

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



Socialism and the Fight For Women's Liberation - p. 6 & 7

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WOMEN, WORKERS, IMMIGRANTS FIGHT TO DEFEND OUR RIGHTS!

ABORTION ON DEMAND

NOT DEPORTATION

LABOR STANDS WITH IMMIGRANT WORKERS

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS ON STRIKE

INSIDE: HOW SEATTLE WON \$15 p.5

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

Satya Vatti
Student
Seattle, WA

Even as a little kid growing up within the complexities of Indian society, I dedicated my life to the betterment of the human condition. I saw poverty and discrimination everywhere in a heavily industrializing and rapidly Westernizing Indian society. I assigned myself to the purpose of participating in the struggle for Justice and Peace.

Over the years, my experiences have only strengthened this stance, but they have also taught me that Justice and Peace cannot be achieved within a capitalist system. The realization that capitalism needs patriarchy, racism, sexism, hetero-normativity, and many other injustices to function successfully moved me to shift my understanding of how the connected realities within which we exist operate. There is no necessity for these pillars of dominance in a socialist society.

Over time, I have realized that many of us, with good intentions, become trapped in the idea that the system can be changed from within through gradual reforms. But this is an incorrect strategy because it not only neglects our consistent urgency for change, but also perpetuates this wrongful idea that change

only comes slowly, and in increments.

Today, as I work as a low-wage hotel worker, I see every day the dehumanizing ways in which my hardworking coworkers are subjugated in terms of wages, treatment, and working conditions. This system does not allow for respect for human dignity, and many are coerced into dire circumstances with no real control over their lives.

We, as Americans, live in the Belly of the Beast, and the struggle is more important here than anywhere else, because when battles are won here, their effects are felt everywhere in the world. Reform is not the solution; revolution of systems and ways of thinking are. For me, socialism is the primary – and a necessary – step toward the liberation of society and of the individual self. This is why I am a socialist. ✦



Northeastern Students Campaign for Country's First Campus-Wide \$15

Elan Axelbank, Boston

As the fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage continues to spread, students at Northeastern University are breaking new ground by becoming the first students in the country to bring the fight for \$15 to their college campus. As the cost of living in Boston continues to rise and gentrification continues to plague the city, workers and students have no choice but to unite in the fight against poverty wages.

Joseph Aoun, the president of Northeastern, is the second-highest-paid university president in the country, with a salary of \$3,121,864, 117 times what campus security guards make. In 2014, Northeastern's endowment was \$713.2 million. There is no reason that even a tiny percentage of this money can't go toward ensuring that all campus workers are afforded a decent standard of living. However, as Northeastern and many other universities are becoming increasingly corporatized, university administrations cares less about quality education and the well-being of campus workers and more about maximizing their profits.

Initiated by Northeastern Socialist Alternative, this campaign is being carried out by a coalition of student groups under the banner of *15 Now Northeastern*. The students have to collect 750 student signatures to get the question on the student government elections ballot at the end of March. If a majority of students vote yes for all campus workers to be paid a minimum of \$15 an hour, they will be the first students in the country to do so – but that won't be the end of the campaign. Student referendums are nonbinding and will only serve as a tool for 15 Now Northeastern to make sure their university stays true to its self-proclaimed mission of social responsibility and integrity by providing a living wage for all campus workers. This is just the first phase of a potentially historic campaign. ✦

MAKE HISTORY ON CAMPUS!

The national Fight For A \$15 Minimum Wage, which has produced victories for workers nationwide, has come to Northeastern's campus!

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR A \$15 MIN WAGE

WEEKLY MEETINGS
THURS 8PM
@SOCIAL JUSTICE RESOURCE CENTER
106 ST. STEPHEN ST.

15 NOW
NU.ORG

Defeat “Right to Work” in Wisconsin and Illinois

Scott Walker Attacks Again!

Travis Albert, Milwaukee

When Republican Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker “dropped the bomb” after his election in 2010 with his infamous Act 10 legislation which eliminated collective bargaining for most government employees in the state, his long-term intentions were perfectly clear. Talking with the billionaire Diane Hendricks in 2011, Walker insisted that he could implement “right to work” in Wisconsin. After giving her a kiss, he detailed his strategy, stating, “The first step is we’re going to deal with collective bargaining for all public employee unions...you use divide and conquer,” (Bloomberg.com, 02/23/2015).

Right to work, which already exists in 24 states – mostly in the South and West – places serious restrictions on unions and will directly contribute to significant sections of the remaining unionized workforce being de-unionized. This contributes to undermining the wages and working

conditions of all workers.

Four years later, as Walker prepares to enter the 2016 presidential race, right-to-work legislation is on the fast track to becoming a reality in Wisconsin. The state legislature has called an extraordinary session, ensuring little opportunity for public input.

The right-to-work legislation comes just weeks after Walker put forward a massive \$300 million cut for the University of Wisconsin System. It is clear that this cut will be on the backs of students and ordinary workers at the UW System, and it is already generating massive opposition.

The Need to Fight Back

The confidence of the Republicans is not surprising, given that the labor leadership – so far – has not prepared workers for a fight-back. Legal challenges, doomed recall efforts, and a reluctant Democratic Party cannot defeat right-to-work measures. Only

a united working class and a fighting approach can. It is vital that the unions organize mass mobilizations in the days ahead to begin galvanizing working people. But as the experience of 2011 shows, marches will not be enough to defeat Walker. Strikes, occupations, and mass civil disobedience will be necessary to defeat this legislation. These are tactics that will require reaching out to the rank-and-file of the unions, not to corporate politicians and law firms.

If labor leaders fail to mobilize their memberships and supporters in a meaningful way, this will only further embolden the anti-union governors of neighboring states. This is all the more imperative as Illinois Republican Governor Bruce Rauner is attempting to mirror Walker’s divide-and-conquer methods to bring anti-union laws to Illinois.

Read more at SocialistAlternative.org on the fight against anti-union attacks and education cuts in Wisconsin and Illinois. ☘

Sawant Rally Kicks Off \$15 for Minneapolis Campaign

Ginger Jentzen,
15 Now Organizer, Minneapolis

15 Now Minnesota hosted a rally on February 15 featuring Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant, speaking alongside worker-activists and supportive Minneapolis City Council Members. Over 250 supporters attended and contributed \$10,000 toward building the grassroots campaign for \$15 an hour at MSP airport and in the City of Minneapolis!

Speakers from Neighborhoods Organizing for Change (NOC), Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha (CTUL), and the 15 Now MSP airport campaign met an enthusiastic response to their calls for \$15 in Minneapolis. Four of the thirteen Minneapolis City Council Members have publicly pledged support for raising the minimum wage in Minneapolis.

Sawant energized the crowd, highlighting the 15 Now movement’s victory in Seattle, which will impact 100,000 workers and return an estimated \$3 billion to the pockets of workers over the next decade. “The interests of corporations are fundamentally in conflict with the interests of working people,” Sawant said, encouraging supporters to build a fierce grassroots campaign for \$15.

Unions and community groups had been urging Mayor Betsy Hodges, who was elected in 2013 on a social justice and racial equity agenda, to back a wage hike. But within days after the Sawant rally, which received favorable media coverage, Mayor Hodges came out publicly



Over 250 packed the 15 Now launch meeting on Feb 15, 2015.

against Minneapolis setting its own minimum wage.

Mayor Hodges echoed big business’s fear-tactic arguments of economic flight and job loss. She is hiding behind a “regional strategy,” stating she is in favor of wage increases statewide and nationwide, but not in Minneapolis, (*Star Tribune*, 02/20/2015). Her statements immediately provoked outrage on social media.

