Party in the U.S. in the 1990s to the anti-globalization and anti-war movements of the following decade. We covered the mass protest of immigrant workers in 2005-06 demanding "equal rights for all workers." When the financial collapse of 2007-08 led to mass unemployment and millions of foreclosures, we demanded: "Bail-out Workers not Wall Street."

When Republican Governor Scott Walker set out to destroy public sector unions in Wisconsin in 2011, Socialist Alternative was there, popularizing the call for a one-day public sector general strike. We also participated in the Occupy movement, which broke out later that year and gave extensive coverage to subsequent developments, like Occupy Homes in Minneapolis. And, given our political agreement with the Committee for a Workers International, which organizes in over 40 countries, we have provided outstanding, in-depth coverage of major developments and struggles that cannot be matched by media organizations with far more resources.

Since the election of Kshama Sawant, the first socialist council member in Seattle in nearly 100 years, the left in the U.S. and our organization in particular have entered a new and very exciting chapter. Socialist Alternative has doubled in size, and our national profile has grown by leaps and bounds. It is no exaggeration to say that we are now the most

prominent socialist organization in the U.S. But this is really only the beginning of what can and must be achieved.

Kshama's election reflected the enormous openness to socialist ideas in the U.S. today, especially among young people. This is part of a broad shift to the left in society. There is an enormous thirst for ideas, particularly for ideas that relate concretely to the development of real struggles. However, people are flooded with misinformation by the corporate media. This is one of the key reasons we need to take a bold step forward in the development of our publications – and particularly our newspaper.

We are hoping that this issue of *Socialist Alternative* will mark the beginning of moving to a monthly newspaper – doubling our frequency. However, this requires resources. We receive no corporate donations, and we are asking you to support this effort by subscribing today at the ordinary rate of \$25 for 10 issues – or the \$50 solidarity rate.

A Marxist paper plays a number of roles. It helps to define the political position of our organization at any given time. We seek to address the key issues facing working people and to formulate demands and tactics that can help take social struggle forward. We want our publications to be tools that ordinary people can use in the fight for a better world.

In Seattle, Socialist Alternative played an important role in leading the fight for a \$15 minimum wage. With Kshama Sawant's public position and the building of the grassroots *15 Now* campaign, this fight ended in victory. It is the job of our paper and website to tell the story of how we did this and to help arm the movement nationally as we push rapidly to replicate this success in cities and states across the country.

Our paper also serves to knit together our growing organization. Our branches use the paper to engage in dialogue with fellow workers and people in our communities at street sales, protests, or on the doorstep.

Some leftists question why Marxists focus on selling their papers as a key activity. Some, likewise, question the importance of a paper in the Internet era. We know that many of our new members first encountered our material on the Internet. But in trying to connect with a wider working-class audience, there is no substitute for talking to people directly. The paper is part of that conversation.

For all these reasons, and many more, we feel that the time has come to take the next step. Support us by subscribing and sharing the paper with your friends and coworkers as we seek to rebuild a powerful socialist movement in the U.S. ✪



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Interview With Worker Activist at Delta Airlines

Workers in Minneapolis and St. Paul are enlisting the support of 15 Now to help organize a community-wide effort to bring a \$15 minimum wage at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP). 15 Now MN sat down with Kip Hedges, a leading organizer in the effort for Delta baggage handlers union recognition with the International Association of Machinists (IAM), on the potential strength of a \$15 campaign led by airport workers in coordination with the broader 15 Now organization.

15 Now MN: Can you describe the wages and conditions facing airport workers at Delta, at Delta's subcontractors, and at MSP generally?

Kip Hedges: Many of my coworkers are Ready Reserve. That means they make around \$11 an hour. They get no vacation, no sick time, no seniority, no health benefits. When and if they get full time, they get a pay cut. Those that work for contractors that clean Delta aircraft make between \$8 and \$10 an hour, with very limited benefits. At Delta Global Services, which employs baggage handlers and gate agents to work Delta's commuter aircraft, workers face similar wages and conditions. Most of these low-paid workers have to work two or three jobs to make ends meet. Every worker at the airport today faces speed-up and eroding conditions. It is also important to remember that most of these jobs used to pay \$20 an hour with benefits.

We are at the beginning stages of pulling together workers from every work group and company at the airport. The idea of a \$15 an hour minimum wage at the airport is attractive to many workers here because it would be a life changer. 15 Now is a national and metro-wide effort to raise the minimum wage. We will need forces broader than just airport workers to win this. 15 Now has the ability to help us enlist community, union, and political support. They also have some experience in winning.

