

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



Kshama Sawant Runs for Re-Election in Seattle - p. 5

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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

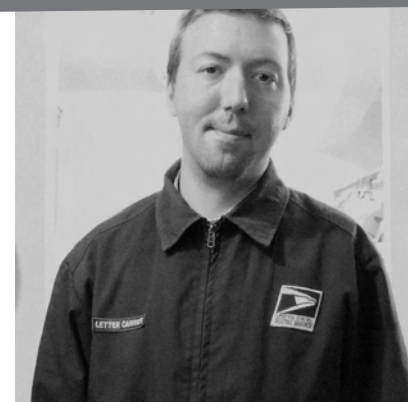
- ✦ For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people, and activists from workplace, environmental, civil rights, and women's campaigns to provide a fighting, political alternative to the corporate parties.
- ✦ Unions and social movement organizations should stop funding and supporting 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

## Josh Smith Postal Worker New Haven, CT



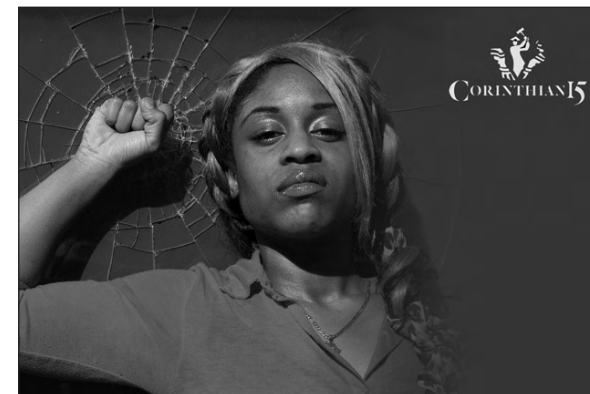
A few years ago, I encountered Occupy Wall Street. I haven't the space to describe it in detail, but the atmosphere there was absolutely electric. It had quite an effect, driving me from the libertarian right into the populist left. Over the course of my life, I've striven to do the right thing, and on that night in September 2011 – the urge to take action struck me. The next day, I founded Occupy New Haven and organized our first meeting. We stood in Pitkin Plaza, and I got up and talked about my struggle against multiple layoffs within the first few years of working. I talked about how my mother struggled to stay in her home, and often ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for dinner because she just didn't have money for anything better. Others had similar tales, and we began to discover we weren't so different after all.

The local movement took on a life of its own. I attended regular meetings and helped out as I was able after work, experiencing the ups and downs, setbacks and victories, and learning lessons in the course of the struggle.

The camp eventually fell in April, but before it did, I was approached by someone who claimed socialism was the way forward. I'm paraphrasing here the way I remember it, but – "Socialism?" I asked. "Why? The most important thing right now is to fight climate change and fight for the environment's future. How would socialism help?" "Well," she said, "Socialism is the only way we can stop climate change. Corporations aren't interested in doing it – they're only interested in their profits. If we're going to fight for the environment, we're going to need ordinary working people to take control of these corporations to make sure profits are secondary to the need to fight climate change and making society sustainable." ✦

## The Corinthian 15: Standing Against Student Debt

### Lauren Tritz Socialist Alternative, Boston



*Natasha Hornes, one of the Corinthian 15, is refusing to pay her student debt.*

Student debt in America has well surpassed 1.2 trillion dollars and the weight is bearing down heavily on the working class, particularly the younger generation of workers. Such a burden is utterly crippling, with many people reporting desperate forays into criminal markets, funds automatically extracted from disability checks, and stalker-esque harassment from anonymous debt collectors, among other abuses. This is all against the backdrop of rising unemployment and a pathetic federal minimum wage, tokens of an economy where many struggle to pay rent, let alone a hefty loan repayment.

But some former students have decided to fight back. The self-titled "Corinthian 15" are former students of Corinthian Colleges, for-profit universities that are currently under government investigation for predatory lending. The former students have refused to continue paying off their debt, inspiring many more to join the strike and drawing massive attention to the sickness of the student lending industry. In an open letter to the Department of Education, the students claim: "We paid dearly for degrees that don't pay a living wage. We can't and won't pay any longer." The work they are doing points to the need for a mass campaign to cancel student debt.

Moreover, the government stands to make \$185 billion from student loans by 2023, which appears farcical considering that an investment of \$15 billion could make every public two- and four-year university in the U.S. tuition-free for all (ProjectonStudentDebt.org). This degree of shortsightedness and grave mismanagement is made possible, if not inevitable, in the haphazard capitalist economy that values generating profit over providing citizens with the education that is their basic right. In a planned economy devised collectively and democratically, free quality education could be made a top priority.

Read the full story at [SocialistAlternative.org](http://SocialistAlternative.org) ✦

Socialist Alternative Editor Tom Crean • Editorial Board Ty Moore, Tony Wilsdon, Jess Spear, Joshua Koritz

• 206-526-7185 • [info@SocialistAlternative.org](mailto:info@SocialistAlternative.org)  
• PO Box 150457, Brooklyn, NY 11215



Decision Time for Democratic Populists

# Thousands Call on Elizabeth Warren to Run

Grace McGee

In recent months, many progressives have been holding out hope that Elizabeth Warren might throw her hat in the ring to be the next Democratic presidential nominee. MoveOn.org has collected over 300,000 signatures for its “Run, Warren, Run” campaign. So far, however, she denies that she has any plans to do so.

