

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



Ferguson - Shows Need for a New Black Freedom Movement - p. 3

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**RIGHT WING PUSHES
BIG BUSINESS AGENDA**

TIME TO FIGHT BACK!

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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

Matt Maley
Math Teacher
Seattle, WA



Every day I see how the inequality woven into the fabric of our economic system disproportionately impacts those who, in no way, authored that inequality. One person I work with gets two hours of sleep every night because they take care of their baby brother while their mother works two minimum wage jobs. Another comes in every day because, otherwise, they might not get breakfast or lunch. The craziest part: I'm a math teacher and both of those students are also expected to show up and succeed in school because that is how you create a better life for yourself: so we are told. I am a socialist because I believe that no young person should be expected to shoulder responsibility for themselves and their families while being forced into the narrow definitions of success in both school – standardized testing – and, once in the work place – accumulation of wealth.

We live in the wealthiest nation on the planet, yet the prevailing attitude is, "I got mine; you get your own." The dissonance

there is that no one is successful in a vacuum; hard work is necessary, but it cannot always overcome institutional sexism – for example, the gender pay gap – or racism – as in the staggering percentage of youth of color in prison. I'm a socialist because we can provide every marginalized person with the social services they need, but instead we use tax dollars to fight wars the majority of people disagree with!

The challenges facing this generation grow more imminent while proponents of the free market are waiting on chaotic market forces and politicians remain stagnant. We need to let go of an outdated, unregulated economic system and conscientiously structure our economy to adequately fund climate solutions, quality public education, and a robust network of social services. ✦

Winter Appeal

This holiday season, we're asking for financial support to continue and grow our work across the country. Support the work for Socialist Alternative into the new year by subscribing to our monthly newspaper, and receive our socialist analysis of the news at your doorstep!

Socialist Alternative is essential reading for all those who want to help create a new political force in the U.S. representing the interests of working people, the poor, and all those oppressed by capitalism. You can also gift a year-long subscription! A subscription is \$25 for 10 issues a year but if you want to support our work consider giving \$100 or \$50.

This holiday season, support independent media and keep up with the work of Socialist Alternative.

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Ferguson – Build New Black Freedom Movement



Chris Gray

The prospect of a new Black freedom movement has been raised through nearly three months of heroic protests by the youth of Ferguson. Like the murder of Emmett Till in 1955, which helped spark the Civil Rights Movement, Mike Brown's murder symbolizes the systematic violence and oppression faced by millions of people of color in our society.

The whole process of top-down investigation by police and use of secretive grand juries has failed to provide justice. Socialist Alternative calls for an independent investigation by organizations in the black community and the wider working class, such as unions. We call for a democratically elected civilian review board with real powers to deal with police brutality. This board should have the power to hire and fire officers and launch independent investigations.

The only way to gain justice is to build the most powerful possible movement in the streets. This should include a massive campaign of protests and actions – including, where possible, strike action. Time and again, we have seen courts forced to make decisions in cases based on strong opinions from the public, rather than purely on the merits of the case. This is to prevent

the courts being discredited before the public.

Mobilize Mass Protests

Workers have organized mass solidarity campaigns in legal cases like those of Big Bill Haywood in 1907, Huey Newton in 1968, and Mumia Abu-Jamal in 1999. These cases were widely seen as representing broader political processes in society, much like the grand jury's role in Mike Brown's murder. In each, the ruling class backed off because it was afraid of a social explosion.

New black organizations, other social justice organizations, and labor unions should organize similarly around Mike Brown's murder, mobilizing millions of workers into mass demonstrations and utilizing workers' unique power to interfere with the capitalist system. In a small example of what is possible, black and white workers at UPS in Minneapolis took wildcat action in solidarity with Ferguson through "Hands Up, Don't Ship," refusing to ship riot control gear to the Missouri State Police (*Labor Notes*, 8/26/2014).

Such actions conjure up the old slogan "An injury to one is an injury to all," first by recognizing that the same militarized police used in Ferguson will also be used to repress strikes and social movements like Occupy Wall Street. At the same

time, these actions offer ways for white workers to act in solidarity with their black and brown brothers and sisters, cutting across the corporate media's fear-mongering of a coming "race war."

Increased state repression in the U.S. is directly connected to the fact that we live in one of the most economically unequal societies in human history. It's even more stark if you break it down by race and gender. As of 2010, the average white family had six times the total assets – house, cars, savings, retirement – as black and Latino families (*NY Times*, 4/28/2013). Women make 77 cents to every man's dollar. The gap is even greater for African-American and Latina women, with African-American women earning 64 cents and Latina women earning 56 cents for every dollar earned by a Caucasian man (NWLC, 10/13/14).

Revolutionaries have long pointed out the connections between racist state repression and class society. In 1966, at a time when many radical African-American activists were embracing socialism, the Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Program featured demands for 100% employment, fully funded social programs, and ending the Vietnam War in addition to demands for an end to police brutality and the retrial of all black

continued on page 10

Obama Changes Rules to Prevent 5 Million More Deportations

Jeff Booth

President Barack Obama recently announced plans to change U.S. immigration policies by executive action, in essence, temporary legal protection against deportation for almost five million undocumented immigrants.

This is welcome relief from the danger of deportations, which tear families apart, destroying the lives of workers and young people.

However, Obama's administrative steps are not an amnesty, not a way to citizenship and they're not permanent. More than half of the undocumented immigrants in this country are not covered.

Despite not stopping all deportations or giving a path to citizenship, the "deal" is a partial victory for the

immigrant rights movement. Movements, from the recent "Not One More Campaign" to the immigrant strike of May Day 2006 have kept alive the fight for immigrant rights. Socialist Alternative is part of this struggle to end discrimination and fight for equal rights for all.

Republicans oppose the new changes, threatening lawsuits and lack of cooperation. Wanting to avoid alienating the Latino population too much, Republicans cynically stir up rightwing-populist sentiment against immigrants. They focus on the "unconstitutional" actions of Obama. Any substantial blocking of Obama's plans could spark an increase in immigrant rights' demands, including justice for all 11 million undocumented immigrants.

The Democrats present

themselves as defenders of immigrant rights. However, Obama delayed immigration reform for many years. He did not use past majorities in Congress to act. His administration used deportations more than any other. In 2013, U.S. deportations broke records with almost 440,000 people imprisoned and forced out of the country. (Source: Pew Research Center)

Socialist Alternative welcomes the reform of limiting deportations as long overdue. But it's only a first step. Undocumented workers are forced to accept worse living and working conditions and are used by corporations to undermine wages for all working people. The movement for immigrant rights remains a crucial struggle for all "illegal" and "legal" workers and youth. ☺

Kshama Sawant Column

The Right Has No Mandate



Drunk by their success in the midterm elections, Republicans aim to block Obama's important, but overly cautious, steps toward stopping five million more deportations. Intoxicated by winning the Senate, the GOP dreams again of blocking the limited health care access for millions that the Affordable Care Act started to provide. With willful ignorance about climate change, Republicans aim to force through the Keystone XL pipeline to serve big oil profits.

They are playing with fire. They will overreach. They don't understand the true nature of the midterms, which did not reflect a shift to the right in society.