The mayor’s stand against \$15 an hour will, more than any other issue since she was elected, expose her deference to big business, which remains the dominant force within the Democratic Party establishment. The organized grassroots campaign of low-wage workers and supporters in Minneapolis has been key to winning the support of some City Council Members. Strengthening the grassroots campaign, building popular support for \$15, will be vital to overcome the resistance of the political establishment and to win \$15 an hour for Minneapolis in 2015. ☘

Kshama Sawant Column

Build the Resistance Against the Right



When the Republicans won the midterm elections, we in Socialist Alternative argued that this did not represent a turn to the right in society. It was fueled by an anti-incumbent mood reinforced by a massive abstention by progressive voters. The contradiction was expressed in the number of progressive ballot measures that passed, even in states that voted Republican.

But it was absolutely inevitable that the Republican Party, particularly its right wing, would see this as a mandate to go on the offensive against working people. Look what is happening now:

- ☘ A Texas judge, ruling in a lawsuit brought by 26 overwhelmingly Republican-led states, has blocked Obama’s executive order which lifted the threat of deportation for up to five million foreign-born workers and youth. The whole program is now on hold, perhaps indefinitely. This is an absolutely devastating blow to people who though they finally could begin coming out of the shadows.
- ☘ The Republican leadership in the House of Representatives was preparing to pass legislation banning all abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy, but they were forced to drop this because of a revolt among Republican Congresswomen! Instead, they passed a more confusing piece of legislation restricting federal funding for abortion services that, while not openly labeled a ban, is effectively an abortion ban for large numbers of poor women. Already, in 89% of counties in the U.S., particularly in the South, there are no abortion providers at all. But it is clearly the aspiration of the right to go even further by overturning *Roe v. Wade* and dealing a massive blow to women’s rights.
- ☘ And, as reported above, Scott Walker, the governor of Wisconsin who launched the assault on public sector workers’ collective bargaining rights in 2011, now wants to finish the job by making Wisconsin a right-to-work state. The new Republican governor of Illinois wants to go down the same path.

While the Democrats will oppose the Republicans in the courts, at least on some fronts, all of this points to the urgent need for massive social struggle to rebuild a powerful labor movement in the U.S. It also points to the necessity of building a political force that genuinely represents working people and the poor that would inspire people to vote in their interests – rather than settling for the lesser evil or simply staying home.

A Critical Battle for Working People and the Left

Re-Elect Kshama Sawant to Seattle City Council

Bryan Watson

The strong record of Socialist Alternative Seattle City Council member Kshama Sawant in achieving victories by organizing and activating working people is the basis to win more, especially for affordable housing. After winning legislation for a \$15 an hour minimum wage, the task to make Seattle affordable for all is far from done. Donate and volunteer in this year's referendum on the first open socialist elected in the city in a century.

This campaign promises to be the most highly visible city council race Seattle has seen in decades, one that pits the corporate establishment against the only consistent voice for working people on the council. Moreover, the impact of this campaign will extend far outside of Seattle, with the potential to inspire more independent, left-wing, pro-worker challengers to the two parties of big business nationwide.

Kshama Sawant's election



Kshama Sawant speaking at a March 15, 2014 rally to raise the minimum wage.

victory in 2013 showed that you can challenge pro-corporate candidates independently of the Democratic Party, without taking any money from the super-rich and big business, and on a platform that benefits working people.

In 2015, we're going to prove you can do all that, win concrete victories for working people at the expense of corporate interests while in office, and win re-election.

A Year of Tremendous Change in Seattle

Kshama is running on a strong record: Through the combined efforts of low-wage workers, the labor movement, 15 Now, and Kshama's role as a councilmember, we passed a \$15 an hour minimum wage - the first major U.S. city to do so. Through the efforts of Kshama Sawant's council office, we passed Indigenous People's

Day, won millions in funding for social services through the People's Budget, won raises for low-wage city workers, and won a major victory in helping defeat a brutal attack on low income housing: the so-called "Stepping Forward" program. We showed that when we organize, we can win! You'll find many more reports of small and big efforts of Kshama and Socialist Alternative on our website, SocialistAlternative.org or Kshama's council blog, Sawant.Seattle.gov.

Now, with the call to "Make Seattle Affordable for All," the campaign to re-elect Kshama Sawant to Seattle City Council in 2015 is off and running.

Confronting the Power of Corporate Cash

In recent polls, Kshama Sawant

had a 61% approval rating in her district, and she has become the third most popular representative in the city. However, the corporate establishment, enflamed at the passage of the \$15 an hour minimum wage and determined to head off any other reforms that would threaten their profits, is intent on unseating her.

Already, two candidates to the right of Kshama Sawant have entered the race, Rod Hearne and Morgan Beach. In reality, this election is a referendum on Kshama and the pro-working-class interests she unapologetically fights for.

Why will the establishment find us so hard to beat? Because of the grassroots campaign we will launch, and because of your donation and the energy that you can give to support this campaign! ☺



Follow Kshama Sawant's campaign in Seattle at KshamaSawant.org

facebook.com/VoteSawant
@votesawant

Bernie Sanders Edges Closer to Running as a Democrat

Tom Crean

Bernie Sanders, independent Senator from Vermont and self-identified socialist, has made it increasingly clear that he is preparing to run for the presidency in 2016. Unfortunately, Sanders has now also made it clear that he will not run as an independent but in the Democratic primaries, saying he does not want to be a "spoiler," that is, he doesn't want to help elect a Republican by taking votes away from the Democrats. If Bernie sticks to this position, it represents a lost opportunity to build a left political alternative to the two-party system.

As Hillary Clinton apparently is in discussions with 200 advisers about how populist she can be without scaring off her corporate backers, there is a huge space to the left of the mainstream Democrats in American politics which is waiting to be filled.

Sanders stands for a trillion-dollar, federally funded infrastructure program to create 13 million jobs, to begin taking more decisive steps away from a fossil fuel economy, for single-payer health care, and for card check to make unionization easier. He speaks a language that enthralls working people but that is alien to the leadership of the Democratic Party - even when it is presenting itself as more populist.

Socialist Alternative has been on record for the past few months in calling on Bernie to run because his campaign has the capacity to galvanize millions of people in the U.S. who are looking for a real left alternative. We have also publicly criticized his positions on a number of issues, particularly on foreign policy. But what we have been most insistent about is that Bernie should run as an independent.



Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders is known for standing up against corporate interests.

Can the Democrats Be "Recaptured"?

One argument made for standing in the Democratic primaries is that it will enable Sanders to challenge the neoliberal leadership of the party, including Clinton, directly in televised debates. Sanders talks about waging a "battle of ideas."

The appeal of this is

understandable. Millions want left ideas to move from the margins and pose a clear and present challenge to the establishment. However, history shows that it is essentially impossible for a genuine anti-corporate candidate to win the Democratic primaries. Previous left challengers, like Jesse Jackson in 1984 and 1988 and Dennis Kucinich in 2004, built up inspiring primary

campaigns, only to cave in to the big business Democrats who inevitably won.

The most effective way to bring a serious challenge to the pro-business agenda is to create a new political force in U.S. society, which takes no corporate money, based on the mass participation of working people. The Democratic Party, despite its real differences with the Republicans on important issues, is wholly dominated by corporate cash and the influence it represents. Through the election of Kshama Sawant in Seattle, Socialist Alternative has demonstrated the enthusiasm which a real left challenge can create.

Last summer when he first declared that he was considering a presidential race, Sanders said he could see arguments for running as an independent. He correctly declared, "The more radical

continued on p. 11

How Seattle Won \$15

Philip Locker

The fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage is gaining further momentum. On April 1, Seattle's low-wage workers will see the first rise thanks to the efforts of workers, labor, and 15 Now.