Since her election to the Senate in 2012, Elizabeth Warren has emerged as a leading figure in the populist wing of the Democratic Party and, with her anti-Wall Street rhetoric, she has excited the Democratic Party base and forged a connection with working people across the nation who are still reeling from the Great Recession as well as 30 years of neoliberal domination and unrelenting attacks on workers’ rights.

## “Scourge of Wall Street”

It’s not difficult to see how Elizabeth Warren could appear to be a viable alternative to the Democratic Party establishment and corporate politics as usual. She has boldly spoken out against growing income inequality, crushing student debt, and tax breaks for the wealthy. She is one of the few politicians in Washington willing to unabashedly call out powerful Wall Street institutions, as she did in a speech last year decrying a provision in the Omnibus Budget Bill that would enable further bank bailouts on the backs of working people. More recently, Warren stood up to Obama and the Democratic Party establishment, joining some right-wing populists in criticizing a provision in Obama’s prized multinational free trade agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which could give corporations the ability to challenge national laws such as environmental regulations that limit profit.

Despite denying plans to run for president in 2016, a recent poll conducted by MoveOn.org and Democracy for America showed Elizabeth Warren leading Hillary Clinton in two key states, Iowa and New Hampshire. Warren’s populist rhetoric and her growing support among the more progressive wing of the Democratic Party have highlighted a growing rift within the party between what is being dubbed



“the Warren wing” and the “centrist” party establishment, which rose to prominence during Bill Clinton’s presidency. However, the fact that Warren appears unready to take up Hillary Clinton in the primaries, thereby leaving her a free field, raises serious questions about the viability of the much-discussed populist wing of the party that she represents as well as the seriousness of her rhetoric.

The Clinton campaign and the centrist wing have recently been working to neutralize any influence that the populist Warren wing could have in 2016. Many centrist Democratic leaders have drawn the false conclusion that their embarrassing defeat in the midterm elections was due to a party platform that shifted too far to the left, rather than to the Democratic Party’s inability to fight back against the onslaught on working people over the last few years. The New Democratic Coalition announced early this March that they were drafting their own more pro-business economic policy platform, focusing on “economic growth and prosperity” to counter Warren’s more progressive economic policy platform.

## Serious Limitations

Warren clearly stands to the left of the Democratic Party establishment, but her politics have serious limitations. While she has challenged them on some key issues, she has broadly supported Obama’s disastrous foreign policy. For example, in 2013 she voted in favor of the National

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# Chuy Takes on Chicago’s Mayor 1%

Stephen Edwards

Despite President Obama’s personal intervention, Rahm Emanuel, Chicago’s “Mayor 1%,” has been forced into a runoff with Jesus “Chuy” Garcia. This is a very significant expression of the huge desire nationally for an alternative to corporate politics, whether in Republican or Democratic guise.

Rahm outspent the four other candidates in the open primary almost twelve to one, using money collected from corporations and the wealthy. Rahm’s policies have centered on attracting corporate headquarters to downtown, attacking unions and public education, and making working people pay for the fiscal crisis. Working-class neighborhoods are crumbling while working people face high sales taxes and other regressive measures. For the one-fifth of Chicagoans living on \$16,100 or less, affordable housing is an almost impossible dream.

Chuy has adopted a populist, anti-establishment tone and, undoubtedly, large numbers of working people in

Chicago will be using a vote for him on April 7 to get rid of Emanuel. Unfortunately, as this paper goes to press, Chuy, who comes out of the Democratic establishment himself – albeit its more populist wing – has not articulated a fighting alternative to Rahm’s soak-the-poor regime. Nor is the campaign mobilizing working people into the type of social movement that must back up a real left electoral challenge.

The tragedy of the primary is that it shows the possibility of an independent, labor-backed, combative election campaign to seriously challenge the Democratic Party establishment. This could have developed if Karen Lewis, the president of the Chicago Teachers Union and leader of the 2012 teachers’ strike, had not been forced to withdraw due to health reasons. Garcia could still take up a bold program of taxing the rich and corporations to fill the city’s massive budget gap. But with the runoff coming up on April 7, time is short.

Read our full analysis and continuing coverage of the Chicago mayoral election at [SocialistAlternative.org](http://SocialistAlternative.org). ✪

Kshama Sawant Column

# TPP: Bad for Working People



The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a massive trade agreement that the U.S. and 11 other countries are secretly negotiating. Like NAFTA and other trade agreements, the TPP threatens to surrender more power to big corporations at the expense of communities, workers, and the environment.

We know, from the leaked Investment Chapter of the TPP, that this trade agreement could give foreign corporations the power to sue the U.S. over any laws or regulations which they believe would reduce their future profits. Likewise, U.S. corporations could sue other countries in the TPP. Protective environmental regulations, health and safety laws, and even labor rights could be challenged or repealed. Under NAFTA’s similar provisions, U.S.-based Ethyl Corporation sued Canada for banning MMT, a harmful gas additive, and won a \$13 million settlement.

In the name of eliminating “illegal trade barriers,” the TPP goes even further. It would force the U.S. to waive “buy local” requirements and promote the offshoring of jobs. The TPP also opens up such basic protections as food safety rules to challenge by foreign corporations, if the rules set higher standards than those in the trade agreement.