15 Now MN: How does the struggle to unionize airport workers relate to the 15 Now campaign?

KH: It relates in two ways. It helps to energize and involve Ready Reserve



Delta is notoriously anti-union.

workers in the union campaign. Several are stepping up to help lead both campaigns. The 15 Now campaign builds workers' power at the airport. That can only help our organizing effort to join the machinists union and the effort by aircraft cleaners, wheelchair pushers, and cart drivers to join the Service Employees International Union.

Delta Air Lines plays to win. They will use all their power to stop both our organizing drive and the 15 Now campaign. That is why we will need broad support from the working people of Minnesota. This kind of minimum wage can only be won with broad support from both workers at the airport and from the community.

My coworkers inspire me [to fight back]. We have been through the wringer, and yet we have a sizable number of activists at Delta that are working to regain our union. At AirServe, which performs aircraft cleaning for Delta, workers are trying to get a union and have refused to give up. For many of us, there is not much choice. The past 10 years have taught me that there is no bottom in the race to the bottom. The only way to stop it is to organize and develop workers' power.

As workers, have been kicked hard, over and over again. I think there is a keen awareness on the part of working people that it is time to fight. The victory in Seattle for 15 Now and the likelihood of a similar victory in San Francisco signals that. I think a victory at the airport could also spur efforts in Minneapolis, St. Paul, and other cities

to win \$15. 15 Now is clearly an idea whose time has come.

15 Now MN: What strategy to win \$15 at the airport?

KH: The key to winning \$15 at the airport is a strong base of support and participation from the 10,000 workers who make a living at the airport. Support among the several thousand who would benefit directly from this because their income would increase is all the more important. I believe, based on many discussions, that we have that support. This allows us to reach out to the Twin Cities labor movement and working-class communities. I think this is an effort that can win broad support from unions. It also provides the basis for getting elected officials to do the right thing. Ultimately, the Metropolitan Airport Commission, a 15-member board of political appointees, has the power to increase the wage. We want to give them lots of incentive to agree.

On the other side of this are corporations such as Host Marriott, Delta Global Services, AirServe, Swissport, and – most prominent and largest in MSP – Delta Air Lines. Delta made \$2.3 billion in profit in 2013. According to one of their vice presidents, 30% of their profit came from MSP. My high school math tells me that is in the neighborhood of \$700 million out of MSP. We think they can afford to pay their baggage handlers, ticket agents, aircraft cleaners, and other service workers a living wage in MSP. We also expect that they won't agree with us. ☺

15 Now Campaigns Growing Nationally

Ty Moore

After the victory for a \$15 an hour minimum wage in Seattle, the movement to end poverty wages is growing (see back page). 15 Now, the driving force behind the Seattle triumph, is an organization that has a unique role to play in the struggles that will unfold.

15 Now is a constant presence in communities that does not just come and go on the important days of action. 15 Now doesn't limit its demands to what Democrats will deliver. It pushes further and does so boldly. 15 Now had a democratically run National Conference in April and is setting up democratic structures throughout the country.

These movement-building methods need to be combined with concrete tactics to win victories for working people. This article can only give a sketch of the impact being made by this new, dynamic organization. Check out 15now.org for more information.

In Minneapolis, 15 Now is leading a determined struggle of airport workers to get higher wages. We are organizing alongside workers – union and non-union – to fight to win significant improvements in living conditions. In airports, there are concentrations of both food service and airline workers. When united, these workers have tremendous power in a vital industry. Across the country, we can turn airports into sites of struggle for \$15 an hour.

In Wisconsin, lawmakers were discussing increasing the minimum wage to \$10 an hour. 15 Now and allies in many endorsing unions packed the meeting to demand

more, getting an echo and changing the conversation.

In Philadelphia, our campaigns on the streets across the city have struck a chord. Action groups have been set up at successful meetings in West Philly and North Philly. Two city councilors, due to the pressure of our movement, signed on to the demand for a \$15 an hour minimum wage. We're going to keep the heat on the politicians with street campaigning and public city council hearings.

To win legislation to increase the minimum wage in Pennsylvania, you need a statewide law. So, we've organized 15 Now groups in both Pittsburgh and Allentown. The Pittsburgh meeting was a "who's who" of the local labor movement. Together with New York activists, Philadelphia 15 Now has helped the New Jersey group get off to a bold start.

In New England, 15 Now Boston has a nonbinding referendum on the ballot in West Roxbury, and 15 Now in Portland, Maine had its launch on the front page of the popular *Portland Phoenix* weekly newspaper. 15 Now in New England is backed by two of the biggest unions in the region, the Massachusetts teachers' and nurses' unions.

We've been active out on the West Coast and down South, too, with new groups popping up in Los Angeles, in Arizona, and in Tampa Bay, Florida. There is far too much activity to mention it all here!