Seattle is the first major city to implement a \$15 an hour minimum wage, phased in over the next few years.

Ultimately, 100,000 workers will be lifted up, one in four employees in the Emerald City. On April 1, all workers in big businesses like McDonald's, Starbucks, Macy's, and Target will see an immediate increase to a minimum of \$11 an hour, and by 2025 all workers in Seattle will be making at least \$18 an hour.

It is estimated that this will result in businesses paying \$3 billion in increased wages for the lowest-paid workers over the next 10 years.

"We have to clarify how \$15 was won. It wasn't handed to us by the Chamber of Commerce. In fact, there was a real push-back by big business, hiding behind small businesses. Without an organized movement, we would not be where we are today."
-Seattle Councilmember Kshama Sawant

People of color and women will benefit in particular, given their over-representation in the ranks of the lowest-paid.

The movement, started by fast-food workers in New York City at the end of 2012, has won a major victory. The success in Seattle last June opened the floodgates nationally, inspiring further victories. Even stronger legislation for \$15 in San Francisco followed, and the midterm election saw successful ballot initiatives to raise wages, even in Republican-dominated states like Alaska and Arkansas.

Grassroots Organizing by 15 Now

The possibilities for a major victory in Seattle became clear in November 2013. A ballot initiative for \$15, heavily backed by a



In 2014, thousands of people turned out on multiple demonstrations calling for \$15 in Seattle.

coalition of labor unions, passed in SeaTac, the small city housing Seattle and Tacoma's international airport.

At the same time, the first openly socialist candidate in a century won a seat on Seattle's city council with almost 100,000 votes against a 16-year Democratic Party incumbent. Socialist Alternative's Kshama Sawant won on a platform calling for \$15, as part of a program to make Seattle affordable for all.

The importance of this victory became clear as Kshama Sawant took immediate action. She launched 15 Now in January 2014 to offer an organizing tool for all activists and to give full democratic ownership of the campaign to workers getting involved.

From the start, 15 Now built neighborhood and campus action groups to activate as many people as possible. March 15 saw an energetic march for \$15. A national conference brought hundreds together on April 26. 15 Now prepared a ballot initiative, a "charter amendment," to immediately increase the pressure on the city council and as a backup plan if they didn't deliver.

There were constant mobilizations, tables in all parts of the city to convince people, teach-ins, conferences, posters, and major marches for \$15 on Martin Luther King Day in January and on May Day. These endless efforts were necessary to win solid support in Seattle against the anti-worker propaganda of big business and the mass media.

A Struggle Against Big Business

"You don't have to be a socialist to fight

for social justice, but it definitely helps," Kshama Sawant said after \$15 was passed. "It helps to understand that workers are confronted with the power of big business and their corporate politicians – not just those on the right, paid for by the Koch brothers, but also the big business agenda of the Democratic Party leadership. Winning \$15 meant consciously organizing our side – workers, labor, and community groups."

However, throughout the fight for \$15 in Seattle, there was an ongoing debate within the movement on its strategy.

David Rolf, president of SEIU 775, explained the thinking which guided the main union leaders. In an interview, he said that it was necessary to have a "left flank" and that he had "nothing but respect for Sawant and her organization, 15 Now ... But we don't agree on the strategy. For some period of time, we've made it clear we support the concept of a phase-in, we want to reach a compromise and we believe the best compromise is one with labor and business at the same table joining their hands and advocating to the council," (KPLU.org, 05/01/2014).

But as the president of the Seattle chapter of the National Restaurant Association, Bob Donegan, said, business only accepted the mayor's proposal – the basis for the legislation in the end – as the "least offensive of the imperfect solutions." He explained, "If Seattle must go to \$15 – and that appears a political reality – there are elements to like in this deal," (Seattle Times, 05/03/2014).

This underlines the reality that it was only due to the widespread public support won by Kshama Sawant, 15 Now, and the

\$15 in 2015!

All Out For April 15

Low-wage workers, unions, community groups, and many more are preparing for a national day of action on April 15. "15 Now calls on everyone to join this protest!" says Ty Moore, national organizer for 15 Now. "We have the momentum on our side; we are fighting for \$15 in all 50 states in 2015. It is pretty simple: \$15 in 50 in 2015."

Be part of the protest, volunteer, or donate:
www.15Now.org

labor movement that business was forced to accommodate itself to the new political reality of a \$15 minimum wage.

Even Seattle Mayor Ed Murray admits in retrospect, "If we hadn't negotiated the proposal that we negotiated, I believe we would have had mini-class warfare, with competing measures on the ballot ... And I believe that '15 Now' had the potential of passing ... So we've tried to tailor it toward different sectors of the business community," (Puget Sound Business Journal, 01/02/2015).

The agenda of business was clear: If they couldn't stop a \$15 minimum wage, they would try to at least water it down by any means possible. What we won was a result of the strength of the movement built by Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative, and the labor movement, and the weaknesses in the Seattle legislation were a result of the counterefforts of business and the support they received from the Democratic Party mayor and city council majority.

If We Fight, We Can Win

"Our victory is not complete, but we have fought until the last day, the last hour, against all the loopholes demanded by business ... We'll come back to the questions of tip penalty, the long phase-in, the training wage," Kshama Sawant said in her speech before voting in favor of the new minimum wage. "What was lost through corporate loopholes is a reminder to us ... that we need to continue to build an even more powerful movement ... But today's message is clear: If we organize as workers, with a socialist strategy, we can tackle the chasm of income inequality and social injustice. \$15 in Seattle is just a beginning. We have an entire world to win," (15Now.org, 06/03/2014).

In many ways, the fight for \$15 resembles the early struggles of the workers' movement 100 years ago around the demand for an eight-hour day. The task of rebuilding labor and a powerful socialist movement lies ahead.

The victory for \$15 in Seattle will be remembered as a turning point in beginning this historic task. ☺



Socialism and the Women's Liberation

Jess Spear

Today's women's movement stands on the shoulders of countless women who fought against oppression in all its forms and won substantial reforms. From the abolitionist movement to the labor movement to the Civil Rights Movement, women have been at the forefront in the struggle for the rights of all oppressed people. It was Rosa Parks (and other black women before her) who refused to give up her seat on the segregated buses of Montgomery, Alabama, which sparked the Civil Rights Movement. It was Mother Jones who led the crusade against child labor in the early 20th century, forcing the issue into the national spotlight. Following in this tradition, it has been women leading the way in the fight for a \$15 minimum wage.

Martina Phelps and Caroline Durocher were two of the first fast-food workers to walk out of their workplace and strike in Seattle. Kshama Sawant, after winning the city council seat, launched 15 Now. All of this together sparked a movement that saw Seattle become the first big city in the country pass a \$15 minimum wage just one year later. This victory comes after decades of defeats for the labor movement and demonstrates the power of organized action around a clear demand.

Walmart's recent announcement to pay its employees no less than \$10 by February 2016 – a raise for over 500,000 workers nationwide – is another indication that workers moving into struggle produces tangible gains for the entire workforce.

Income Inequality

Though the U.S. is experiencing an economic recovery, the recession cut deep; many people continue to struggle under the weight of unemployment, underemployment, lack of workplace rights, unequal or low pay, and continually rising living costs. Women make up a majority of low-wage workers, women make up a majority of tipped workers who make a

subminimum wage of \$2.13, and women have been disproportionately affected.

Workplace rights and a \$15 an hour minimum wage, for predominantly female low-wage workforces, would dramatically improve the economic conditions and social power of women. If the mainstream women's rights groups and big labor unions linked the fight for \$15 to the wider fight against sexism, it would strengthen both struggles: the fight for \$15 necessitates unity between women and men in the low-wage workforce who are battling a common enemy: the big corporations. This unity would be a major step toward overcoming the divisions forced on us by capitalism.