The TPP will have real impacts on both the national and local levels. Here in Seattle, for example, where we are leading the way on workers’ rights and fighting climate change, the TPP has the potential to unravel our efforts. The “buy local” waiver will harm local workers, blocking the government from prioritizing the purchase of locally made products. The threat of lawsuits from foreign corporations will hinder our ability to pass legislation supporting workers and protecting the environment. And, if we are sued, the city has no right or ability to represent the interests of our community before foreign tribunals, undermining the democratic process.

Right now, Congress is considering granting fast-track authority to President Obama to limit debate and preclude any amendments to the TPP. I oppose the TPP and am especially opposed to stifling debate by fast-tracking a bill developed in secret with such great potential for harm.

Here in Seattle, I am cosponsoring a City Council Resolution opposing the TPP. But defeating the TPP will require a strong and coordinated movement. We must organize against the TPP and any trade agreements or legislation that threaten people and the environment in the name of corporate profits.

Space Growing for a Fight-Back in Workplaces, on the Streets and at the Ballot Box

# Explosive Contradictions Reshaping U.S. Politics

Tom Crean

American society today is in a state of simmering discontent. The U.S. economy is emerging from the biggest economic downturn since the Great Depression. The rate of job creation is the highest in twenty years, but the bulk of the jobs being created are low-paid. In fact, despite economic growth there has been essentially no growth in wages. There is vast anger at the scale of inequality, at the political dysfunction in Washington, and at racial injustice.

We in Socialist Alternative said that the midterm victory of the Republicans did not give them a popular mandate for launching more attacks on working people. One recent poll showed that 63% support a \$15 federal minimum wage! This statistic alone gives the lie to the idea that the country is moving to the right.

Since November, we have seen the eruption of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) on a national scale, expressing the biggest radicalization of black youth in 40 years. The fight for a \$15 minimum wage is extending and sharpening in different parts of the country after victories in Seattle and San Francisco. Young immigrants continue to take courageous action against the inhuman denial of basic rights; women fight back against the attacks on reproductive rights and epidemic levels of violence, whether on college campuses or in the NFL; and the fight for marriage equality is still making forward progress.

## Stopping the Retreat of the Unions

But the single biggest factor holding back a more generalized struggle against austerity, inequality, and racial injustice is the absence of a fighting mass labor movement. The unions are at their weakest point in more than a hundred years. The stagnation of wages during a period of growth reflects this. The passing of “right to work” legislation, which we discuss separately, is a serious setback.

Nevertheless, the growing

movement of fast-food workers, which has spurred the fight for \$15, as well as the strike of refinery workers against big oil, which focused on the terrible safety conditions in the industry, show the huge potential for rebuilding the labor movement around fights with broad popular appeal. We have urged that the unions, with their still significant numbers and resources, should join forces with BLM to push for serious reforms to the criminal justice system as well as for economic demands like the \$15 minimum wage. Imagine the impact if the unions and the main civil rights organizations seriously mobilized for a national day of action in solidarity with BLM.

Rebuilding the labor movement means rebuilding collective strength in the workplaces and a culture of struggle. This could be a protracted process and will require new forms of organization. It will certainly require building a new leadership that rejects the bankrupt idea of “partnership” with big business and its political parties. BLM and the fight for \$15 can play a key role in pushing this process forward.

## Black Lives Matter

Despite the temporary ebbing of the BLM movement as a visible force on a national scale, police shootings of unarmed people of color are now regularly leading to significant and determined local protests as in Madison, Wisconsin, after the killing of Tony Robinson, or in Pasco, Washington, after the killing of Antonio Zambrano-Montes.

Furthermore, the movement has led to Eric Holder and the Justice Department issuing a scathing report about Ferguson’s police department and court system and their systematic harassment and leeching of poor black people in this small city where the killing of Mike Brown sparked upheaval. The report is backed by the threat of a federal lawsuit or even the dissolution of the police force if certain reforms aren’t enacted. These reforms are only one step and are not even remotely close to what is needed, but they are still an important step. But while Obama



#BlackLivesMatter has given voice to mass anger at racial injustice.

says that Ferguson is not typical or “endemic,” there are, in fact, hundreds of Fergusons across this country. This is just one indication of the huge potential field of activity for the emerging black freedom movement.

We have urged the movement to develop a broader program to combat not just police brutality but the crushing economic pressures facing black workers and the working class generally. And many sections of the movement are beginning to do exactly that.

## Endless Dysfunction

On the political plane, we also see sharp contradictions. Both houses of Congress are dominated by an erratic Republican

majority that seems focused on staging stunts like House Speaker Boehner’s invitation to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to address Congress. The clear goal was to undermine the Obama administration’s negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program.

Meanwhile, the Republicans are hellbent on overturning, through court action if necessary, any progressive measures that Obama has undertaken in the last while, including lifting the threat of deportation for five million people or the emissions controls imposed on coal-fired plants by the EPA. They also want to blow a huge hole in Obamacare through the lawsuit now in front of the Supreme Court. If successful, this lawsuit could cause an estimated nine million people to lose

their tax credits and, therefore, be unable to afford insurance.

But, of course, there is a whole series of issues, like the Trans-Pacific Partnership, where the right wing of the Democrats and the more “responsible” big business wing of the Republicans are in complete agreement and both stand in complete opposition to the interests of working people.