For example, ballot initiatives to increase the minimum wage passed in Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota – the latter two reliably "red" states. In San Francisco, voters passed a referendum for a \$15 minimum wage by an overwhelming 77%.

However, a demoralized electorate had no reason to turn out for Democrats. A historically low turnout of voters – the lowest since 1942! – revealed it again: most Americans are fed up with all representatives in Congress.

"Too many Democrats are too close to Wall Street," said Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio. "Too many Democrats support trade agreements that outsource jobs, and too many Democrats are too willing to cut Social Security — and that's why we lose elections" (*NY Times*, 11/15/2014).

This leads to two conclusions for 2015:

First, the election of an open socialist to the Seattle City Council last year shows that there is space for independent left candidates who refuse to serve big business and reject corporate cash. The impact of Howie Hawkins' and Jess Spear's campaigns this year reinforces this conclusion (see page 5).

Second, with the Republicans in power and no national elections for two years, people will look past elections to build struggles and movements in the streets. In 2010, the midterm success of Republicans and Tea Party candidates laid the basis for a huge response: the Occupy Movement.

Every provocation of the Republicans – against immigrants, with Keystone XL, against LGBTQ people, or against workers' rights – has the potential to spark new movements.

Unfortunately, conservative labor and environmental leaders won't prepare or build these struggles. But the seeds are there: look at Ferguson, the People's Climate March, #CarryThatWeight, and service workers striking for living wages.

Let's get ready for the next round on the streets. On that basis, we can take on the Republican threat. Let's build movements so we don't have to rely on the timid, pro-business Democratic Party establishment.

Kshama Sawant

The Battle Over Keystone XL

Jess Spear

In the face of mounting and alarming scientific evidence of climate change, environmentalists have targeted the construction of the Keystone XL (KXL) oil pipeline as ground zero in the battle to stop global warming.

Republican Denial; Democrat Half-Measures

Environmentalists have nightmares about Republicans in control. They rightfully worry that Republicans, many of whom openly state they think global warming is a hoax, will roll back new regulations on greenhouse gas emissions and accelerate the efforts of the big oil corporations to extract more profits at the expense of people and the environment.

Indeed, after Republicans won big in the midterm elections, taking control of the Senate and expanding their seats in the House, they immediately announced plans to use their majorities to pass legislation forcing the president to approve KXL.

But it wasn't Republicans pushing for a vote on KXL in the Senate; it was Democratic Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana, aided by Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. Between the House and the Senate, 44 Democrats voted with the Republicans to approve KXL.

Clearly, the Republican leadership doesn't take the threat of climate change seriously. However, the Democrats, while paying lip service to climate change, have stymied global climate talks and refuse to boldly put forward what is necessary to halt global warming.

Build an Independent Movement of Millions

The construction of Keystone XL will be prevented not by politicians, but by united



Protesters conduct a "die-in" in front of the White House.

mass protests organized by ordinary working people. When Republicans take over in January, they will force another vote on Keystone XL. There is no guarantee that Obama will exercise his veto power to stop its passage.

The September 21 People's Climate March featuring 75 labor unions and hundreds of social justice organizations shows the way forward. Half a million people marching in New York, 2,000 in Seattle, and actions in over 160 countries show the widespread support for serious action to stop climate change.

If Obama caves to pressure from big business and Republicans, we must respond with mass rallies and marches and, where effective, non-violent civil disobedience to demand the pipeline and any other fossil fuel project be scrapped. Earth Day this year should be marked with millions in the streets demanding investment in clean energy jobs, not new wars.

We call for:

- ✪ No new fossil fuel projects – stop the Keystone XL pipeline!
- ✪ A massive jobs program to build clean energy infrastructure and mass transit, and to make buildings energy-efficient.
- ✪ Public ownership of the big energy companies to break the power of the big oil CEOs and to redirect these resources toward green energy projects.
- ✪ A "just transition" with retraining program to ensure those who work in polluting industries are able to find jobs of similar quality in new green industries.
- ✪ For a new political party that represents the 99% – not big fossil fuel corporations – that fights for the needs of working people and the environment. ✪

Workers Have the Power to Win Tensions Build on West Coast Ports

Patrick Ayers

Truck drivers at the Port of Los Angeles walked out on strike on November 13, demanding to be classified as employees, not independent contractors. This action at the biggest and most important container port in the U.S. quickly spread from two companies to six.

Meanwhile, the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) and 20,000 members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) have been without a contract for the entire West Coast since July 1.

International shipping companies are relentlessly pursuing new labor-saving technologies to cut down on their costs and boost profits, intensifying competition between ports and presenting a challenge to ILWU, a union with a

long record of militant action.

In 2011-2012, ILWU members in Longview, Washington waged a ferocious battle against EGT, a conglomerate of grain exporters that opened a new state-of-the-art grain terminal and sought to operate it without ILWU labor.

The Longview ILWU local worked with Occupy activists to build a powerful protest against EGT, the threat of which - alongside targeted action by the union - was enough to help force EGT to negotiate with the ILWU.

ILWU defended its jurisdiction on West Coast ports, but the final contract was a step backward, watering down the union's control of the hiring hall and the work process. This set a precedent that the PMA wants to exploit.

The ILWU, because of its role in critical West Coast ports, has the power to bring important

sections of the U.S. economy grinding to a halt. The National Association of Manufacturers estimates a West Coast port shutdown would cost the U.S. economy \$2 billion a day, and business groups are calling on the federal government to intervene.

The ILWU's power to defend itself has been unjustly restricted by laws imposed by the two corporate parties. But if the bosses' relentless pursuit of profit gives the ILWU no choice but to break the law and mobilize its full power, it would undoubtedly inspire thousands of people to support port workers, just like what happened with EGT.

Concessions are unacceptable. The entire labor movement must be ready to defend port drivers and the ILWU if needed. An injury to one is an injury to all! ✪

Nurses Fight for Ebola Preparedness - AND WIN!

Katie Quarles, RN, Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA) (personal capacity)

The situation at the hospital in Texas where two nurses contracted Ebola from a patient showed how ill-prepared hospitals in the U.S. are for Ebola. The initial attempt of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to blame the nurses themselves for breaching protocol was an attempt at blaming the victims. In fact, the hospital didn't have proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and didn't give staff the necessary training to put on and take off PPE without contaminating themselves.

In response to this, the National Nurses United (NNU) conducted a brilliant media campaign. It conducted a survey in October of more than 1,900 nurses in 750 facilities in 48 states. This showed that more than 80% of nurses had not been given adequate training on Ebola. NNU launched an online petition to demand Obama use executive authority to mandate proper PPE, including full-body HazMat suits and powered air-purifying respirators (PAPR), as well as continuing interactive training for nurses who are exposed to Ebola patients

November 12 Strike Wins a Victory

A two-day strike of 18,000 Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners took place at 66 Kaiser Permanente Hospitals. A one-day strike took place at a hospital in Washington, D.C. In over 150 locations in 16 states, nurses held actions for Ebola safety, from Florida to snowy St. Paul, Minnesota.