Destroying the Roots of Sexism and Violence Against Women

The inequalities between men and women and the violence against women flow from the deeply ingrained idea that women are possessions of men, exist to gratify men's needs, and should depend on and submit to men. These ideas stem from women's role in reproduction and property inheritance in class based societies. Women's sexual lives were relegated to producing offspring that would inherit the father's property, and women were seen, therefore, as property themselves.

The economic oppression of women underlies this systemic violence. The number one reason women stay with abusive partners is that their partners control their access to money, leaving them without the economic ability to escape.

From college campuses to the military to the homes of NFL players, there is an epidemic of sexual assault and violence toward women. And, on top of the violence faced by women, the massive cover-up from these institutions, further oppressing survivors and defending perpetrators – a culture of misogyny and oppression that has to be broken up.

In recent years, a new generation of women and opponents of sexism have been fighting back.

Rape on college campuses has been met with young women and men organizing for stricter legislation and protections for victims. #CarryThatWeight, in particular, inspired women to join a rape victim in solidarity, helping her carry the weight of her experience and denounce the university's pathetic lack of response. In 2011, thousands of people across the world participated in "SlutWalks" to challenge victim-blaming.

History shows, again and again, that nothing has been more effective at undermining sexist ideas than the combination of women playing a full role in society and in production, as well as women and men organizing and fighting together for their common interests.

Before women joined the workplace en masse during WWII, most women were expected to raise children, cook and clean, and submit to their partner's authority. Since the vast majority of men were needed for the war effort, leaving many factories and workplaces without necessary labor, women entered the workforce in large numbers for the first time. Once the war ended, many women stayed in the workplace, working alongside men, proving they were equals, and fighting alongside men for better wages and workplace conditions. This experience helped undermine sexist ideas in the workplace and society at large, laying the foundation for the women's movement of the '60s and '70s, as well as providing a model for how to continue the struggle to end sexism, sexual assault, and violence towards women.

Winning the Genuine Right to Choose

Reproductive justice and the right to choose is more than just the legal status of abortion. In reality, access to reproductive health care has been cut off for many women who already cannot afford to overcome expensive obstacles such as long travel to the nearest provider, 72-hour waiting periods, and mandatory counseling, all of which can require several days of

work.

Socialists stand for the genuine right to choose: for free, high-quality contraceptive care and free, safe abortions accessible to all. Socialists also stand for securing all that is needed for women and families to choose life. Without economic security, free child care, health care, access to healthy food, quality housing, and education, many women feel unsupported and unable to provide the adequate care necessary for raising a child.

The Case for Socialism

Women's oppression is not etched into the DNA of humanity. It's material roots are the class society in which we live, and the economic system of capitalism that depends on it for survival. Any strategy aimed at gaining more rights for women and ultimately ending women's oppression will not achieve lasting victories without extracting the roots.

Once the roots are extracted, though, what would we plant in their place?

Under capitalism, decisions are based on the maximization of profits for a tiny elite – the shareholders and owners of finance capital. By weakening the resistance of the working class through division along gender, race, religion, and sexual identity lines, working people are convinced to tolerate it. And it is by overcoming this division that we are able to effectively organize and fight for tangible victories now, while challenging the entire capitalist system.

Through our collective struggle for concrete improvements – \$15 an hour minimum wage, free child care and education, decent housing, and jobs for all – we will develop the confidence and conviction to wrest economic and political power from the hands of big business CEOs and place it into the hands of the working class. Once in the hands of the working class, a democratic socialist society can be constructed, whereby the economic decisions would be based on meeting the needs of the people and the environment, not on maximizing the profits of the few. ✪



The Fight for Liberation

The Origins of Sexism and Women's Oppression

The battle for abortion rights, equal pay for equal work, and equal consideration in all aspects of life, from sports to the workplace, was fought, and major victories were won, by the women's movement in the 1960s and '70s. Yet these gains are being rolled back, particularly access to safe and affordable reproductive care.

This attack on women's rights has prompted a new generation of young women and men to ask: Why the hell do we have to keep fighting for the same rights our grandmothers won?! More and more women are elected office, women comprise a larger number of highly skilled professions like doctor or engineer, and women have excelled in nearly every field in which they endeavor. So why, then, do sexist and misogynistic ideas persist?

These questions have led many to conclude that the problem is patriarchy and men's privilege over women and that the solution is changing men's attitudes toward women through education, through men learning to check their privilege, and through promoting women to leadership roles. While educating men on women's issues and promoting women to leadership roles are important steps toward uniting men and women in a common struggle for their common liberation, they don't target the root of sexism and patriarchy. In reality, they focus the blame on men – which divides working people – rather than the conditions that produce sexist ideas and patriarchal violence.

What, then, is the root of sexism and patriarchy, and how can we effectively tear them out of the foundations of human society and win women's liberation?

Inequality between men and women is not something "natural" that always has, and always will, exist. Archaeological data indicates that for most of human history – before the rise of civilization made possible by the advent of agriculture – men and women generally lived as equals. It was the emergence of class society, the division of society between those who

work for a living – workers, or the working class – and those who control the resources needed for production and live off the labor of workers – in the past, slave owners and feudal lords; today, the capitalist class – that women came to be subjugated by men. But not without a fight!

The history of civilization is that of men and women struggling to regain what they lost in the development of class society: full and equal control over the resources and the power to determine our future. Ending women's oppression, therefore, is intimately linked to the struggle to end class society and for an economic system that is democratically controlled and run in the interests of all working people. This can only be achieved by overcoming the division of men and women.

As Helen Keller argued in 1913 in the struggle for women's suffrage:

"The country is governed for the richest, for the corporations, the bankers, the land speculators, and for the exploiters of labor. Surely we must free men and women together before we can free women. The majority of mankind are working people. So long as their fair demands – the ownership and control of their lives and livelihood – are set at naught, we can have neither men's rights nor women's rights."

To wage an effective struggle for a society that benefits the 99%, a society in which women receive equal pay for equal work, free child care, free education, and free and equal access to reproductive health care, it is necessary to build the maximum unity of all those oppressed under this system – the working class.

The biggest obstacle to this joint struggle is the grip of sexist ideas on men, strengthened by the small crumbs this system offers men above women. A constant struggle to fight sexism in all its forms is needed, by women and men. The most effective method to overcome prejudice and discrimination is the united struggle itself. ☘

Movie Review

She's Beautiful When She's Angry

Chelsea Forgenie, New York

She's Beautiful When She's Angry is a documentary directed by Mary Dore, who also co-directed *The Good Fight*, a film about the Lincoln Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. It explores the eruption of the Women's Liberation Movement in the late 1960s to the mid '70s in the United States, along with the societal and internal struggles it endured, as well as the way it helped transform the discourse on women's rights in today's society.

The documentary begins and ends with footage from recent militant protests in Texas against restricting abortion access. Whereas the mass media focuses on the filibuster by Texas State Senator Wendy Davis, the movie focuses on the lesser known women who built the movement in the past and who are standing up today.

The film thoroughly explores how art, story telling, music, and creativity brought the ideas and needs of women to the forefront of society in the '60s and '70s. Many activists developed skills and ideas in women's circles that served as a safe place for women to share their stories and experiences as well as ask questions. These circles fostered a warm sense of community among women that was so lacking in mainstream society.