The Democrats’ response to endless Republican attacks is weak at best. Hillary Clinton, who is getting ready to declare her candidacy for 2016, is surrounded by advisers who argue that the Democrats’ mistake in the midterms is that they moved too far to the left! The pro-corporate leadership of the party is doing all it can to contain Elizabeth Warren, whose popularity flows from her denunciations of Wall Street and her call for more regulation of the financial sector.

Meanwhile in Chicago, voters denied Rahm Emmanuel, “Mayor 1%,” an automatic re-election by forcing a runoff with Chuy Garcia, a populist Democrat. Millions of ordinary working people are looking for a way to fight back and yearn for political representatives who will actually represent their interests, not those of the corporations.

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## Wisconsin Passes “Right to Work”

The recent passing of legislation in Wisconsin making it the 25th “right to work” state is a significant defeat for workers, not just in Wisconsin but across the country. “Right to work” is aimed squarely at making it harder for workers to organize. Scott Walker, the Koch-Brothers-backed governor who has led the charge against the unions, now wants to use this as his calling card in the Republican presidential primaries.

The best opportunity to push back Scott Walker’s reactionary agenda was in 2011, when hundreds of thousands surged onto the streets of Madison, linking their struggle to that of the Egyptian Revolution which was underway simultaneously. The idea of a one-day public-sector general strike, which Socialist Alternative helped popularize, perfectly matched the mood of thousands of workers who were prepared to fight.

But the leadership of key unions at the state and

national level, deeply afraid of going down this path, diverted the movement back into the “safe” channel of trying to defeat Walker through a recall, where they failed to put forward a powerful independent candidate representing the interests of Wisconsin workers. Walker has been easily able to fend off the challenge from weak Democratic opponents who don’t even oppose key aspects of his agenda.

However – despite the demoralization caused by the 2011 defeat – if the unions had given a clear call to action this time around, it would have met with an enormous response from the wider working class. And with a militant policy, the obstacles created by “right to work” can and will be overcome in Wisconsin and in all the other states where it has been enacted.

For a longer analysis, go to [www.SocialistAlternative.org](http://www.SocialistAlternative.org)





*"I want to stress how important the re-election of Kshama Sawant is, nationally, ... if we want to overturn the corporate coup d'etat that's taking place. And you can be sure that not only the establishment in Seattle but the establishment nationally is determined to crush this movement ... because it expresses the real concerns, the real desires, and the real needs of working men and women in this country. And those needs have been utterly abandoned by both the Democratic and Republican parties which are beholden to corporate power and corporate money."*

- Chris Hedges, author, columnist, and left activist (see full video at <http://tinyurl.com/HedgesEndorsmentVideo>)

## Organizing the Defense against Skyrocketing Rents

Bryan Watson

Last year, Seattle had the fastest-rising rent among all major U.S. cities, and moved into the top 10 most expensive cities for renters. Communities across Seattle, especially in District 3 where Kshama Sawant is running for re-election, have seen their neighborhoods torn apart by "economic evictions." Big developers are buying up old buildings and pricing renters out of the homes they've built their lives in.

At a time when bold measures are needed that put the interests of working people, families, and renters front and center, the corporate politicians on the

City Council continue to line the pockets of developers, most recently with a \$528,000 giveaway to the multibillion-dollar Vulcan Inc. Is it a coincidence that the council's conservative majority have received more than \$25,000 from Vulcan and its top executives?

### Build Thousands of Housing Units

To address the stratospheric rises in rents, Kshama Sawant is proposing the city build thousands of high-quality, modern, affordable housing units for working families and the middle class on public lands financed

through a municipal bonds sale. She is also demanding developers be taxed at much higher rates to fund the construction of low-income housing. Moreover, to rein in the rapacious developers who are making fabulous profits, she is raising the need for rent control as part of her demand for a "Tenants' Bill of Rights."

To see her program to make housing affordable, visit [KshamaSawant.org](http://KshamaSawant.org).

### Labor for Sawant

More than 12 union locals have already endorsed Kshama's campaign, and there is a team of labor activists determined to re-elect her.

Read more about Labor for Sawant at [SocialistAlternative.org](http://SocialistAlternative.org).



Follow Kshama Sawant's campaign in Seattle at [KshamaSawant.org](http://KshamaSawant.org)



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@votesawant

## End Hate Crimes Against LGBTQ People



A view of the room at the LGBTQ Forum Against Hate Crimes, March 3.

Rosie Daniels

On March 3, over 300 people packed a historically queer church to hear Kshama Sawant and other community members. The public hearing was organized by the socialist council member to discuss hate crimes against LGBTQ people. In Seattle, there's a problem: queers are harassed and physically attacked, and a transwoman and local community leader reported at the hearing that police beat her down and called her a "faggot."

The police precinct covering Capitol Hill, in the heart of District 3 where Kshama is running for re-election, reported 55 bias incidents in 2014, an increase of 28% over the previous year (*The Seattle Times*, 03/15/2015). The Capitol

Hill neighborhood, once a haven for LGBTQ people, is being rapidly gentrified by big developers.

The issue has gone largely unaddressed publicly. But Kshama is uniquely using her council seat to actually represent the folks who need and deserve a voice.

Participants developed concrete steps to keep our community safer, like city funding to tackle queer homelessness, support for community watch efforts, and a queer center in Seattle. Kshama Sawant's office will follow up on these steps, and the organizing know-how of Socialist Alternative will be a vital support to any of these efforts.