Two days after the strikes and actions, NNU announced a victory in California, with Cal-OSHA agreeing new mandatory standards, including full-body PPE suits and PAPRs. This was achieved against the lobbying efforts of health care giants like Kaiser Permanente and other hospitals concerned about the cost of providing expensive PPE to protect their staff. Time and again, hospitals have been willing to risk the lives of their nurses in order to save money. This victory shows the advantages of being organized and fighting back. When we fight, we win! ✪

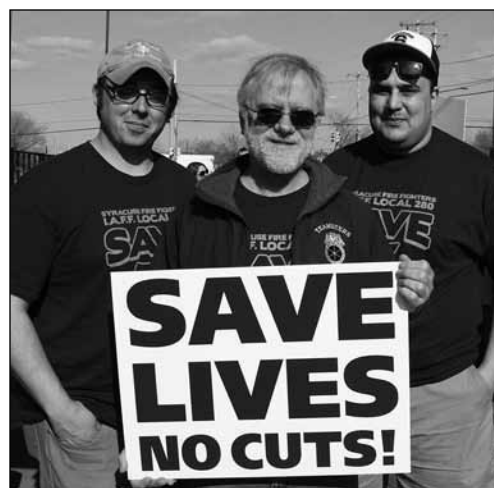
Building A New Political Force for the 99%

Left Candidates Take on the Establishment

In the recent elections, the Republican Party made significant gains overall. However, we completely reject the narrative that this represents a shift to the right (see Kshama's column on p. 3 and below). Where there were credible left candidates in these elections, they often did very well. In Washington State's 43rd State House district, Socialist Alternative candidate Jess Spear received 18% of the vote against Frank Chopp, one of the state's most powerful corporate politicians. Jess ran on a program including the ending of corporate bailouts, taxing the rich, and rent control to make Seattle affordable

for ordinary people. The campaign demonstrated again the roots that Socialist Alternative – whose candidate Kshama Sawant won a citywide race for city council a year ago, and which helped lead the first successful fight for \$15 in a big city nationally – is developing in Seattle.

In New York State, Howie Hawkins, a UPS worker running on the Green Party ticket and calling for a \$15 minimum wage, a ban on fracking, and calling for a “Green New Deal,” received 175,000 votes, or 5% of the total. This is the highest vote for a genuine left-wing candidate in New York since 1920. It



Howie Hawkins (left) and Jess Spear (right) ran strong independent challenges in New York and Washington.



reflects, in large part, the anger of the base of the Democratic Party at Andrew Cuomo, who has ruled the state for four years in the interests of Wall Street.

In Milwaukee, an African-American socialist, Angela Walker, received 21%, or 61,000, running for county sheriff. For a campaign with very few resources, this is a very impressive result. Walker explicitly opposed mass incarceration and police brutality and called for an end to the austerity agenda. Meanwhile in Richmond, California, all the candidates of the independent Progressive Alliance won their races for City Council.

All of these results show what is possible when there is a real alternative representing the 99%. However, as many working people may see no way to change politics through elections for the moment, they may be more focused on what can be done through struggle. Socialist Alternative will be there to help build these movements, to fight tooth and nail for workers' rights, living wages, to defend women's rights, and to fight racism. These battles will help to lay the basis for a new mass party of the 99%, armed with a socialist program. Join us in the struggle. Join Socialist Alternative today. ✪

Democrats Fail Again Behind Walker's Win in Wisconsin

Travis Albert

In a result that shocked progressives around the country, right-wing Republican Scott Walker won re-election as governor of Wisconsin.

Walker has been infamous since he “dropped the bomb” on the labor movement in 2011 with Act 10, which took away collective bargaining rights for public sector workers, provoking an unprecedented mobilization of over 200,000 workers, an occupation of the state Capitol, and a standoff that lasted for weeks. This movement had the possibility to defeat Walker, but it was diverted away from struggle toward a recall election in 2012 that returned Walker to power.

Since 2011, the attacks on Wisconsin workers, students, Indian tribes, and the poor have been relentless. With such ruthless attacks, a victory for the Democrats should have been easy, yet Walker won with a solid majority.

Democrats' Uninspiring Campaign

As a former CEO of Trek Bicycles, the Democratic candidate, Mary Burke, offered very little to Wisconsin workers. Her campaign did not promise to repeal Act 10 and restore bargaining rights. Burke's campaign attacked Walker over and over on failing to live up to its job growth promise but refused to comment on his dismantling of public sector unions!

This allowed Walker to go on the offensive

with attacks that resonated among working-class voters. A huge part of Walker's campaign money was spent attacking Mary Burke's record as a CEO. Televised advertisements highlighted Trek's reputation for outsourcing jobs from Wisconsin in order to profit off of low wages. Walker's attacks frequently referred to her as “Millionaire Mary.”

It is remarkable that after three years of non-stop attacks on working people, Walker did a better job tapping into working-class anger than his Democratic opponent.

Building a Real Alternative

While the next four years in Wisconsin will see an invigorated right wing pushing hard against marriage equality, labor rights, environmental protections, women's rights, and what remains of our feeble safety net, working people do not have to take this lying down. As in 2011, we must build up a determined mass movement to fight the right-wing assaults. This time, we must not allow the movement to become sidetracked into the dead end of the Democratic Party but rather see the struggle through to the end. A small indication of what is possible is that voters in Wisconsin, while reelecting Scott Walker, also voted to raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour, although the labor leaders unaccountably decided it was a better idea that this be a “nonbinding” referendum.

Read the full story at SocialistAlternative.org. ✪

Opinion Polls: Americans Lean Left

Elliot Jensen

Many people have been struggling to interpret the complicated, seemingly contradictory 2014 midterm elections results. Republicans defeated their Democratic rivals in key races across the nation and gained control of the U.S. Senate. At the same time, progressive ballot initiatives on the minimum wage, marijuana, paid sick leave, and women's reproductive rights all won by significant majorities.

The key to explaining the stunning defeats of the Democrats is the low voter turnout among Democratic and independent voters due to disappointment in Obama and the Democrats' failure to fight and campaign on the issues that most working people clearly care about.

A look at opinion polls shows a strong majority of Americans lean to the left and are not represented by either the Republican or Democratic parties.

- ✪ 70% of Americans support raising the federal minimum wage to \$10.10. (CBS News/New York Times, Sept. 2014)
- ✪ 61% of Americans believe upper-income people should pay more taxes, and 66% believe corporations should pay more. (Gallup Poll, April 2014)
- ✪ 64% support stricter emission limits on power plants to address climate change. (Pew Research Center, Nov. 2014)
- ✪ 71% think undocumented immigrants should be legally allowed to stay in the country. (Pew Research Center, Oct. 2014)
- ✪ The Republican Party's approval rating has hovered consistently around 40% since late 2005 (except when they provoked the government shutdown, when their approval sank to 28%). The Democratic Party's approval rating has fallen by a staggering 20% since Obama's election. In 2008 it reached 56%, but now it has slumped to 36%. (Gallup Poll, Nov. 2014)
- ✪ 58% say a third political party is needed because the Republican and Democratic parties “do such a poor job” representing the American people. (Gallup Poll, Sept. 2014) ✪

The Coming Wave Struggle

After Right Wing Gains, Working People S

The coming year could very well see increased struggle, on par with the explosive movements of 2011 around Wisconsin and Occupy. In 2015, the movements will have a higher consciousness and more openness to socialist ideas. Already by the end of 2014, we will likely see explosive protests against police violence and the biggest-ever actions of low-wage workers demanding \$15 an hour on Black Friday and December 4. That's what Socialist Alternative is preparing for.