In Seattle, we'll be hosting a concert with Rage Against the Machine guitarist Tom Morello to raise funds for our movement! Please follow Tom Morello's lead and donate generously! ☺

rage against the machine's

TOM MORELLO

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Stop the Attacks on Teacher Tenure

Tom Crean

Several weeks ago, a California judge delivered a ruling that, if upheld, would represent a devastating blow to teachers' unions in that state and set a very dangerous precedent nationwide. The ruling in *Vergara v. California* by Judge Rolf M. Treu decrees that the state's teacher tenure laws are unconstitutional because they deprive students from receiving a quality education.

Tenure is essentially the right to due process before being fired; without it, teachers are employees-at-will who can be fired with relative ease. In his decision, Judge Treu claimed that the alleged proliferation of bad teachers was violating the civil rights of poor and minority students by condemning them to a substandard education. The judge furthermore declared that the scores of a teacher's students on high-stakes tests should be the key factor in determining competence.

Who is Behind Vergara, and Why?

The Vergara case was brought by nine students in Los Angeles. But the group behind the case, Students Matter, is bankrolled by David Welch, a Silicon Valley capitalist who also paid all the legal fees. Since the ruling, a similar suit has been filed in New York, and Students Matter is talking about filing lawsuits in at least six other states. It is clear that almost unlimited funds to pursue these suits will be available from "Wall Street philanthropists," as *The New York Times* charmingly described them, (7/3/2014).



Vergara is, in one sense, just the latest step in a very long campaign waged by corporate America and with the full support of the leadership of both major capitalist parties to subvert public education through privatization and union-busting. "Education reform" has been presented as an attempt to right wrongs and end the very real racial gap in education.

The reality is that American public schools are now more racially segregated than they were at the time of the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision by the Supreme Court in 1954. Furthermore, schools in poor neighborhoods are now far more under-resourced than they were a decade ago. Racial segregation and massive austerity, along with the

devastation caused by high-stakes testing, are the real reasons why the quality of education offered to poor black and Latino students is getting markedly worse – not the alleged epidemic of bad teachers

The Truth About Tenure

As Marxists, we are deeply committed to the right of working-class and poor youth to a decent education. We also believe that teachers, as education workers, have rights which should be respected. We do not say that teachers have a right to keep their jobs no matter what they do – but what is the real purpose of tenure?

Without tenure and a degree of job security, the bosses can rapidly shift to a high-turnover, casualized

teacher workforce that exists in constant fear of being fired and, therefore, is far less likely to stand up for itself, demand higher wages, or advocate for students' interests. In these circumstances, a union might theoretically still exist, but it would be drastically weakened.

Full-Court Press on the Unions

The reason why the backers of Students Matter pushed the Vergara case and are now preparing a national offensive is that, despite the massive upheaval caused by education reform, they feel the job is still only half done. They want to decisively cripple the teachers' unions, the National Education

Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Despite their awful leadership, which has spent the last fifteen years trying in vain to negotiate the terms of education reform rather than fighting back, the teachers' unions remain an objective obstacle to the corporate agenda for education. The Vergara decision is backed enthusiastically by the leadership of both corporate parties. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan was particularly effusive.

The Way Forward

The Vergara ruling is a potentially decisive moment for the teachers' unions in the U.S. and for the future of public education. In order to decisively end the assault on public education and the teachers' unions, there will need to be mass struggle led by reinvigorated unions that have decisively broken from the collaborationist policies of the past period.

Teachers' unions have to fight on several fronts. They need to rebuild their internal democracy from the school level up, train shop stewards in how to fight, and be prepared to follow the example of the Chicago Teachers Union in 2012 and go on strike. But if there is one lesson that Vergara also should really burn into the minds of teacher activists, it is the urgent need to end the abusive relationship with the Democratic Party and begin supporting independent working-class candidates. Kshama Sawant, the first socialist elected to the Seattle City Council in nearly 100 years, has shown the way. We do not have to accept that the war to defend public education will be inevitably lost. There is a way forward, and we must take it. ✪

Crisis at the Border

Below are the opening paragraphs of a longer article by Meghan Brophy which originally appeared on SocialistAlternative.org. Please check out the longer article, which explains the causes of emigration from Central America to the U.S., including the "War on Drugs," corporate trade deals, and military coups. The article goes on to say what socialists demand in the present situation.

The Obama administration has revealed a plan to spend \$3.7 billion to curb the recent influx of Central American refugees, which includes approximately 90,000 unaccompanied children crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Leaked pictures of detention facilities for immigrants have flooded the U.S. media, revealing overcrowded, inhumane

conditions in which thousands of people are confined and subjected to right-wing, anti-immigrant rhetoric from politicians and extremist organizations. This situation has provided small groups of racists in Murrieta, California, who attacked buses of children, a national platform to promote a disgusting display of resistance to immigration.