As Melissa from Portland Socialist Alternative said at the forum, us queers have to "stay safe, stay strong, and stay visible."

Patrick Ayers, Seattle, WA

At a time when billionaires have the "right" to unload their bank accounts on elections, Kshama Sawant is running for re-election in Seattle and won't be taking a dime from corporations. With your help, we can defend this city council seat for the struggles of working people.

### We Can Win Against Big Business

Two years ago, Sawant won more than 90,000 votes, defeating a 16-year incumbent and stunning the establishment. We used the momentum of our victory to immediately launch a grassroots campaign for a \$15 an hour minimum wage. Within six months, we won the highest minimum wage in the country.

And Kshama was no one-trick pony! When the Seattle Housing

Authority proposed raising low-income rents by 400 percent, her council office helped the tenants organize themselves and defeat it.

During the City of Seattle budget discussions, Kshama Sawant brought together a broad coalition of unions, affordable housing advocates, and civil rights organizations to demand a "People's Budget," which succeeded in winning a number of significant improvements, including millions in increased funding for social services and immediately bumping city workers to \$15, as opposed to the mayor's plan to phase it in over three years.

### Donate Now to Defend Kshama's Seat

Kshama's campaign will be up against big money this year, including national corporate lobbying groups. Our campaign is

only taking donations from ordinary people. If you have been inspired by Kshama's example and share our vision for building a new political force that fights for ordinary people and not corporations, then we need you to donate generously.

The maximum individual campaign donation is \$700. Married couples can donate up to \$1,400. If you and your family can donate the maximum, it will help us print up to 10,000 full-color newsletters that volunteers are already distributing across the district. A \$100 donation will help us print 25 yard signs.

If you can only make a small donation, that helps, too. We need every penny. And if you can sign up to donate \$10, \$25, \$50, or more on a monthly basis, then you can help us build a permanent funding base for our campaign to re-elect a real fighter for working people.

Donate at [KshamaSawant.org](http://KshamaSawant.org).





# We Have a World to Win

## Fight Climate Change, Challenge Capitalism



Jess Spear

On September 21, 2014, 400,000 people marched for climate justice in the largest environmental protest ever in the U.S. This historic mass mobilization followed the tens of thousands protesting against the Keystone XL pipeline in 2011 and 2013.

Scientists have warned again and again that urgent action is needed. But the establishment politicians have failed to act for decades – and now, to overcome this obstacle, many are drawing the conclusion that we need to take matters into our own hands with protests and direct action.

As Naomi Klein laid out in her new book, *This Changes Everything*, what is needed to stop global warming is nothing short of a revolution in the way our economy functions: To stop climate change, we need system change. And changing our economic system to focus on human need and environmental sustainability, rather than on profits for the 1%, is in everyone's interest.

But challenging the for-profit system of capitalism means taking on the most powerful corporations in the world, with vast resources at their disposal to confuse and divide us. Fortunately, we are many and they are few, and the awakening and uniting of the social forces needed for this mighty task has already begun.

### Small Increase, Massive Disruptions

The Earth has warmed roughly 1° Celsius since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. Yet this seemingly tiny increase has unleashed deadly heat waves, persistent drought, wildfires, massive flooding, devastating hurricanes, and extreme weather events. It has destabilized the West Antarctic Ice Sheet, a massive block of ice that is now projected to melt completely in the coming centuries, raising the sea level globally by 10-13 feet. Whole island nations and vast swaths of coastal regions inhabited by hundreds of millions of people will be lost under the rising ocean. All this from just 1 degree of warming.

Imagine the consequences of allowing

Earth's temperature to increase another 1-3 degrees, as predicted. Clearly, without a major effort to halt global warming, our ability to withstand the impacts will be completely overwhelmed.

Scientists have calculated our "atmospheric carbon budget," how much fossil fuel we can burn and keep the total warming to just two degrees. Their calculations indicate that we have roughly 30 years left, at current rates of carbon emissions, to transition to renewables and adapt to the changes already underway.

So there is time. But, after more than 20 years of "climate talks" and continued expansion of the oil and gas industries, it's clear that there are massive obstacles to transitioning our global economy to operate on clean energy under the current political and economic system.

### We Need a Mass Movement

The battle over the Keystone XL pipeline provides an important lesson for future battles with Big Oil. Coordinated action, mass protests, and mass civil disobedience – in short, disrupting the status quo – is our most potent tool for changing policy.

The Keystone XL pipeline was once considered a done deal. Yet three years of persistent campaigning, thousands of arrests at the White House, tens of thousands marching in Washington, and ongoing resistance from frontline communities have moved the probability needle from definitely to maybe. Mass demonstrations forced Obama to pause and reconsider.

Imagine what millions in the streets could achieve. Earth Day 1970 saw 20 million people participate in mass demonstrations on college campuses, high schools, and city squares nationwide. These demonstrations offered people a way to express their anger at rampant pollution and their desire for reform, and they were central to the passage of the landmark Clean Air and Water acts.

In the absence of mass movements, many young people and activists are turning to direct action – blocking railroad tracks or the construction of pipelines, for example – to force change. Given the urgency of the need to stop fossil fuel corporations from destroying our

environment and disrupting the climate, it's no wonder more and more people see the need to take matters into our own hands. Direct action is a powerful tool, but it's far more powerful when linked to building a mass movement.