Bryan Koulouris

"So voters want a higher minimum wage, legal pot, abortion access and GOP representation. Ok then." –Ben Casselman, in a tweet that went viral

The Republicans have taken the Senate, but this does not indicate a shift to the right in U.S. society. The Republicans didn't "win" this election; the Democrats lost it. While most "swing" elections were in areas held by Democrats, the minimum wage ballot questions show what a working-class appeal could achieve even in "red states." In four Republican-controlled states, minimum wage increases were passed with overwhelming support. In addition, San Francisco became the second major city to pass a \$15 an hour minimum wage. This sets the stage for big struggles around the minimum wage in 2015, and we have all the momentum.

Low turnout was a crucial aspect of the Democratic defeat. Republicans succeeded in making the election a referendum on Obama's presidency, meaning that youth, people of color, and others on the left stayed home due to disappointment in Obama. In this election, Democrats were punished for their inaction, their fundamental capitalist character, and their inability to mobilize and motivate their base.

The defeat of the Democrats can have a temporary effect of demoralization among progressives and activists. People may also turn away from electoral politics and more toward an

anti-party mood of focusing purely on protests and direct actions. We need to make clear that - as we've shown in Seattle - political organization and independent working-class electoral action can energize movements and play a catalyzing role in struggles that win victories. The idea of independent left candidates had tremendous momentum after Kshama Sawant's historic victory last year. Now, many on the left will see the electoral plane blocked to them and unviable; they will look to movements on the streets, in the unions, and on campuses for the next step.

While many can see that this result is the fault of the Democratic Party leadership, others will make a stronger turn to "lesser evilism" in fear of reactionary Republican attacks. This lesser evilism will only be strengthened further with two years of Republican overreach and attacks. Socialists need to skillfully address these workers and youth tied to the Democrats while also standing against the tide of big business politics.

In the medium term, these election results will intensify the political dysfunction of U.S. capitalism, with Republican obstructionism during Obama's final two years.

All recent polls and ballot questions show

that the Republicans are increasingly out of touch with the opinions of the vast majority of people in the U.S.

Any Republican lawmakers feeling that they have a "mandate" will overstep with reactionary legislation, provoking movements from below.

Republican Strategy

The Republicans did not come up with any new strategy to reach out to independent or Democratic voters. Instead, they doubled down on the "Southern strategy" of reaching out to older, white voters, particularly in the South. This strategy can only win with low voter turnout and voter suppression among people of color, and it will be less and less viable in coming years. This puts the Republican establishment "between a rock and a hard place" of their reactionary core voting base and their big business backers who want long-term viability of the two-party system.

The Republican establishment will not likely want to go down the road of the government shutdown and debt ceiling debacles of previous years due to the damage it did to their approval ratings. New Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has already said he won't have that happen again, and that repealing Obamacare isn't on the table. However, many Republicans

paid lip service to obstructing and overturning Obama policy during their campaigns.

At the state level, many Republican and Tea Party governors sailed to victories in what were expected to be losses for them, again due to low voter turnout and lack of enthusiasm for the Democrats. We will see attacks on union rights and public education along with other right-wing legislation in these states that could result in explosive movements.

During the next two years, Republicans will grandstand with reactionary legislation that Obama will veto. These efforts could become a "whip of counterrevolution" that spurs movements into action like HR 4437 did in 2005, sparking massive immigrants' rights protests and strikes. Right-wing bills could be on immigration, women's rights, LGBT legislation, or labor law.

Reaching Across the Aisle

At the same time, Obama will aim to "reach across the aisle" to Republicans, as he has for the last six years. The Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement will be the most obvious collaboration, as both sides fundamentally agree on the U.S. ruling class's drive for profits and domination, no matter what the cost to workers and the environment.

The Republicans will seek some agreement on the Keystone XL pipeline, which will anger large numbers of young people particularly - potentially resulting in large-scale protests and direct actions. There could also be agreement on decreasing taxes for the rich and super-wealthy or other legislation aimed to benefit the super-rich.

Since the election, Obama signed an executive order removing the threat of deportation for five million of the nation's 11 million undocumented immigrants. This will be seen as a victory by some in the immigrant rights and labor movements, but others will feel it is an inadequate proposal well short of what is needed. It will help the Democrats rebuild their authority among Latinos, but Republican opposition could push people into the streets.

Action on immigration and carbon emissions can, to a limited degree, help the Democrats rebuild their authority with progressives, but this has severe limits as they are also pushing free trade agreements, sending more troops back into Iraq, expanding the surveillance state, and doing the bidding of the big capitalist tax-dodgers. The Democrats' appeal will be that of a lesser evil, as they are unable fundamentally to counter the attacks of the Republicans with



2011 demonstrations for union rights in Madison, WI.

of

Search For Way Forward



Half a million people on the streets of New York City for the People's Climate March on September 21, 2014.

motivating policy proposals.

These future debates, bills, and laws coming from Congress and the White House will serve to undermine both political parties and the system that they represent, laying the basis for independent political action.

Independent Politics

Right, left, and center, the midterm elections saw cracks in the two-party system.

From Socialist Alternative's Jess Spear campaign in Washington State to Howie Hawkins' campaign in New York, independent left politics made modest steps forward in 2014 (see page 5). There were more left candidates than usual and a slightly increased vote from what the left is used to. However, the vacuum is far bigger than the organized and activist forces of the left are prepared to step into. We showed what was possible in 2013, giving confidence to other activists to challenge the Democrats. The momentum for independent left politics will not be the same in 2015 due to the modest results of these elections.

Most of what passes for the "left" in this country is tied to the Democratic Party. Those who aren't tied to big business politics are small and often without roots in the working class. This makes it difficult to gain credible results despite the current inequalities, hatred of the two parties, and openness to left ideas.

If even a small section of the

unions took the initiative to run viable candidates, then the political terrain and debate in this country would change dramatically. Further class struggle could push this process along if we are fighting on all fronts to push for independent working-class politics.

If the labor movement and left are unable to step into the vacuum, then political polarization will find other expressions, including the development of left and right populism. The Libertarianian Party, for example, got a much higher vote than the left in the 2012 presidential elections, and the non-Republican right was able to field far more candidates than the left throughout the country. On the other hand, left populists among the Democrats like Senator Elizabeth Warren and New York Mayor Bill de Blasio have been asserting themselves. Many progressives are looking for an alternative to Hillary Clinton in 2016, although her candidacy will also excite many based on the idea of electing the first woman president.

Ferguson and Other Struggles

In the next months, struggle can break out on a wide range of questions, but in the immediate sense, the sharpest struggle will likely develop from the outcome of the grand jury deliberation on the killing of Mike Brown in Ferguson (see page 3).

What is happening in Ferguson is not just a singular protest against a

police killing; it could be a turn away from the demoralization and despair that has plagued the black community since the destruction and defeat of the black power movement in the 1970s. In this situation, we need to bring socialist ideas to the forefront of the struggle.