Amid all of this, the predicament of these young children and why they are migrating is forgotten. There is a severe lack of knowledge regarding the strong relationship between U.S. policies and geopolitical strategies in Central America and the recent northward migration. The displacement of a generation is intrinsically tied to the political, military, and economic policies that are created and implemented by the U.S. government, either independently or through the local



ruling classes in the region. It is a further indictment of the U.S. government's immigration policy that these guiltless victims are treated as outcasts and fugitives. ✪

Protests Erupt Against Racist Police Violence

By Eljeer Hawkins
Harlem, New York

"YOU took my son away from me. YOU know how hard it was for me to get him to stay in school and graduate?! YOU know how many black men graduate?! NOT MANY! ... 'Cause you bring them down to this type of level, where they feel like, 'I ain't got nothing to live for ANYWAY. They going to try to take me out ANYWAY.'"

—Lesley McSpadden
Mother of Michael Brown

On August 9, an unarmed teenager and college-bound student, Michael Brown, was killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Beginning with an order from the police officer to Brown to get on the sidewalk, shortly thereafter a shot was fired. According to eyewitnesses, Brown raised his hands in the air to exhibit to police that he wasn't a threat, yet gunfire from the officer continued, killing Brown instantly. As his body lay on the pavement, the community of Ferguson exploded in righteous indignation and anger at the naked violence of the police.

The community's seething rage at the killing of Brown was evident Sunday night as people marched to the police station, with some engaged in looting and throwing bottles. This has been followed by mass – and overwhelmingly peaceful – protests. Several eyewitnesses have spoken out against the disputed police account that Brown was attempting to take the police officer's gun.

These protests have been met by increased repression: a militarized police force using tear gas, rubber bullets, and ongoing provocations, like an officer calling the people "animals." The police have created a virtual war zone and have increasingly attempted to shut down media coverage. Reporters have been made targets, including the arrest of two reporters from *The Washington Post* and *The Huffington Post*, as well as the throwing of tear gas at Al Jazeera journalists. Police also shot a Ferguson protester on Wednesday.

We in Socialist Alternative demand an immediate withdrawal of police. We also demand a full and thorough investigation by independent forces, including representatives of African-American organizations, trade unions, and the wider community, to expose the conditions of this brutal killing as well as the repression of the protests. The entire police force must be put under public scrutiny, including the officer responsible for the shooting.

Given the government's failure to address these problems, the only way to achieve a genuine, independent investigation and to systematically address the roots of police violence and deep racial and economic inequality is to spread the protests and demonstrations all around the country. This will require the coming together of community and workers'



organizations in new, grassroots organizations to build and coordinate the protest movement against racist police violence.

Daily Racism in a Deeply Divided Society

How many more? How many more must die at the hands of police or extrajudicial violence? Michael Brown joins the long list of working-class and poor people, particularly black and brown youth, whose lives have been violently taken in this racist capitalist society that has rendered black and brown life disposable and unworthy of respect and dignity. How can we put an end to this deepening crisis our youth face of systemic poverty, police violence, brutal racism, and mass incarceration?

Michael Brown's only "crime" was being black and poor as he walked to his grandmother's home in Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis. Ferguson is 70% black with a predominately white police force. In a population of 21,000, a quarter of the residents live below the poverty line. In some of the surrounding areas, poverty is as high as 40%. Unemployment and low-wage work predominate. The median household income in the district that borders the scene of the crime is only \$14,390/year.

A report from the Missourians to End Poverty coalition released earlier this year shows that poverty in St. Louis itself increased from 27.2% in 2011 to 29.3% in 2014. Roughly one million Missourians are impoverished, out of a total population of just over 6 million.

In Ferguson, and many other cities in the U.S., for workers and people of color the police are viewed like an occupying army, not unlike in Iraq or Gaza. For years, racial tensions have been boiling over. A 2013 report by the Missouri attorney general's office found that Ferguson police stopped and arrested black drivers nearly twice as frequently as white motorists,

though they were less likely to find contraband among the black drivers.

The Whole System is Guilty!

To put an end to the crisis facing our youth – the systemic racism in this profit-driven, capitalist society – we can't let this anger dissipate into thin air.

The FBI and Department of Justice have moved in swiftly to assist the local authorities and begin what they call an investigation. Democratic Party officials have attempted to tamp down the frustration of the community. Unfortunately, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is not throwing its full weight behind spreading the protests and addressing the root cause of the problem.

These events point to the immediate need for working-class people to cooperate in building an independent, united grassroots movement of workers, youth, and people of color to fight for living-wage jobs, housing, health care, and a living wage for all, as well as an end to police violence by establishing direct democratic control over public safety. We need to draw the lessons from the Trayvon Martin case: The demonstrations, protest, civil disobedience, and strikes need to spread to mount pressure on the police and judicial system to bring justice to the Brown family.