The documentary also offers a chilling account of the Jane Collective which tenaciously and courageously sought to provide medical care and counseling to women in need of abortions before *Roe v. Wade* made abortion legal. In addition to the Jane Collective, many other groups shared the belief that women needed practical advice and knowledge to aid in their fight against oppression. They produced and distributed books and pamphlets on self-defense, the female body, and DIY's. Many workshops and panels were held to promote and discuss women's issues.

Others had different tactics. Some held bra-burning gatherings, staged male cat-calling sessions, and disrupted legislative hearings. One particular group, the Womens International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH) used costumes and wands to put "spells" on "non believers" of the rising feminist movement. The movie covers a huge span of trends and organizations; the National Organization for Women (NOW), Radicalesbians, Black Sisters United, Hispanic Womens Liberation Groups, and the role of feminists in the Young Lords. The film gives an unapologetic look at how women had to push against residual sexism within many progressive groups. While showing the huge range of radical feminist activity in this period, there are areas not covered like the critical role of women and feminists in the labor struggles of this period. But that would truly require a separate movie.

Toward the end of the film a plethora of interviews reminds us that the struggle for women's liberation has not remained in the past. Most importantly *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* inspires us to be both strategic and bold when taking steps toward our freedom. ☘



#BlackLivesMatter Searches for a Way Forward

The Fight Against Racism Will Not Stop

OUTRAGE

Chapel Hill Tragedy Exposes Deadly Double Standards



The youth of Ferguson and the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) movement have had a profound effect on U.S. society. Going forward, police departments around the country can expect that any atrocities they commit will be met with protest. The policy of mass incarceration is increasingly questioned. At a deeper level, this is the most significant uprising of black youth against racism in 40 years. While the movement may have become less visible in recent weeks, it has certainly not disappeared, and it will reemerge and play a huge role in political developments in the months and years to come.

Though on a lower scale, protests continue against police killings. In Pasco, Washington, more than a thousand people protested after Antonio Zambrano-Montes was murdered by the police on video – with his hands in the air. In Cleveland, thousands continue protesting the murder of Tamir Rice.

A whole new generation of black youth has stepped forward and is looking for a way to fight back. Millions more have been shaken by the police murders, the failure to indict the cops responsible, and the heavy-handed response to Ferguson protesters.

As Matt Taibbi wrote in December, “the police suddenly have a legitimacy problem in this country,” (*Rolling Stone*, 12/05/2014).

A section of the establishment sees that something needs to be done. They hope a few small reforms – like body cameras, new training procedures, and new protocols – will send a signal to millions that the problem is solved. But the movement correctly rejects the idea that this is in any sense an answer to the systematic oppression that black and brown people face at the hands of the police.

Yet what will it take to win real changes? To bring meaningful justice for families and communities?

In St. Louis, Missouri, a proposal for a police department citizen review board – which, in reality,

lacks teeth and is not elected or accountable to the community – was met by ferocious opposition from the police and the right wing, demonstrating that even small, ineffective reforms will be hard to win.

BLM and the Fight for 15

Socialist Alternative has called for uniting the struggle of low-paid workers for \$15 and a union to the struggle for racial justice. In some areas, this has begun to happen. Labor was instrumental in the victories of the Civil Rights Movement in the ‘50s and ‘60s, which led to a growing role for black people and women in the unions throughout the ‘70s and ‘80s. The labor movement could play a powerful role in the struggle today – despite its enormous retreat – because it still embraces millions of people, disproportionately people of color, and it still has massive resources.

Important discussions are taking place as the BLM movement has generally moved from street protests to debating the lessons from the past six months and the way forward from here. (See article on The Gathering in New York City on SocialistAlternative.org).

“Black Lives Matter” is a powerful message that can be further developed and given specific content in the coming period. From racist policing to low pay – this system does not value black lives. By linking the fight against racist policing to concrete demands for a \$15 an hour minimum wage, decent housing, health care, and other issues that all working-class people can understand, we can build a powerful movement.

One hundred fifty years after the smashing of slavery, capitalism has completely failed to overcome racism. As Martin Luther King said toward the end of his life, “maybe America must move toward a democratic socialism.” ✪

Since Craig Hicks entered into a Chapel Hill, North Carolina apartment and shot three young Muslims execution-style, there has been a massive wave of outcry across the world. This outrage has been rightly amplified by the fact that most major corporate media outlets have either omitted the story or stuck to the main narrative of it being over a “parking dispute.”

Hicks, a self-styled “militant atheist” who has put forth Internet posts calling for all religions to “kill each other” has had his motives actively defended in the corporate media, with many stating there is no evidence to believe that the action was motivated by ‘religious hatred’. However, these same news outlets are among the loudest to publicize terror attacks by those from backgrounds rooted in Islam. The double standard in treatment is thundering in its shamelessness.

Malcolm X once noted, “You can’t have capitalism without racism.” The same thing could be said for ethnic and religious hatred. The capitalist media’s emphasis on what amounts to excusing acts of violence against Muslims, as shown in its coverage of the Chapel Hill murders, is just another example of this dynamic at play.

Socialists stand against all acts of individual terror and mourn all those lost in its wake. Craig Hicks should be tried to the full extent of the law. However, as long as we have to live under a system that treats the lives of some as more significant than the lives of others, we don’t think this will ultimately prevent future acts of violence. What Chapel Hill exposes – in a tragic manner – is that the alienating and racist environment encouraged by the elites has deadly consequences and that we must start to root it out at its source, by organizing ourselves for an alternative based on human needs and unity rather than on exploitation and racism. ✪

Eyewitness Report

Pasco Community Demands Justice for Antonio Zambrano-Montes

The small farming community of Pasco, Washington has been in shock since the outrageous extrajudicial killing of Antonio Zambrano-Montes on February 10 by Pasco police. This is the third police killing in the town since July. The family and community have been in mourning this past week, setting up a vigil where Zambrano-Montes was shot multiple times while his hands were up in surrender. Over a dozen people witnessed the tragedy, and one cell phone recording of the murder went viral.

Over 1,100 people protested in Pasco on Saturday, February 10. People gathered at noon at Volunteer Park. Witnesses, community members, and Zambrano-Montes’s bereaved family and friends then marched for a mile to the site where Zambrano-Montes was murdered. They were joined by people from all across the state who traveled to Pasco to mourn and express support and solidarity, in hopes of pressuring the police department and the political establishment to push for charges against the police responsible for Zambrano-Montes’s death. Before the march, and after, stories were shared remembering Zambrano-Montes’s life, with some people leading prayers for peace and justice, and others asking, what is our next step?

The response to this murder from the Pasco community demonstrates the impact that the Ferguson youth had on communities of color across the country – that it is possible to fight back against police brutality. ✪

Greek Left Government Facing European Capitalism

More information about the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) can be found at:
SocialistWorld.net



Xekinima, the Greek section of the Committee for a Workers International, participates on a demonstration.

Fran Karas

The historic election of the Coalition of Radical Left (Syriza) on January 25 brought to power for the first time a left government in Greece – following five years of savage austerity measures that have left the country in a shambles akin to the aftermath of war.

The next day, the iron barricades encircling Parliament were removed. Within a week more barricades, road blocks and the ubiquitous police buses were gone from the city. One newspaper called it “The Liberation of Athens” from a “barricaded democracy that treated its citizens as enemies.”

The measures announced by the government in the first week included restoring the minimum wage to pre-crisis levels (750 euros a month); raising low pensions; abolition of hospital visit fees and prescription costs; ending the forced sale of homes of people who cannot keep up with mortgage repayments; scrapping planned privatizations; re-employing of more than 10,000 civil servants and workers sacked from the public sector; providing citizenship for children of immigrants born and raised in Greece.

In the first two weeks, three massive mobilizations took place all over the country, in support of the government ministers who were negotiating with the European creditors. Immediately, polls showed overwhelming support including from opposition party voters.