Conclusion

While the Democratic defeat will cause some temporary demoralization and confusion, political dysfunction and struggle will be on the rise. Obama will become less and less popular as he reaches out to Republican lawmakers to attack the working class and fails to deliver gains to his base.

Each party can only whip up its base by attacking the other. The world economy is on shaky ground and more workers are demanding wage increases. A movement against racism is emerging, and reactionary Republican legislation could give life to other movements against oppression. Potentially explosive labor battles could be developing despite the far-from-adequate leadership of the unions.

Space will open for independent politics, and more and more young people will be open to socialist ideas. Struggles internationally, likely to increase in coming months, will have a knock-on impact for movements in the U.S. and give more momentum to our growing movement for socialism. ✪

What Socialists Say

Elections and Political Parties

The recent midterm elections witnessed the lowest voter turnout since 1942. Most working-class people are completely disillusioned with the institutions of government – and indeed with all establishment institutions. They see little way of achieving meaningful change that will benefit them through the electoral arena. People see that both Republican and Democratic politicians are closely tied to corporate interests, and they look in horror at the torrent of corporate cash that dominates national elections.

What do socialists say about elections? We believe that the voice of the 99% needs to be heard in an electoral arena that is dominated by the two corporate-controlled parties. We support running working-class and socialist candidates so that the arguments of big business can be challenged and debated and policies that benefit working-class people can be so popularized. However, we feel strongly that voting for the "lesser evil" of the two corporate parties winds up leaving the political and social structure that creates such rotten choices unchallenged.

As we point out on page 5, on almost every conceivable issue the American people are broadly to the left of both the Republicans and the Democrats. Because we have not seen a strong independent challenge to these policies from the left, a big section of the population is effectively disenfranchised.

From the rise of the industrial unions in the 1930s to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, real victories for working people and the poor were achieved first and foremost through social struggle. But the failure to build a genuine party of the working class in the U.S. contributed directly to the ease with which so many of the gains were rolled back by the capitalist establishment, as well as the difficulty of mounting a serious challenge to neoliberal austerity policies today.

Last year, Kshama Sawant was elected the first socialist councilmember in Seattle in over 100 years, receiving 95,000 votes for a program stressing the demand for a \$15 minimum wage. Kshama and Socialist Alternative then launched 15 Now, a grassroots campaign that, six months later, won the first citywide \$15 minimum wage.

Of course forcing the Seattle City Council to adopt a progressive measure is not the same as forcing the U.S. Congress. However, this local development shows in outline what is needed: nationally, independent working-class struggle linked to the building of a new political force that represents the interests of the 99%.

A new party – including trade unionists, young people, and activists in the struggles for racial justice, immigrant rights, women's rights, and against climate change – will galvanize opposition to the capitalist establishment and provide an invaluable forum to discuss and debate the way forward to achieve fundamental change. Socialists will form an increasingly powerful current in such a party as working people draw the conclusions from their experience of social struggle that, if we want to create a decent, sustainable life for all, it is not enough to reform capitalism. The entire system must be removed root and branch. ✪

Working People Pushed Out as Housing Costs Rise

Many major cities across the U.S. are in the grip of a growing housing crisis, characterized by rapidly rising rents, gentrification, and the increasing difficulties facing ordinary people trying to afford to live in these cities. This is on top of the continuing crisis facing millions of homeowners who are still “underwater,” with properties worth far less than their mortgage. Hundreds of thousands of homes are still in the foreclosure process.

In November, we carried reports on the situation in Seattle and in New York. This month we are carrying a further three reports from the Bay Area, Chicago, and Boston. These are actually only highlights from longer reports

which you can find at SocialistAlternative.org.

As we pointed out in our previous material, rent control – which would tie all rent increases to the cost of living – is an essential first step toward resolving the crisis facing renters. It would prevent rental costs from spiraling further and further out reach of working people. Effective rent control needs to be comprehensive and implemented citywide. But in addition to capping rent increases, the shortage of affordable housing must be addressed by building high-quality, below-market-rate public housing. This would create tens of thousands of jobs and greatly expand the availability of affordable housing, without

being dependent on private developers.

Paying for any significant expansion of affordable housing will require a reversal of current regressive tax policies, as well as major expansion of taxes on developers and the wealthy. This is why the fight for affordable housing cannot be waged without a struggle against income inequality and the ending the billions in corporate handouts.

Publicly funded construction of housing has to be democratically overseen by representatives of the communities, the labor unions, and the tenants. This will ensure the best use of resources and avoid waste and bureaucratic mismanagement.

Exploding rents, the destruction of homes, and increasing homelessness show that the banks and big business have failed to deliver this basic human need. Developers build only when and where they can maximize profits. On this basis, the need of working people for quality, affordable housing will never be met.

That’s why, as well as campaigning for immediate improvements, we also need to end the domination of corporate greed over society. We need a fundamental shift toward a democratically planned socialist economy, which will use resources in the interest of people and the environment, not the wealthiest 1%. ♣



Working people have run out of housing options in the Bay Area. In the past five years, the rent in San Francisco has doubled: the average one-bedroom apartment is now over \$2800 per month. This puts SF in the running for the least affordable city in the country, and it comes in second place after New York City. You’d have to be making a \$103,000 per year salary for that average rental to count as “affordable housing,” defined as costing 33% or less of one’s income. The situation is similar in rapidly gentrifying Oakland, where the average rent just hit \$2,400 per month.

The average salary in the Bay Area is \$62,000 per year, but this figure hides the true range and inequality of employment. The booming tech industry pays out six-figure salaries to programmers, managers, and other office professions, while retail, service, and manual labor jobs can hope for \$25,000 - \$35,000 per year. For low-wage workers, the tech workers moving in drive rents and home prices out of reach and force them to relocate or struggle harder to survive.

Affordable housing programs have been created but are totally insufficient to combat the scale of gentrification that’s occurring.

Half or more of the developers opt to pay a fine running into the tens of millions of dollars rather than include the affordable units in their developments. The logic is that wealthy buyers and investors are willing to pay a premium to avoid living in “mixed income” neighborhoods. The rich in San Francisco will go to great lengths to avoid interaction with the working class.

In 2013, activists organized protests against the Google buses, which ferry tech workers to their Mountain View offices without paying their fair share for the public bus stops they utilize. This turned into a more general movement against Bay Area gentrification as protests broke out against other similar tech company bus services. ♣



Location, location, location: 150 years ago, Chicago’s location on transport routes to the Western prairies made it among the most valuable real estate in America. Ever since, vast fortunes have been made by speculators, from Marshall Field and Potter Palmer to the Zells, Crowns, and Pritzkers who are among the richest billionaires in present-day Chicago.

Their gain is our loss: this massively profitable speculation in real estate is what drives housing prices for the rest of us, and the goals of the Chicago political elite are set by this little coterie of the uber-rich. Most buildings in Chicago outside of the downtown area are over a century old, so their original construction has been paid for over and over and over again. What drives their market value up is the big banks’ and real estate speculators’ monopoly on the land they stand on, so rents continue to rise. As of 2012, 42% of Cook County residents rent, and more than half of those renters spend more than 30% of their income to do so.