We need to build new mass organizations that will reject the bankrupt politics of the Democratic Party, a pro-capitalist politics that accepts the status quo of systemic racism and violence.

The deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Oscar Perez Giron, John Crawford, and Renisha McBride, as well as the judicial frame-up of Marissa Alexander are just a few examples of the daily violence, humiliation, and discrimination faced by working-class people, youth, and people of color. The underlying function of

law enforcement and the prison system within this capitalist society is to defend and maintain massive inequality – to serve and protect the profits, property, and prestige of a predominately white male ruling elite. The richest 1% maximize their profits while perpetuating endemic poverty, government neglect, blatant corruption, and mass unemployment. In periods of capitalist and social crisis, law enforcement and the ruling elite ramp up their tactics of surveillance and repression to firm up their control of society, out of fear of social explosions against the conditions they've created.

As in Albuquerque earlier this year and Anaheim before that, people have protested against racist police violence with intense determination in recent years. In response to the "New Jim Crow" of mass incarceration and poverty, we need a new black freedom movement that is independent of the Democrats and coordinates mass action against police violence and for jobs, education, and health care.

As Malcolm X once stated:

"We declare our right on this earth ... to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary."

We demand:

- ✪ A full investigation by independent forces, including representatives of African-American organizations, trade unions, and the wider community into the police shooting of Michael Brown and the repression of protests against police violence;
- ✪ That the whole Ferguson police system be put under scrutiny, not only – but of course, including – the specific officer responsible. All results must be made public and openly discussed;
- ✪ Community-controlled policing, overseen by local committees of democratically elected representatives from trade unions and community organizations;
- ✪ A united struggle against racism and repression, humiliation, and exploitation of workers, youth, immigrants, and people of color;
- ✪ Guaranteed jobs, housing, health care, education, and a living wage for all. ✪

Read More at SocialistAlternative.org

Check out SocialistAlternative.org to find a new article by Ryan Mosgrove about the rapid militarization of the police in recent years. The article gives startling statistics and analysis while also containing proposals for how to resist this troubling trend. ✪

Socialist Analysis of the Massacre in Gaza

What Is the Role of Imperialism in the Conflict?

Niall Mulholland
SocialistWorld.net

A hail of death has roared down on Gaza for weeks. Millions of people worldwide are shocked and angered at images of a Palestinian father carrying his dead children's body parts in a plastic bag, as well as other daily horrors from the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian death toll is fast heading toward 2,000, over 80% of them civilians and many of them children, according to the U.N. Over 9,000 have been injured. In this one-sided war, 64 Israeli soldiers have also died, along with three Israeli civilians.

Over 460,000 people out of Gaza's population of 1.8 million have been displaced by the Israeli Defence Forces' (IDF) murderous attacks. Many are forced to live in overcrowded makeshift shelters or with relatives. A third deadly missile attack on a U.N. school in Rafah, which killed at least ten, shows that nowhere can offer protection from the indiscriminate IDF bombardment.

The destruction of infrastructure, leading to a lack of clean water and sanitation, poses the serious risk of the outbreak of diseases. Most of the Gaza Strip exists on less than two hours of electricity a day. One-third of hospitals and dozens of ambulances have been destroyed. As morgues run out of room, children's bodies are grotesquely piled up in ice-cream freezers.

Huge demonstrations against the onslaught on Gaza and in solidarity with Palestinians have taken place across the world. Despite the one-sided reporting of most of the mainstream media – which chooses to ignore that the Israeli state is occupying Palestinian land, building illegal settlements, and blockading Gaza – public opinion is increasingly shifting to support for the oppressed Palestinians. A majority of young people in the U.S. now oppose the Israeli onslaught.

Many people see through the hypocrisy of the Western powers. Ruling elites wring their hands over massacred Palestinians while continuing to supply their ally Israel with arms and funding to continue its deadly war aims.

The suffering people of Gaza and the Palestinian Authority can only rely on their own resources, in solidarity with working people in the region and internationally, to struggle to win lasting peace and genuine statehood.

New mass struggles against the Israeli state oppressor and desperate social



conditions will see Palestinian working and poor people striving to build their own independent political voice.

And only socialist ideas can both end the system that breeds war, terror, and poverty for Palestinians and break Israelis from their right-wing leaders, who have shown they cannot deliver permanent peace while oppressing Palestinians.

Western Powers

As the death toll mounted in Gaza, Western powers mouthed empty condolences and called for a "ceasefire." The White House timidly called the IDF attacks on U.N. schools "disgraceful" but failed to explicitly blame Israel. At the same time, the U.S. State Senate unanimously voted for \$225 million in new funds for Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile system and to restock Israel's arsenal.