In Washington State, a number of activists, the author of this article included, have been arrested blocking railroad tracks to protest potentially explosive oil trains from passing through communities. This has helped raise the issue in public debate.

But to really stop oil trains passing through our communities once and for all means winning over the majority of working people to a much bolder political program to address climate change – in essence, building a massive social and political blockade against Big Oil.

### Strength Through Unity

In the face of extreme weather disrupting our lives and destroying entire communities, concern about climate change has grown substantially. A recent poll showed 74% of Americans think the federal government should be doing more to tackle global warming, including 51% of Republicans.

Big Oil knows there is a battle for public opinion. The main way corporations combat the environmental movement is by emphasizing the importance of fossil fuels for jobs and forcing people to choose sides: jobs or the environment.

For the majority of people, jobs and wages are paramount. In some places, whole communities are dependent upon the fossil fuel industries for paychecks to support families. Without a massive jobs program that provides a real alternative for these workers, it's understandable why many will accept the continued destruction of the environment. The struggle against climate change is, therefore, a struggle to relieve people of their daily worries through the creation of living-wage union jobs.

Stopping global warming, halting greenhouse gas emissions, requires a major jobs program, a massive investment in infrastructure projects aimed at expanding mass transit, building a new electric grid, and producing the technology – thousands of windmills and millions of solar panels – necessary to replace fossil fuels as our main energy source. By focusing the

movement's demands on creating millions of living wage union jobs and a "just transition" for all fossil fuel workers, with guaranteed retraining and rehiring in the new industries, we can win the majority of working people to a sustainable alternative.

In particular, fossil fuel corporations try to divide the environmental movement against the organized labor movement. Yet 75 labor unions marched with environmental activists in the People's Climate March.

The recent strike at oil refineries – where members of the United Steelworkers (USW) walked out to protest unsafe conditions – shows that the jobs Big Oil promotes are incredibly dangerous, and the working conditions brutal. By supporting union struggles like these, and fighting alongside workers for good-paying and safe jobs, we can combat Big Oil's divide-and-rule tactics and unite the environmental movement with the power of organized labor.

### Change the System, Not the Climate

We are told that the genius of capitalism is this: the profit motive of this system perfectly aligns with the greed inherent in all humans and this combination will generate new technology, new industries, and new jobs. But capitalism hasn't actually delivered for the vast majority of people on the planet.

Rather than motivate equitable sharing of resources and wealth, capitalism actually incentivizes a tiny minority of people on the planet to continue amassing a hoard of cash while the vast majority of people are living in squalor. Under capitalism, access to safe, clean drinking water, sanitation systems, healthy food, quality homes, education, and good jobs are denied to billions of people.

Furthermore, capitalism creates competition among countries, where each nation is competing with other nations for raw materials and markets to sell its goods. An international agreement to seriously curb carbon emissions and transition to renewable energy is effectively blocked as each world leader refuses to agree to anything that might lose him or her a competitive advantage over a rival.



# Could to Win Capitalism

## Are Movements Enough? The Case for Independent Politics



Millions had hopes that Obama would dramatically change course. After eight years of Republican climate change denial under President Bush, the EPA regulations on coal-fired plants, increased efficiency standards for cars, and investment in renewable energy all seem like major accomplishments. But the consequences we face today and in the future demand that we evaluate the efficacy of the Obama administration's policy changes, not by comparing them to the policies promoted by the do-nothing Republicans, but by what is needed.



But until we uproot capitalism and replace it with a new socioeconomic system based on human and environmental needs, we need to fight in the here and now for every regulation we can win against the giant oil corporations. We need to strip away their unnecessary tax subsidies and divert that money to clean, renewable energy projects. All new fossil fuel projects should be met with massive public opposition in order to prevent their completion and demand the resources be used for clean energy.

But what strategy can rein in the power corporations have? They have enormous resources and control the flow of energy necessary to make society run. They have used this power to wreck our planet. What right do they have to control these resources?

We need to build a movement powerful enough to take these resources out of the hands of these corporations and into public ownership, under the democratic control of working people. Eminent domain is being used to seize the lands of small farmers to build the Keystone XL pipeline. This is backwards; we should be using eminent domain to seize the resources controlled by the ruthless corporations that are trying to force the Keystone XL pipeline on our planet.

### Build a New World Through Socialist Planning

On the basis of public ownership of the biggest corporations, we could democratically plan the economy and rapidly transition our economy to clean energy

sources. Rather than a handful of rich corporate executives deciding everything, decisions would be made with full participation of working people and the community. Clean energy technology, along with other advances in sustainable development, would be shared widely, allowing developing countries to grow their economies without destroying the local environment.

Socialist planning would allow us to tackle climate change without lowering living standards. Efficient use of resources would dramatically improve through the rapid development and implementation of sustainable forms of production, ending built-in obsolescence and making goods durable, reorganizing food production, and massively expanding public transportation. Application of new automation technology would relieve people from the burden of working long hours and allow more free time for family, community, and political activities.