Whose Bailout?

In the face of economic collapse and bankruptcy because of enormous indebtedness, a “bailout” for Greece was imposed in 2010. Under the bailout terms, the Greek state was in essence captured by the Troika (representing the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund) which controlled all aspects of economic life.

The deficit went from 113% of the GDP in 2009 to an astonishing 187% after five years of austerity. Almost 90% of the bailout money went to service the debt. The new Syriza finance minister, Yianis Varoufakis, correctly stated, “[it] was a bailout of the German and French banks. The German public was misled into thinking that this was money going to the Greeks, the Greek public was misled into thinking that this was our salvation.”

The conclusion from this, as Xekinima-Socialist Internationalist Organization/CWI, Socialist Alternative’s sister organization in Greece, has argued, is that, “In these times of deep economic crisis and desperate social needs in Greece, it is not possible to be on the side of the ship-owners and the workers, with the businessmen and with unemployed.”

Not a Single Step Back!

Syriza bases its negotiating strategy on the expectation that a Greek default or exit would deal a deadly blow to the Eurozone.

On the other hand, the European “partners” know that any concession to the left government of Greece will only whet the appetite of those in Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Spain – the so-called PIIGS – eager to escape the grip of austerity. Madrid saw 150,000 demonstrating in support of the new Greek government, while Podemos, the new anti-austerity party, is leading opinion polls in Spain. Syriza’s victory is seen as a harbinger of a new era with the potential to inspire and to forge a working-class movement across Europe to defeat austerity and begin a wider fight against the capitalist system which created the crisis in the first place.

In the next period, any illusions that Syriza can, through negotiations, convince the European Union of the bankers and the bosses to grant justice for the people of Greece and its neighbors will be shattered. ☛

Syriza Retreats Under Troika Threats

This is an excerpt of an interview with Nicos Anastasiades, of Xekinima (CWI Greece). More reports and analysis, and the full interview will be published on SocialistAlternative.org and SocialistWorld.net.

On February 20, Greek negotiators agreed a four month extension of the current bailout program with its creditors, the Troika – the EU, the IMF and the European Central Bank. It is reported that the Greek delegation were subject to outright blackmail by the eurogroup (finance ministers of the eurozone). The Greek Syriza government was told they would be forced to implement capital controls within days if they did not agree.

The key elements of this deal are that Greece accepts the framework of the “memorandum” – an austerity agreement – for the next four months; Greece will get the next bailout payment only if it is evaluated “positively” by the Troika; Greece must repay all the debt on time; Greece is committed to use the bulk of the money collected by the austerity programme to repay the debt and Greece will not take any “unilateral actions.”

It is clear that the agreement signifies a big retreat by the Greek government.

Syriza claims it got the “best” of bad deals on offer under the pressure of capital flooding out of Greek banks and the threat of a chaotic run on the banks. “We won time,” claimed Syriza. But time for what? The deal saw Athens having to propose reforms acceptable to its creditors. Syriza’s proposals must be approved by the eurogroup and the Troika, with April set as a deadline. Unless Syriza accepts these diktats it will not get the further loans it needs to stop defaulting on its €320 billion debt.

Does this mean that “all is lost”? It depends on the mood for struggle of the Greek working masses. The social and workers’ movements will fight to stretch their election victory over the establishment to the industrial plane, while the Troika will attempt to contain Syriza within the capitalist EU framework. The government will be squeezed hard between these two pressures. Where this tug-of-war is going to end is something which cannot be predicted because it is a battle of living forces.

Syriza should tell the truth to the Greek people. If the government has made concessions in order to gain time to implement a strategic plan to defeat austerity, the people will understand and join the battle. But failing to do so will sadly show that the path the Greek government is taking is one of class collaboration with the EU and the local elite, accepting their agenda.

Syriza is not putting forward a general socialist program. Its leaders pledge to stay within the capitalist eurozone, no matter what. This means imprisoning Greek workers within the straitjacket of the EU bosses’ capitalism and accepting the logic of the “single market” and diktats of the Troika.

Syriza leaders are publicly wavering on some of its policy pledges, such as on re-establishing the ERT state broadcaster. While it has claimed it will not carry out any new privatisations, Syriza has discussed the possibility of private company involvement in the “development” of facilities.

Yet there is huge public support for a radical, anti-austerity programme. Over 100,000 people rallied in central Athens on February 15, in support of Syriza’s initial negotiating position. The mood was combative. The fascistic Golden Dawn and reactionary nationalism have been pushed into the background because of a new anti-Troika, anti-imperialist mood. Sixty six per cent of Golden Dawn voters said they agreed with the Syriza government’s stance. This shows the huge active support that could be won for a bold struggle against the Troika on a clear anti-cuts and socialist programme, including repudiation of the debt, ending all austerity, capital controls, state monopoly of foreign trade and democratic public ownership of the big corporations and banks, to meet the needs of the many not the few - and a class internationalist appeal to the workers of the rest of Europe.

If the left fails to show a way out and the middle classes and big sections of the working class fall prey to frustration and demoralisation, it will pave the way for the return of New Democracy and other pro-austerity parties to power and even a renewed growth of Golden Dawn. The stakes could not be higher for the Greek and European working class. ☛

Oil Workers Strike Is a Fight We Should All Support

Jordan Quinn, Bellingham, WA

On February 1, around 3,800 United Steel Workers (USW) union members at nine oil refineries across the United States went out on strike, the first major strike in the industry since 1980. The oil workers are demanding an end to outsourcing, short staffing, and mandatory overtime in the national contract bargaining sessions. Fatal consequences at the hands of Big Oil companies are exactly why the USW is out on strike, and exactly why other union and nonunion workers, environmentalists, and activists should support them.

At refineries where workers are out on strike, production is being run by a combination of managers, nonunion “contractors,” and retired oil workers – a dangerous situation, as running the refineries without skilled, experienced union labor will inevitably lead to disaster. The workers are entirely justified to take whatever action they feel necessary to defend themselves against unsafe conditions. If, in order to increase pressure on Big Oil, the union decided to expand the strike and completely shut down production, working

“Our local union has lost 14 members in 16 years. Quite frankly, we’re tired of our coworkers being killed and being subjected to this risk.”
 - Steve Garey, President of Local 12-591, Anacortes, WA

people around the country should support such actions and defend the oil workers.

But even if the oil workers won all of their demands, the Big Oil corporations would attack those gains twice as hard in the future. Even while making billions in profits, the oil companies must remain “competitive” with other producers by cutting costs wherever they can. Risking workers’ lives is more profitable, in the end, than providing safe working conditions.

The bosses of the Big Oil corporations are destroying our environment, wrecking our climate, and refusing to implement safety standards for their workers. What right do they have to decide our future?

The resources of the oil companies should



Unionized oil refinery workers are striking all over the country.

be taken out of the hands of the corporate CEOs and put into public ownership under workers’ control. Under public ownership, where production could be planned for society’s needs rather than for profit, there could be significant investment in proper equipment, inspections, and staff at the refineries. Further, the massive resources of the oil giants could be redirected to developing renewable energy production in order to rapidly switch to an environmentally sustainable economy. The

entire process, which would include subsidized worker training programs, would create millions of jobs. Oil refinery workers could then choose to work in safer refineries or get trained to work in the much safer renewables field at no cost to themselves.

Socialist Alternative stands in complete solidarity with the striking oil workers, and we offer whatever support we can to fight alongside the USW for a fair contract and safe refineries. ✪

Austerity Measures – The New Postal Way?