Now, under growing public pressure, British government ministers say they will review the sale of £8 billion in arms to Israel. Significantly, however, Downing Street said they would not stop licensing military equipment to Israel outright.

The U.N.'s Ban Ki-moon condemned Israel's Gaza onslaught as a "criminal act" and called for an end to "this madness." But the U.N. – dominated as it is by the big imperialist powers – proposes no action for Israel's flouting of international law, let alone a genuine negotiated settlement to the decades-long crisis.

One of the main reasons Israel has been able to survive is because of enormous economic and military aid from U.S. imperialism. It regards Israel as a key client state in the strategically vital and natural-resources-rich region. The U.S. arms and finances Israel to the tune

of \$3 billion a year, creating the fourth-strongest army in the world.

Successive Israeli governments and Western powers have aimed to remove Hamas from power with their military might. The Gaza Strip, the world's largest open-air prison, was effectively sealed shut.

Israel has encouraged splits between Fatah and Hamas. Its huge military assaults on the Gaza Strip in 2008-09 and in 2012 were intended to "mow the lawn," – that is, weaken Hamas and strengthen Israeli power. Israel's current assault, which started on July 6, is intended to do the same and to destroy attempts by Hamas and Fatah to reach a "reconciliation agreement."

Hamas

However, Israel's ferocious military aggression has strengthened Hamas – regarded as the only line of resistance to IDF butchery even by many of its severest critics in Gaza – and put Palestinian rights back center stage in world politics.

Hamas' authoritarian rule and failure to show a way out of poverty and national oppression for the Palestinian masses led to a sharp fall in its support in Gaza in recent months before the Israeli offensive. Criticisms of Hamas were understandably muted once the latest IDF onslaught began.

The people of Gaza, of course, have a right to defend themselves, but the bouts of rocket fire from Gaza since July 6 reflect the desperation of Palestinians in the Strip. They are no deterrent to the Israeli regime, with its crushing military

Kshama Sawant Sends Letter Condemning Continued Violence in Gaza



The following letter was sent by Socialist Alternative Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant to President Obama and Congress. Other councilmembers declined to sign on.

Elected officials in the U.S. have failed to step up and speak to the conflict. It is the duty of all people, irrespective of their position or status, to speak out against humanitarian crises.

Dear President Obama, Members of the House of Representatives, and Members of the Senate,

As the most recent wave of Israeli bombardment of Gaza enters its 28th day, many of us globally watch in horror as the death toll soars. News reports indicate that more than 1,888 Palestinians have been killed, while more than 9,400 have been injured. Hundreds of Palestinian children and civilians are counted among the dead in this humanitarian catastrophe. Sixty-three Israeli soldiers have also died, along with two Israeli civilians and a Thai worker.

Yesterday, Israel attacked a United Nations school sheltering some 3,000 displaced people in Rafah, in Southern Gaza, killing 10 people and prompting United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to declare the attack "a moral outrage and a criminal act." The U.S. State Department also issued a denunciation saying, "The United States is appalled by today's disgraceful shelling outside an UNRWA school."

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is reaching a critical breaking point. The 139-square-mile territory contains 1.8 million people who literally have nowhere to go and no place to hide from Israeli attacks. The U.N. reports that medical facilities are "on the verge of collapse." An attack on a Gaza power plant has left more than half the population without electricity, and more than 270,000 people are reportedly crammed into 90 U.N. shelters. Without an immediate end to all hostilities, the Palestinian death toll will continue to rise rapidly.

We also condemn the indiscriminate rocket attacks by Hamas against the civilian population living in Israel. We stand in solidarity with the ordinary people of Israel and their desire for security, and in particular with the Israeli anti-war movement.

Security and peace will never be achieved on the basis of the current occupation and blockades. The path to protecting the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people as well as the ordinary people of Israel lies first and foremost in ending the illegal building of settlements in the Palestinian territories and an end to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories.

We call on President Obama, the U.S. House of Representatives, and the U.S. Senate to issue a formal statement denouncing Israel's siege and blockade of Gaza and the occupation of the West Bank. We also call for an immediate end to all U.S. government military aid for Israel. ☘

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Detroit: Water Rights and the Faulty Logic of Capitalism

A Statement from Socialist Alternative Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant

Last year, the governor of Michigan staged a corporate takeover of the City of Detroit through his suspension of local authority and the appointment of an Emergency Manager. For the working people of Detroit, this experiment has been devastating.

Detroit is currently facing a war on water. Over 150,000 customers are late on bills that have increased 119 percent over the last decade. This inexcusable rate increase coincided with the worst economic crisis – and the greatest increase in income inequality – that we have seen since the Great Depression. Instead of finding solutions, between 200,000 and 300,000 people face shutoffs. That includes nearly half of Detroit's minority population. This means mass humiliation and certain death for segments of the working poor and unemployed, especially children and the elderly, all because they cannot afford to pay monopoly prices for a resource that should be available to everyone simply by virtue of being a living being.