The vast majority of people on this planet want the same things: purposeful jobs with good wages and safe working conditions, healthy communities with quality housing, access to clean drinking water, healthy food, free education and health care, and an end to poverty, homelessness, and general want. If it were up to workers internationally, the technology, resources, and wealth would be used to create a better world. ✪



Obama has promoted and overseen the largest expansion of oil extraction on U.S. soil in a generation. Oil production in the U.S. has exploded to roughly nine million barrels a day, a 72% increase since he took office. Last year's production surpassed that of oil giant Saudi Arabia. Throughout, the Obama administration has made it easier for oil exploration and extraction, fast-tracking permits, and opening up millions of new acres on federal lands and offshore in the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic Coast, and the Arctic.

Increased oil production also means increased oil transported throughout the country. Lacking the necessary pipelines to transport this new oil to market, corporations have taken to the railroads. Oil by rail has increased 4,000% since 2008, with more oil spilled from railroad derailments in 2013, over one million gallons, than in the previous 40 years combined.

Fracking also got a boost from the Obama presidency. To the dismay of many environmentalists, Obama promoted the natural gas boom, which employs fracking technology to get at shale gas reserves deep underground, as providing a "bridge fuel" that would supposedly allow us to transition from coal to renewables. But scientists have warned that natural gas extraction actually exacerbates global warming.

A sober assessment of Obama's record shows that more oil production, more fracking, more oil spills, and increased reliance on the consumption of fossil fuels, are his climate legacy so far. The investment in renewables, the regulations on coal-fired plants – all of it is completely outweighed by the massive increase in oil and gas production. Though he regularly talks about climate change as a major threat, Obama's actual policy has been "drill, baby, drill."

The Republicans are clearly more rapacious in their pursuit of the interests of Big Oil. Undoubtedly, large numbers of people will vote for the Democratic Party because Republican policies are disastrous. But, as Obama's record shows, the Democratic Party is also serving the interests of Big Oil and cannot be relied upon.

We need movements to be independent of both parties. The climate movement held back from protesting during the 2012 presidential election cycle. We cannot allow our movement to be demobilized during elections in the hope that electing Democrats is enough. We need to keep the pressure on, even at election time.

The best way to do that is by building a political alternative that refuses corporate donations and puts forward a platform centered on people and the environment, not on corporate profits. Such a platform would include a bold call to "keep the carbon in the ground," and a massive jobs program, putting millions to work in living-wage jobs rebuilding our infrastructure and retooling our economy to run on clean energy. It is through electing independent, left-wing representatives, like socialist Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant, into the halls of power – backed by millions of people on the streets – that we can force our demands onto the agenda, despite fierce corporate resistance. ✪



Major Victories Possible If Labor Launches a National Campaign for a \$15/Hour Minimum Wage

# Fight for \$15 in All 50

Ty Moore  
15 Now National Organizer

Republished from 15Now.org.

On April 15, fast-food strikers and other low-wage workers are planning their biggest protests yet for “\$15 and a union.” The driving force behind these actions, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), reportedly aims to turn out 100,000 workers and supporters in over a hundred cities across the country.

Chapters of 15 Now are going all-out to build for the April 15 demonstrations, to demand union rights and raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

According to a January Hart Research poll, 63% of the country now supports a \$15 federal minimum wage. Support is even higher in most big cities. The time is right for the big unions to help launch an all-out national campaign for a \$15 an hour minimum wage. Let’s use April 15 to kick things off!

Everywhere, anger at corporate greed – and the extreme wealth and racial inequities – is reaching a boiling point. The fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage has the potential to become a powerful mass movement uniting low-wage workers demanding union rights, people of color standing up against racism, and young people facing a dead-end future.

## Union Power

15 Now is urging SEIU, alongside the AFL-CIO unions, to link up the industry-specific “\$15 and a union” campaigns with a mass campaign for a \$15 an hour minimum wage in every city and state, and at the federal level.

Uniting workplace organizing drives with the demand for \$15 for all low-wage workers could bring far greater numbers into action, on April 15 and beyond. Given the concentration of communities of color in low-wage jobs, the call for a \$15 an hour minimum wage could also attract youth radicalized around the #BlackLivesMatter protests.

If the big unions adopted this approach, many big cities could see tens of thousands on the streets demanding a \$15 an hour minimum wage and offering solidarity to low-wage union drives.

Imagine if the big unions and groups like the NAACP mobilized an army of tens of thousands of volunteers and staffers, as they do for every big election, to build mass demonstrations on April 15 and further national days of action. As the victories for \$15 an hour in Seattle and San Francisco show, a mass movement for \$15 could win far more for working people than spending hundreds of millions on elections, often to back corporate-sponsored Democratic Party politicians.

We can’t continue to let our unions put political loyalties above fighting for what workers need to survive. While many union leaders will demand McDonald’s and other employers pay \$15, few put this same demand on city, state,

and federal politicians. This is because many union leaders want to avoid conflict with Democrat Party tops who, in turn, want to avoid conflict with their business backers who, in turn, defend poverty wages to maximize their profits!

## Build 15 Now

The potential to build powerful grassroots campaigns for \$15 is shown wherever strong, politically independent campaigns like 15 Now or left-wing union locals have taken the initiative. In Seattle and San Francisco, pressure from below pushed virtually the entire labor movement to back \$15 and win historic victories.

The three strongest campaigns for a \$15 an hour minimum wage today – in Oregon, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia – were all initiated by 15 Now. All three are gaining significant union support. Campaigns for a \$15 an hour minimum wage in Chicago, Los Angeles, and other cities also made important headway after SEIU and other unions swung behind them.