Josh Smith, New Haven, CT

I’m an organizer for Socialist Alternative in New Haven, a city carrier assistant for the United States Postal Service (USPS), and a member of the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Branch 19. You may have heard something about postal closures recently, with the effect of ending overnight first-class mail delivery to local destinations. As of mid-January, 82 mail processing plants began to close down, affecting approximately 15,000 postal workers’ jobs. USPS announced back in 2012 that they would be closing mail processing plants as part of an ongoing effort to cut costs. According to the Office of the Inspector General, the Postal Service consolidated 141 mail processing facilities in 2012 and 2013, resulting in a cost savings of approximately \$865 million.

This is great for the organization’s bottom line, but we’ve got to ask where that money came from and why management is so desperate to save money at a time when the American economy is just coming back from a reeling recession. Government spending helps boost the economy, so why is top management implementing austerity measures?

As some of you may know, the U.S.

Congress passed a bill that mandates the Postal Service to fund its retiree health benefits 75 years in advance, which is something that no business or government agency other than USPS is required to do. Without this mandate, USPS is actually extremely profitable. It could use profits to upgrade and repair facilities and equipment, boost workers’ pay and benefits, and freeze or reduce costs for customers. The organization also wouldn’t have to close any facilities and wouldn’t have to farm out services to corporations like Staples, which is a direct attack on the well-paying union jobs of my comrades in APWU, our clerks’ union.

The Postal Service management has cut 212,000 jobs since 2006, and enough is enough. The attacks on the livelihood of working people have got to stop. The four postal unions – APWU, NALC, NPMHU, and NRLCA – are strong, but they could be much stronger as part of a united workers’ organization. We’ve got to mobilize working-class people against these assaults on basic services like the post office as part of a more general fight against austerity policies. Such a fight will contribute to laying the foundation for our own political party that fights for our interests. ✪

Us vs. Them

COLUMN

Ryan Mosgrove

Another Day in Paradise

What do the King of Jordan, the President of Paraguay, and Phil Collins all have in common? They are all complicit in an international banking scandal. In February, the details of 30,000 accounts were leaked from Swiss Bank HSBC, which revealed how they advertised banking schemes and “black” accounts to rich clients, allowing them to avoid taxes. Far from a “bad apple” story, a policy councilor with Global Financial Integrity pointed out that “nearly every major bank is either under investigation or subject to settlements for engaging in serious financial crimes,” (*The Guardian*, 2/8/2015).

A Government of the Fifth of a Percent

In February, two more studies were released that show how capitalism and democracy are a lot like Kanye West and the Grammys: they just don’t mix well. The

studies targeted the voting record of representatives in the House and Senate and found that their “preferences reflect the preferences of the average donor better than any other group.” Since only 0.22% of people make donations of more than \$200, this has created a system where the rich use their power to shift taxes onto working people and block even wildly popular measures like raising the minimum wage, (*Al Jazeera America*, 2/16/2015).

Rank in the Rankings

Reporters Without Borders released their yearly ranking of nations based on their record for press freedom. Spoiler alert: the U.S. government didn’t do great. Ranking 49th in the world, the U.S. fell behind countries like Chile, Botswana, and Burkina Faso. This is the second-lowest score since the ranking system began in 2002. The fight against independent media is all the more reason to support *Socialist Alternative* newspaper, which takes no corporate donations and reports on the fight-backs of working people against capitalism across the globe, (*The Intercept*, 2/12/2015). ✪

follow Ryan on Twitter @basebenzi

TPP: Taking Power from People

Tom Wegner, Seattle

Negotiated in secret, and with the potential to erase laws in the name of profits, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is no less than a power grab, concocted by representatives from 13 countries and 600 “advisers” from major multinational corporations. Since 2008, it had been discussed behind closed doors, away from the public’s eyes and input – that is, until someone leaked the document to WikiLeaks in 2012.

A War on Democratic Rights

This is an effort by the corporations who wrote the TPP, and the politicians who are signing off on it, to roll back victories working people and activists have won because those victories stand in the way of further profit. They masquerade this war under the brave words “Free Trade.”

Described as “NAFTA on steroids” (*The Nation*, 6/27/2012), the TPP gives more strength to multinational corporations to sue countries for lost corporate profits due to laws or regulations. Like NAFTA, the courts which measure the validity of the arguments are not courts of the country but “corporate tribunals,” and will ultimately side with the corporations.

It also redefines companies as “corporate states,” putting them on the same level as nation-states in regards to these laws. This gives them more ammunition to justify their lawsuits against nations. Fines imposed by tribunals are aimed at overturning the laws and regulations which are in the corporation’s way.

Profits Before People

Previous free trade agreements (FTAs) show what can be expected from the TPP.



Demonstrations against the TPP have drawn thousands in Japan.

In 2012, French firm Veolia sued the Egyptian government to overturn a minimum wage increase. Under NAFTA, Ethyl sued Canada because Canadians had voted to ban a harmful gasoline additive, MMT. They won \$13 million in fines from the Canadian government and are now able to sell gas with MMT.

Corporations have already collected \$365 million by suing governments, usually in developing countries, under existing treaties. Under NAFTA, the Central American and Peruvian FTAs, \$13 billion more is pending in suits. We can expect even more if TPP is signed.

Many of the protections that are under attack have been won through organized struggles. Everything from pollution laws to overtime and union contracts is a potential target. TPP is one means by which multinational corporations will try to destroy the standard of living we have won. It must be resisted – but how?

Fighting Back

Protests, such as the ones against the WTO in Seattle in 1999, demonstrate the power of working people to fight back against FTAs and the corporate control of our society. TPP negotiations should be met anywhere and everywhere by uniting the labor movement and the environmental movement with the same intensity and message. We need a trade system which actually benefits people, protects workers’ rights, and enforces environmental protections.

Street protests should be linked to unions fighting for jobs and against outsourcing, as well as to environmental organizations challenging deals like the Keystone XL pipeline. This movement will inevitably run up against elected officials who operate based on the logic that corporate profits trump human needs. Movements can challenge this idea by running independent left candidates like Kshama Sawant in Seattle, as well as by building left electoral alliances like Syriza in Greece. ☺

Arctic Drilling Fleet Coming to Seattle



The Port of Seattle recently signed a deal with Shell Oil to bring its Arctic drilling fleet to Seattle. The Port Commissioners negotiated in secret for months, knowing the public would oppose the deal.

The commissioners claim opposing the deal is useless since the ships would just go elsewhere. But refusing a port for the fleet would send a powerful signal to Big Oil that they are not welcome in Seattle, inspiring other West Coast port cities to take a similar position and effectively killing Shell’s plans to return to the Arctic.

Supporters claim 200 jobs will be created. We support the demand for living-wage union jobs. The false dichotomy of jobs versus the environment is trotted out over and over again to divide working people. In reality, many more jobs are, and could be, created by investing in clean energy infrastructure projects.

The potential to create a united movement of labor and environmental activists has never been greater. The coalitions of labor and environmental groups in New York that mobilized half a million onto the streets last year demanding action on climate change and green jobs shows the way forward. ☺

Bernie Sanders

continued from p. 4

approach would be to run as an independent, and essentially when you’re doing that you’re not just running for president of the United States, you’re running to build a new political movement in America.”