My office receives calls every week from Seattleites who are also struggling to retain their access to water. Detroit is not an exception, but just a more extreme example of the many crises and general insecurities the working class is forced to face



Photo: James Anderson

Hundreds of people poured into the streets of Detroit July 18 to declare water a human right.

under capitalism.

Over the last three and a half decades, both Republican and Democratic politicians have worked hand in hand to undermine cities like Detroit through the promotion of so-called free trade policies. Enormous numbers of working people in Detroit have sacrificed their labor to build some of the world's largest and most profitable corporations. As a consequence of the logic of global capitalism, which inevitably sinks into crisis, industrial and financial capital moves around the world in search of more profitable venues. The lives of hundreds of millions are sacrificed in this process. This is the very same logic which leads governments to strip water from a quarter of a million people in an age of massive corporate

profits and excess.

From Detroit to Seattle, we have to organize and mobilize mass movements. We need to run independent, left-wing, working class candidates who will fight back with a clear understanding of the situation and the struggle ahead.

I urge every resident of Seattle to check to see if they are eligible for the Utility Discount Program.

We also need to fight for measures like a millionaire tax to help address the deep inequality in Washington state. ✪

Follow Kshama Sawant:

Twitter: @cmkshama

Facebook: /cmkshama

Council Blog:

www.seattle.gov/council/sawant/

Socialist Alternative Has Doubled Our Membership in 2014!

Since the beginning of 2014, Socialist Alternative has double our membership and established new groups throughout the country.

We've proven that we can relate a socialist message to the day-to-day needs of working people. We struck a chord with our electoral campaigns that were the most prominent independent left challenges to the Democrats in over a decade.

Then, we showed that we weren't just rhetoric. We didn't sell out like many "progressive" Democrats. We built a movement that delivered a massive wage increase for the most oppressed workers in Seattle society.

It isn't a mistake that Socialist Alternative is the group that is growing in the massive vacuum that exists on the left of U.S. society. We have a method of analyzing consciousness, organizing tight-knit groups, and seizing opportunities. We look for movements that will develop and amplify them, connecting basic working-class messages to a bold vision of a society without exploitation, oppression, and poverty.

We proceed from an international working-class point of view, along with our co-thinkers in the Committee for a Workers International, organized on every continent in 45 countries.

By training a new generation of leaders in the struggles against the injustices we face every day, and against the capitalist system at the root of our problems, we will continue to grow in the coming months. Email us to find out how you can get involved: contact@socialistalternative.org. Join us today! ✪

www.SocialistAlternative.org/Join/

Massacre in Gaza

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superiority. Moreover, indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israeli civilians, carried out by groups that are not under democratic control, are counterproductive; they cause widespread fear among communities in Israel, which is ruthlessly exploited by the right-wing Israeli government to deploy even more repression against Palestinians.

The interests and aims of Israel and its Western imperialist backers do not always chime. The Western powers would like to see a long-term agreement between Palestinian and Israeli leaders that leads to, in John Kerry's words, "two states for two peoples." Under the watch of imperialism, this would not mean Palestinian liberation but some form of rump Palestinian statelet with a pliant ruling elite.

The Western powers hope this would lead to more stability in the region and safeguard

their interests. The corrupt and despotic ruling elites in the Arab states, despite their fake support for Palestinian rights, also fear the establishment of an independent Palestine, dreading that radical developments there could provoke the beginning of the end of their rule.

After both the EU and U.S. indicated they would be prepared to deal with a new Hamas-Fatah regime, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, under pressure from his far-right ministers and the powerful settler movement, upped the ante. The June 12 disappearance of three Israeli students in the West Bank was used as a justification to start military operations against Gaza and to whip up Israeli fears of Hamas "rocket terrorism" and later "tunnel terrorism." But the main aim of the Israeli regime was to terrorize the Gazan population and to break Palestinian resistance.

Storing Up Explosions

Netanyahu says the current conflict confirms his argument that "security control" is needed over the West Bank. This implies consolidating the occupation and extinguishing any remaining Palestinian hopes of a two-state solution.

But this policy will only entrench divisions and store up even greater explosions and conflicts. Palestinian numbers are growing in Israel and the Palestinian territories, and threaten to become a majority. The Israeli elite could face uprisings in both the West Bank and Israel itself, where the demographic clock ticks on to its disadvantage. The Israeli extreme right will try to counter this process by further enforced population movements or by further stripping rights from Palestinians living in Israel.