The unregulated market in housing makes it impossible to be sure of the average rent being paid, but one site puts an average two-bedroom apartment in Chicago above \$2,100 a month. All sources agree that rents stayed level in the recession while incomes shrank. Today, most renters make less than half the median area income, which for a household of two means they’re surviving on less than \$29,000 a year. ♣



Like a number of other cities with an influx of college graduates and tech professionals, Boston faces a gentrification problem. Biotech and pharmaceutical jobs in Cambridge pay well, and members of the industry – often drawn in from other areas such as California, London, or elsewhere in Europe – are willing to pay through the nose for convenient apartments near the T or their workplaces. It’s a system that barely works for those with the best of jobs, who are forced to pay more for their housing than it’s worth; but more importantly, the influx of well-to-do residents drives rent and housing prices up and poor and middle-class residents out.

Rent in Boston is well-known for being unreasonable: the median rent is \$2,439, and it’s considered common knowledge that a single person has to pay at least \$1,000 to live in the city. Those who can’t afford that either need to find roommates, or live further away – in the surrounding suburbs of Somerville, Quincy, Watertown, Lynn, Chelsea, or elsewhere.

Boston had the third-highest rent increases in the country over the period from 2012-2013, with an increase in the median rent of 5.5%. There was a time when the cities of Boston, Cambridge, and Brookline had rent control and affordable housing policies that placed checks on price-gouging landlords.

All rent controls were eliminated across Massachusetts in 1995, laying the basis for the large-scale gentrification and desperate shortage of affordable housing we see today. In the late ‘90s and early 2000s, activists waged building-by-building battles against rent hikes, mass evictions, and poor conditions, but as stunning as some of their individual victories were, such a small-scale response couldn’t keep up with the intensity of the housing crisis.

Now, though rent is increasing more rapidly than ever, the media is avoiding the subject of rent control. About 45% of renters in Boston are paying more than 30% of their income to keep up with rent. The time is overdue to fight back, demanding rent control across the board, investment in high-quality public housing, and a \$15 minimum wage. ♣

Mexico: Disappearance of 43 Incites Mass Revolt



Meghan Brophy

On October 9, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Mexico to demand justice for the 43 missing students from the Normal Rural School in Ayotzinapa. These marches stem from the unearthing of numerous clandestine mass graves close to the place where the student teachers were last seen being corralled onto buses by the police.

The students were stopped while traveling to the city of Iguala to protest against harmful neoliberal education reform legislation. This has evoked memories of the infamous 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, in which police and military forces murdered hundreds of students and civilians. Students at numerous major Mexican universities declared strikes and international days of action throughout October and November. However, an examination of various policies and institutions is imperative to completely understand the situation.

Drug War Fuels Violence

Since 1971, the United States has been fighting its “war on drugs” with policies centered on pushing drug-trafficking-related violence into Mexico and Central America. In December of 2006, the Mexican government began fighting its own “war on drugs” with more than \$3 billion dollars from the United States government. Simultaneously,



Protesters from Iguala carry images of the 43 missing students in Mexico City.

drug cartels have been fighting each other for control of territory and markets. Numerous corrupt government officials, the army, and the police – the forces who are supposed to be fighting against cartels – are actually shown to have a collaborative relationship with traffickers.

Ostensibly, the drug war was meant to make Mexico safer, as traffickers and violent crime pose an obvious threat to the country’s well-being. However, the body count from this alleged “war on drugs” from 2006 to 2014 is more than 100,000 dead, at least three-quarters of whom are under the age of 25. In

addition, more than 400,000 Mexicans have been displaced from their homes as a result of the drug war violence around them.

Youth Fight the Political Establishment

Alongside these events, a movement against Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and Mexico’s three major parties has emerged from growing discontent over the deplorable continuation of this “war on drugs” and the lack of proper response to the abduction of the 43 students. Subsequent to the

disappearance of these students, Mexico’s National Palace was set ablaze by protesters carrying torches. These protests began as a seemingly spontaneous outcry against the “disappearance” of the 43 students, but they have developed into a broader movement of young people and the working class resisting an overwhelming manifestation of fear, violence, and corruption in Mexico.

Throughout the world, frustration with the lamentable consequences of capitalism has reached a boiling point. From South Africa to Mexico, young people have been at the forefront of these struggles. The fight against worsening economic inequality and political repression is extending beyond borders and reaching an entire generation of youth with uncertain, dwindling futures. These movements that challenge the current social, political, and economic establishment have also served as an inspiration to working people across the globe.

The massive protests have already demonstrated the potential strength of these growing movements in Mexico. To most efficiently direct this growing discontent, a cogent challenge to the current three-party political establishment is necessary. It’s obvious that the current establishment is devoted to preserving Mexico’s capitalist system. Through a movement of workers and young people organizing around a socialist alternative, a real challenge to the exploitative system of capitalism is possible. ☸

South Africa: Metalworkers’ Union Expelled from COSATU

Committee for a Workers International (CWI) members in South Africa played a critical role in launching the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP). The following is extracted from an article by WASP on important new developments in the South African labor movement.

On November 7, the Central Executive Committee of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which is the nation’s main black union federation, voted 33 to 24 to expel the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). By this action, they inadvertently accelerated the reemergence of the working class as an independent political force.

NUMSA General Secretary Irvin Jim stated: “You want to expel us because we constantly remind you how you are failing to protect the interests of the working class. Inside or outside COSATU, we will not stop mobilizing the working class on the road to socialism. We will not give you any peace as we expose the miserable failure of the

class alliance you are entangled in and how it compromises your ability to lead the working class.”

In solidarity with NUMSA, seven of COSATU’s 19 affiliates suspended their participation in COSATU’s leadership structures.

The blame for the break-up of COSATU lies with the right wing, which has betrayed every principle of working-class political independence, worker control, and socialism. All that remains within COSATU of the traditions that gave birth to the federation in the 1980s battle against apartheid is the name.

NUMSA announced the national launch of its United Front, which the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) participates in, on December 13-16. The potential exists to create a new trade union federation, replacing the class collaboration of the Tripartite Alliance – the ANC, the Communist Party and COSATU – with the principles of working-class political independence and socialism. ☸

Struggle Against Water Charges in Ireland Intensifies

Eleanor Rodgers

In Ireland, November saw the struggle against water charges, part of a deeply resented privatization of water, reach new heights.

On November 1, 150,000 people protested nationally. All over the country, local protests are taking place on a rolling basis, against installation of water meters, against the politicians responsible for austerity, and against Gardai (police) brutality against protesters.

In mid-November, one local protest in Tallaght, Dublin, captured the attention of the national media when the protesters surrounded the car of the Tanaiste’s (the Deputy Prime Minister), creating a stand-off with the Gardai that lasted two hours. Paul Murphy, TD (member of parliament) for the Socialist Party, which is part of the Committee for a Worker’s International, joined local residents in peaceful protest sitting in front of the Tanaiste’s car.

The Irish establishment tried to use this incident as a way to split the anti-water charges movement – accusing the Socialist Party and other anti-austerity campaigners of violence. The throwing of a water balloon at the Tanaiste has been described as terrorism, and one Fine Gael TD went so far as to compare the socialists to ISIS.

At the same time, the government has been forced to backtrack; they have dramatically reduced the amount that each household would be charged for the first few years, hoping to lull the population into accepting it and then to raise the charges.