Facing the Challenge

The more serious problem for many progressives is that running as an independent in national elections could split the progressive vote and open the door to the Republicans. This problem cannot be wished away. But if a left campaign laid the basis for creating a new political party representing the interests of working people and, therefore, beginning a more fundamental challenge to the corporate domination of politics, it would be a risk worth taking. This was the opportunity posed by Ralph Nader’s presidential campaign in 2000, when he won a remarkable 2.8 million votes. Tragically, Nader failed to build a new political force out of this campaign. This time, we need to learn the lessons from the past. As Bernie says, we need a “political revolution.” There is still time for him to change course and give real content to this idea. ☺

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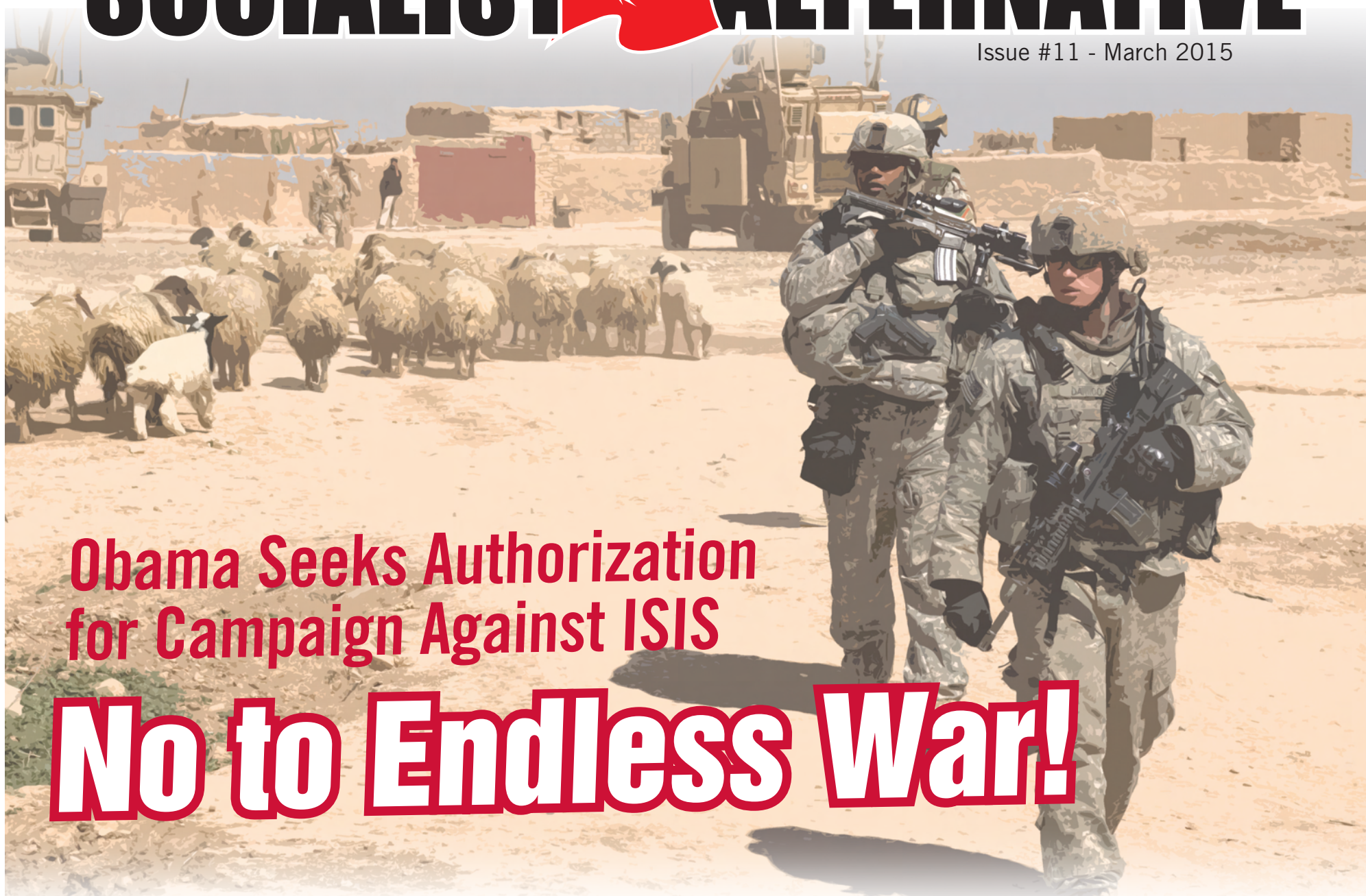
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SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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Obama Seeks Authorization for Campaign Against ISIS

No to Endless War!

Andy Moxley

People are understandably horrified by the litany of highly publicized beheadings by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its affiliates, as well as the terrorist attacks in Europe carried out in its name. The Obama administration is seizing on this outrage, reflected in polls supporting military action, to push Congress to give retroactive legal authorization to the campaign he has been waging for months. But people should not be fooled: this campaign will do nothing to end the conditions that have fueled the growth of ISIS.

Twenty-five years of nearly constant U.S. military engagement in the Middle East have brought the following results: hundreds of thousands of civilians killed, millions of displaced people, the opening up of bitter sectarian division, and thousands of dead American soldiers. We should be clear that the priority of the U.S. elite is not the suffering of ordinary people in the Middle East but maintaining their global power and prestige. Of course Bush's invasion was also driven by the desire to control the enormous oil resources of Iraq.

ISIS is the direct product of the occupation

of Iraq and the policies pursued under Bush. U.S. and allied forces leaned on sectarian Shiite forces to replace the Sunni-dominated regime of Saddam Hussein, former dictator of Iraq, and now it has completely backfired. ISIS is the extension of Sunni resistance to the Shiite-dominated state. It is also an utterly reactionary organization which poses a mortal threat to religious and ethnic minorities or anyone who stands in its way.

Slippery Slope

The authorization request is deliberate in its ambiguity. It places no geographic limitation on U.S. military action. It contains loose language about what kind of military action will take place. It gives the president the authority to use what force he "determines to be necessary and appropriate," while not permitting "enduring offensive ground combat operations."

Obama claims that he is completely opposed to a major commitment of U.S. troops, as in Iraq and Afghanistan. But this authorization is a slippery slope. The reality is that, although ISIS has been pushed back a bit in Iraq and lost the battle in Kobani, it now apparently controls a quarter of Syria's territory, and numerous jihadist groups in

North Africa are pledging allegiance to it. In short, this will be a protracted military campaign and American troops will be dragged in.

The Obama administration tries to justify its new request with the alleged "successes" of its bombing campaign. But in Kobani, bombing alone would not have defeated ISIS. It took the ferocious resistance of Kurdish fighters. And in Iraq, the U.S. relies on bloodthirsty militias from a Shia background who are the mirror image of ISIS.

While leading Republicans claim they want to go even further than Obama, sections of the establishment are openly questioning Obama's strategy. To them, Obama seems not to have learned the lessons of the disastrous Iraq campaign, an enormous blunder from the point of view of the long term interests of the elite. But the truth is that the U.S. is now in a deep quagmire, and it can't find the exit.

And all of this is to what end? As the blowback from the killing fields of the Middle East leads to horrific terrorist attacks in European countries, the promise that all the wars would lead to a safer life for working people seems to be receding by the minute. The question that presents itself is, how do we stop the

madness?

How to Fight ISIS

The way to fight ISIS is not through U.S. intervention, which will drive more people into its ranks. The working class and poor of the Middle East must draw on their own strength across religious and ethnic lines to oppose both imperialism and the reactionary influence of fundamentalism. Where possible, they should immediately create democratic multiethnic self-defense units based on wider organizations of working people. Such a class-based alternative could quickly attract mass support and undercut the appeal of fundamentalism. Here in the U.S. and in other Western countries, a movement must be built to oppose the policies of endless war, against racist profiling of Muslim immigrants, and in solidarity with the struggles of working people in the Middle East.

There are today more displaced people in the world than at any time since World War II, millions of them in the Middle East. This fact alone shows that, under capitalism, there is no way out. Only on the basis of overturning capitalism and creating an international socialist order can we finally begin to put this horror behind us. ☛