Socialists support the right of self-determination for Palestinians and call for the expulsion of imperialism out of the region. But what force can achieve this? Mass struggle by the Palestinians, under their own democratic control, is essential to fight for genuine national liberation.

It will be through the building of independent mass workers' movements and parties throughout the region that the right-wing and pro-big-business agendas of all the current ruling parties can be challenged and socialist ideas can start to take hold. A socialist Palestine and a socialist Israel, as part of a socialist confederation of the Middle East, would lay the basis for a future free from war, terror, and poverty.

This is the program that Socialist Struggle Movement, Socialist Alternative's co-thinkers, courageously fights for in Israel-Palestine. ✪

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Issue #6 - September 2014



BUILD A MOVEMENT TO END POVERTY WAGES!

William Blueher

In 2012, fast-food workers in a single U.S. city – New York – went on strike to demand higher wages. Practically overnight, these strikes spread to cities across the country. In this age of grotesque inequality, people are finally coming together to demand some modicum of economic justice.

Last year, this struggle was brought to Seattle when Socialist Alternative ran a candidate for city council, Kshama Sawant, whose platform included a demand for a \$15 an hour minimum wage. This key demand helped propel Sawant into office, and within the first six months of her tenure in office, Seattle won a \$15 an hour minimum wage, becoming the first city in the entire country to achieve such a victory for its workers.

But Seattle is not alone. Cities and states all over the country are beginning to see people come together around this issue, particularly after President Obama's failed attempt to raise the federal minimum wage to even a modest \$10.10.

In Chicago, for instance, a push to raise the city's minimum wage is gaining momentum. In March, a nonbinding resolution to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour appeared on the primary ballot, and a staggering majority – over 87% – of Chicagoans were in support of it. Then, in May, a group of Chicago

aldermen introduced a proposal to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Now, Mayor Rahm Emanuel has assembled a minimum wage task force to try to raise the minimum wage to \$13 an hour by 2018.

Like many of the new minimum wage proposals being put forth by the now universally pro-business Democrats, this one is riddled with unnecessary concessions to big business, like “tip penalties” and overly long and hard-to-enforce implementation schedules. But what is significant is that politicians all over the country are being *forced* to talk about this issue. People are sick of seeing their wages stagnate as their rent and cost of living continue to skyrocket.

Bay Area

In San Francisco, home to some of the greatest income inequality in the entire country, a “consensus measure” for the November ballot has been put forth that would raise the minimum wage in the city to \$15 an hour.

Inspired in large part by their neighbors to the north in Seattle, activists are pushing hard to make sure the same loopholes that the Democrats and big business secured in the Seattle minimum wage law are not repeated in San Francisco. They are pushing hard against the long phase-ins the Chamber of Commerce and their political allies groundlessly claim are necessary, and they are fighting back against

“tip penalties” and total compensation loopholes. If passed, the San Francisco minimum wage law would be implemented before Seattle's, and it could avoid the many concessions Seattle's Democratic politicians concocted in concert with their deep-pocketed business allies.

And, in further heartening news from California, activists in Los Angeles are pushing forward a similar ballot measure.

In Massachusetts, the legislature just passed a bill to raise the state's minimum wage to \$11 an hour by 2017, making Massachusetts home of the highest state minimum wage in the country. While this is undeniably a huge gain for hundreds of thousands of workers, the bill has serious problems. One is that that \$11 an hour is not indexed to inflation, so what seems like a big gain now will rapidly erode.

And then, of course, there's New York City, by far the most expensive city in the country. As newly elected Mayor Bill de Blasio rides into office decrying the “tale of two cities,” he has yet to come out publicly with a plan to raise the minimum wage.

Recently, however, Governor Andrew Cuomo, in order to secure the support of the titularly progressive Working Families Party, claimed he would raise the state minimum wage to \$10.10, allowing municipalities, which currently don't have the right to set their own minimum wage, to go 30% higher than that.

This would mean New York City could set its minimum wage at \$13.00 an hour. While this is woefully inadequate in a city as expensive as New York, it suggests that there is serious political pressure building to move on this issue.

Get Organized

This is why, now more than ever, as these cities and states across the country begin to take up the issue of the minimum wage, it is imperative that activists, workers, and organized labor join together to demand a meaningful minimum wage increase. We need to make sure that the increase is pegged to inflation, that it doesn't include “tip penalties,” that we get rid of all total compensation loopholes, and that these increases are implemented immediately for all businesses, not years down the road.

To accomplish this, we need as many people as possible to get involved. You can start petitions demanding a minimum wage increase on both a city and state level; you should pack city council hearings on this issue; and you can join up with *15 Now*, a nationwide grassroots campaign dedicated to fighting for a higher minimum wage. It is time to do more than just imagine a world without frozen wages and soaring rents; it is time to demand one. ✪