The Irish people have experienced this tactic before with refuse charges and the household tax – both of which have risen since their introduction. The reality is that this issue has brought to the surface the pent-up anger from six years of endless austerity, mass unemployment, and cuts in working people’s living standards. For full coverage of this ongoing struggle, go to SocialistWorld.net. ☸

Sexist #GamerGate Rocks Video Game Industry

Ben Robinson

Harassment of women in the video games industry, on- and off-line, has reached new lows with the recent GamerGate campaign.

Games developer Zoe Quinn was accused by her ex-partner of sleeping with journalists in exchange for favorable coverage. Despite the private nature – and falseness of these accusations – Zoe Quinn quickly became a target of harassment, involving the circulation of private photographs and personal details including home address and phone number, the harassment of friends and family, and multiple death and rape threats. Soon, Zoe Quinn felt unsafe in her own home.

This hate campaign also expanded to include others, including feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian. Earlier in 2014, Anita had produced a series of YouTube videos covering how women are portrayed in video games. This led to online harassment, but later, emboldened by GamerGate, it got worse. Like Zoe Quinn, Anita Sarkeesian was threatened with murder and rape, and driven out of her home.

In mid-October, she cancelled a planned speaking engagement at Utah State University after anonymous messages, claiming to be from a student, said that if the event went ahead, they would carry out “the deadliest school shooting in American history.” Others, such as games developer and commentator Brianna Wu, have faced similar treatment. Disgracefully, Utah police also told Sarkeesian



Anita Sarkeesian posts videos exposing the objectification of women in video games.

that, given the state law allowing college students to carry guns on campus, they could not protect her or the audience.

This campaign sought to justify its harassment by claiming to speak out against cronyism in games media, but these concerns have been completely overshadowed by attacks on vocal women. This process has been adopted and encouraged by prominent reactionary figures. The Twitter hashtag “gamergate” was coined by conservative actor Adam Baldwin who, earlier in 2014, claimed that marriage for LGBT people was comparable to incest.

The American Enterprise Institute, the right-wing think tank, which was particularly influential during George W. Bush’s presidency, recorded a series of videos justifying video game misogyny.

GamerGate activists have also concentrated many attacks on the relations between video game journalists, critics, and independent developers such as Zoe Quinn. They have focused far less on examples of journalists and reviewers gaining from relations with the huge video game development studios. *Grand Theft Auto IV*, currently the best-rated video game

of all time with an average review of 98/100 (Metacritic), was reviewed by journalists at an all-expenses-paid four-star spa resort over the course of four days. The game reached sales of \$500 million in its first week of distribution in 2008. Earlier in 2014, selected journalists reviewing Ubisoft’s *Watch Dogs* were given complimentary Nexus 7 tablets.

Gaming software sales in the U.S. for 2013 totaled \$20.5 billion, almost double North American movie theater revenues that year.

Video games have the potential to immerse gamers in stories and situations more richly and on more levels than other comparable media. Cultural criticism such as Anita Sarkeesian’s is absolutely essential to developing that potential, and it should be welcomed by video game makers, journalists, and gamers alike. Silencing and denigrating thoughtful voices such as Sarkeesian’s and Quinn’s – whose most famous release, *Depression Quest*, tells the story of coping with mental illness – will only diminish the future quality of video games.

The fact that GamerGate has primarily targeted women and attacked them through sexualized means underlines the extent to which sexism is a feature of society today. Alongside movements such as Carry That Weight – currently rocking campuses across the U.S. – developing a critique of games and entertainment in general is an important part of fighting for a world free from sexism. ✪

Ferguson continued from page 3

prisoners by “People From Their Black Communities.” We need a similar approach today. Movements like the fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage offer a tool to organize millions of workers into action. Such a movement, with links to the broader labor movement, would offer a far stronger vehicle to challenge police brutality and mass incarceration than liberal nonprofits and Democratic Party politicians.

Linking Police Repression with Economic Inequality

On this basis, a new black freedom movement could be constructed which would have the potential to reach out to an entire generation of young people of color who have been totally disenfranchised by U.S. capitalism. At the same time, it could build bridges to the broad anger of millions of working class-people against corporate CEOs and Wall Street, and to the massive disillusionment with a broken political system. Starting with building momentum in the streets, workplaces, and universities, such a movement should run independent candidates tasked with bringing these demands into the political arena, using the

mass attention elections get as a megaphone to advance the movement.

To build toward a new mass liberation movement:

- ✪ End racism and police brutality: for a united struggle against oppression, humiliation, and exploitation of workers, youth, immigrants, and people of color;
- ✪ Justice for Mike Brown, Trayvon Martin, and all other victims of the racist justice system;
- ✪ End economic racism: \$15/hour minimum wage, affordable housing, guaranteed jobs, health care, and education.

However, to defeat police violence, racism, and poverty, we need to address their root causes in this system itself: capitalism. This whole system, here and around the world, is based on the exploitation and oppression of ordinary people. This is how capitalism functions: Workers are impoverished, oppressed, and terrorized while wealth is concentrated at the top. St. Louis and Ferguson provide the touchstone for a new and vibrant movement to cleanse the crimes of capitalism and white supremacy from present and future generations. The need for a system change is on the agenda now! A socialist world is possible. ✪

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INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

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15 Now Grows Across the U.S.

Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN

Broad Labor Support for \$15 in Minneapolis



Ginger Jentzen

With three historic victories for \$15 an hour minimum wage in SeaTac, Seattle, and San Francisco over the last year, Minneapolis may be poised to be the next big win for the movement. Major campaigns with wide labor backing are underway both at the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport (MSP) and in the City of Minneapolis. 15 Now and Socialist Alternative are at the core of both efforts.

Airport workers organizing with 15 Now are building pressure on the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) and Governor Mark Dayton to enact \$15. Nearly 2,000 workers at MSP have signed a petition demanding \$15 an hour and to prioritize workers' interests over the profits of low-wage employers like Delta.

"All workers should be able to support themselves and their families," wrote Shar Knutsen, President of the Minnesota AFL-CIO, in an open letter to Governor Dayton and the airport commissioners. "It is our sincere hope that the Metropolitan Airports Commission chooses to be a leader on this economic justice issue." The AFL-CIO is the biggest of a host of labor bodies that have endorsed and financially supported 15 Now's campaign for \$15 an hour at MSP.

Socialist Alternative initiated the campaign for \$15 an hour in Minneapolis starting with our city council election campaign last year, which mobilized hundreds of volunteers and came just 229 votes short of winning. When 15 Now Minneapolis was launched in March, over 100 workers and community supporters attended its first meeting.

After the first fast-food strikes in Minneapolis on September 4, several city councilors publicly came out behind the \$15 demand. As airport workers are escalating their campaign, 15 Now is helping to bring together a coalition of community and labor groups to fight for \$15 an hour in the whole city of Minneapolis. It appears likely that the coalition for \$15 will win the backing of virtually all labor unions in Minneapolis.

Uniting organized labor behind \$15 was key to the victory of \$15 an hour in Seattle and San Francisco, and will be crucial to defeating the fierce attacks big business will wage against our efforts at MSP and citywide. At the same time, as in Seattle it will remain vital for 15 Now to develop an independent, movement-building approach to win a solid \$15 against the inevitable attempts by the Democratic Party and big business to divide our coalition and water down workers' demands. ☘

Since the victory in Seattle last June, 15 Now has gained momentum nationally, with chapters in over 20 cities. Alongside union and community allies, 15 Now is involved in a number of promising campaigns that could see solid victories for working people next year. Launched by Kshama Sawant and Socialist Alternative in Seattle in late 2013, 15 Now is a grassroots democratic movement that aims to unite workers, unemployed people, students, retirees, and everyone who wants to build a fighting movement for living-wage jobs. Here are several reports from 15 Now chapters which give an indication of the exciting work being done across the country. ☘

Portland, OR

The Fight For \$15 Rages on in Portland



Justin Kertsen

Somewhere between the citywide victories for \$15 in Seattle and San Francisco lies the "little big city" of Portland, Oregon. While a state preemption law prevents Portland from raising the minimum wage for everyone in the city, workers here refuse to accept this unjust policy. 15 Now has mobilized over 30 unions, community organizations, and businesses to endorse \$15 for Portland and the State of Oregon.

As these endorsements come in and a coalition for \$15 is being built, low-wage workers in unions like LiUNA, AFSCME, and SEIU are demanding \$15 in their contract negotiations. On Halloween, news broke that the first two contract victories for \$15 were won in Portland! Employees of Home Forward, a local housing agency, as well as seasonal parks workers, both won \$15. A third victory came days later when employees of Multnomah County won a contract that includes \$15 an hour!

These contract victories in Portland place mounting pressure on our city council to revise the Fair Wage Policy to \$15, affecting workers employed by companies that contract with the City. 15 Now Portland recently held a community hearing on the Fair Wage Policy. Over 100 people, including representatives of city commissioners, heard moving testimony from affected workers, economists, and faith leaders. Commissioners' representatives were also presented with over 5,000 signatures demanding \$15.

With mounting grassroots pressure and government agencies throughout the Portland area giving in to the demand for \$15, a victory on Portland's Fair Wage Policy may be on the horizon. Meanwhile, around the whole state workers are organizing and preparing to fight for \$15 for all of Oregon! ☘

LEARN MORE ABOUT
15 NOW BY VISITING
15NOW.ORG

Philadelphia, PA

15 Now Philly Building Momentum



Andrew Mattei and Kate Goodman

Philadelphia is America's poorest large city and "boasts" the lowest minimum wage allowed by federal law. Sitting on the bus, waiting for the subway, walking through the city, everywhere we go, workers are talking about how \$7.25 is not enough. Leading the way, 15 Now and SEIU's Fight for \$15 are building a movement of low-wage workers fighting for a better quality of life.

In September, we marched down Broad Street with hundreds of people, and 11 of us were arrested for civil disobedience outside a Center City McDonald's. Since then, fast-food workers and 15 Now activists have been meeting to discuss tactics and strategy. Fast-food workers, union and nonunion health care workers, restaurant workers, and unemployed activists are planning the next several months of low-wage worker actions.

On November 22, our new Low Wage Organizing Committee will rally outside City Hall to announce a Philadelphia Low Wage Worker Bill of Rights and a plan to win a \$15 minimum wage and more gains in 2015.

Until now, the Chamber of Commerce has effectively prevented reforms, with hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on lobbying City Council and the state legislature. They passed a statewide preemption law in an attempt to ban raising the minimum wage on a municipal level. In 2015, we will challenge those corporate interests head-on and push the City Council and Mayor Michael Nutter to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. ☘

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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Build a Movement for \$15 in 2015!

Workers' Confidence Growing Amid Fresh Victories

Ty Moore,
National Organizer
for 15 Now

All signs point toward a rising tide of struggle of low-wage workers in 2015, and the demand for \$15 an hour is gaining mass appeal. To build on the momentum, 15 Now is preparing to launch a national "\$15 in 2015" campaign to expand the grassroots surge and win fresh victories for working people.

Following the June victory for a \$15 an hour minimum wage in Seattle, Los Angeles City Council passed a measure granting workers at big hotels over \$15 an hour, and on November 4th voters in San Francisco passed an even stronger \$15 an hour than Seattle with 76% support.

By wide margins, voters also passed minimum wage hikes in Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota, all typically considered conservative states. Over the last two years, 17 states and 10 cities have raised their minimum wage, showing the growing political momentum.

All this has dramatically raised the confidence of workers to demand more. Historic levels of inequality

persist. Homelessness, low-paying jobs, and poverty rates are rising, though not as quickly as the incomes of the richest 1%. Popular anger at the political establishment and the rigged economic system is at historic highs. With the federal government paralyzed in partisan gridlock, local and state governments are feeling increasing pressure to act.

Momentum is growing in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, the three largest U.S. cities, with all three mayors declaring themselves in favor of a \$13 an hour minimum wage. Despite opposition from business leaders pushing hard to water down these promised wage hikes, workers continue to demand more, setting the stage for struggle next year.

Meanwhile, the fight for \$15 at workplaces continues to heat up. The OUR Walmart campaign has taken up the \$15 demand, and the broadest set of strikes and actions by Walmart workers yet took place on Black Friday. That will be followed by nationwide fast-food strikes on December 4. The Fight for \$15 campaign, spearheaded by SEIU, is expanding beyond just fast food. The biggest strikes and actions yet for "\$15 and a Union" are

being prepared for next April, and 15 Now will be calling for big national days of action on March 15 and April 15.

More and more low-wage unionized workers are demanding \$15 in their contract negotiations. On November 13, hundreds of federal contract workers struck and marched on the Capitol building, including the food service workers who staff the congressional dining hall, demanding \$15 an hour. This is an especially striking indication of workers' raised expectations, since these same contract workers won a raise to \$10.10 less than a year ago through Obama's well-publicized executive order.

The potential exists for the \$15 slogan to play a similar galvanizing role for low-wage workers today as the call for the 8-hour day did in the early days of American labor. With a bold and bottom-up approach, and the resources of the big unions, we could see a truly mass movement for \$15 nationally develop in coming years. Let's get organized now and prepare the ground for mass actions and broadening strikes for \$15 in 2015! Join 15 Now or start a chapter today at 15Now.org. ✪

Sawant and 15 Now Win \$1.6 Million for Seattle City Workers



Kshama Sawant held a "People's Budget" town hall at Seattle City Hall.

Overcoming sharp opposition from Mayor Ed Murray, 15 Now and Socialist Alternative Councilmember, Kshama Sawant waged a successful campaign to win \$15 an hour for all City of Seattle workers by April, 2015. The victory was especially striking because it was actually the mayor, in his first major policy announcement after taking office last January, who initially promised to bring city workers to \$15 an hour.

According to the *Seattle Weekly*, "In outlining his 2015-2016 proposed city budget on Sept. 22, Murray altered course from his January declaration by recommending that the salary boost be phased in" over three years. However, with vocal backing from the city unions, 15 Now, and Socialist Alternative, Kshama Sawant's budget amendment passed council on November 14.

This is an estimated \$1.6 million victory – adding to low-wage public sector workers' paychecks over the next two years – and another indication of the power of grassroots organizing amplified by a fighting socialist on city council! ✪

Read more - See page 11 & SocialistAlternative.org