These local examples show the huge potential to build a unified national campaign for \$15 an hour minimum wage in every city and state, and at the federal level. Making this a reality will require building strong independent grassroots campaigns, as well as pressure inside the unions, to demand that the full resources of the labor movement are thrown behind this effort. Just as the call for the 8-hour day helped inspire the early labor movement, today the fight for \$15 could bring a whole new generation of unorganized workers into struggle. ✪



## 15 Now Surges in Oregon, Minneapolis, Philadelphia

15 Now is leading what are arguably the three most serious campaigns for a \$15 an hour minimum wage in the country.

### Justin Harrison, CWA member, Philadelphia

In Minneapolis and Philadelphia, and in Oregon, \$15 an hour is on the political agenda. Each of these campaigns faces unique challenges, but the unifying element is the role 15 Now plays in leading politically independent, grassroots campaigns.

### 15 Now Oregon

Like in many states, activists in 15 Now Oregon face a statewide preemption against municipalities independently raising the minimum wage. However, in coalition with workplace struggles, 15 Now has built a string of small victories to build momentum to overturn the statewide preemption so that Portland and other cities can act.

A statewide network of 15 Now chapters, working in coalition with nearly 80 labor and community organizations, helped to win a \$15 an hour minimum for Portland city contractors, seasonal parks workers, employees of Multnomah County, Home Forward workers, and temporary workers represented by AFSCME Local 3580.

Working with supportive legislatures, 15 Now built near-unanimous labor support behind bills to bring the statewide minimum wage up to \$15 and to overturn the preemption law. With legislative victory unlikely, a coalition is also building for a ballot measure in 2016 to make Oregon the first state to pass a \$15 minimum wage.

### 15 Now Minneapolis

In Minneapolis, 15 Now initiated a campaign at the MSP airport, calling for a \$15 wage floor and working in solidarity with three ongoing union drives. After 2,000 workers signed petitions and organized multiple demonstrations - including a rally of 200 that temporarily shut down traffic into the airport - a victory appears within sight.

In February, with the momentum from the airport campaign, 15 Now initiated a campaign in Minneapolis to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour with a 250-strong rally. Despite front-page opposition from Mayor Betsy Hodges, grassroots pressure is building, and four of thirteen city council members are publicly backing a wage hike.

This pressure also helped convince SEIU and Minnesotans for a Fair Economy – the main forces who got the mayor elected – to back a \$15 an hour minimum wage in Minneapolis. On April 15, we will see over 1,000 workers on the streets in Minneapolis calling for union rights and a \$15 an hour minimum wage.

### 15 Now Philadelphia

Pennsylvania also imposes a statewide preemption law preventing municipalities from raising wages. Despite this, 15 Now is building an aggressive campaign of direct actions, demonstrations, and media coverage. Union and community support is building, including strong links with #BlackLivesMatter and SEIU’s Fight for \$15. Two university 15 Now chapters are organizing lively campus living-wage campaigns.

Philly 15 Now pressured City Council to hold hearings on the impact of raising the minimum wage and challenging the state preemption. The speakers at the hearing included economists, educators, labor leaders, and low-wage workers. 15 Now called for clear council resolutions opposing preemption, for raising all city employees and contract workers to \$15 an hour, and for a ballot measure to support \$15 an hour.

In a measure of our popular support, a majority of mayoral candidates for the upcoming city elections are calling for a \$15 an hour minimum wage and pledging to fight preemption. At the state level, the campaign is working with allies to introduce \$15 an hour legislation and lift the preemption. ✪



# Irish Workers Fight Water Charges

Elma Relihan

**As Socialist Alternative goes to press, 80,000 people protested against the water charges on the streets of Dublin.**

The economic crisis that unfolded in Europe in 2007/2008 had a drastic effect in Southern Europe, particularly Greece, but it also hit Ireland very hard. Like Spain, Ireland suffered from huge speculation by property developers and predatory lending by the banks. With the Irish banking system in crisis, Ireland was forced into accepting a bailout from the so-called Troika, consisting of the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Attached to the bailout was a savage austerity program which led to a serious decline of living standards for working people, mass unemployment, massive cuts to the public sector, and emigration levels not seen in decades.

Water charges are just one of a series of regressive taxes implemented as part of this bailout agreement. Yet again, it is working people who are forced to foot the bill for the reckless behavior of property speculators and the banks that caused the crisis.

The cost of the charge for working families will be more than \$500 a year and, even though there is a cap on charges, this is likely to change and bills could skyrocket. It is against this backdrop that we have seen mass mobilizations, with 100,000 people taking to the streets of Dublin last December protesting the charges, in addition to protests in 93 towns and cities.

## Mass Anger

Across the country, neighborhood groups have been set up under the banner of "We Wont Pay." When water meters began to be installed in households, these groups emerged onto the streets in direct actions against such measures. The police and private security firms employed by Irish Water have responded by arresting and harassing those peaceful protesters.

These mobilizations reflect the deep desire of working people to fight back after six years of crisis and austerity and the general sense that enough is enough. As Paul Murphy, member of the Dáil (the Irish parliament) for the Socialist Party and the Anti-Austerity Alliance (AAA), states, "Water charges are, for many, the straw that broke the camel's back, and the pent-up anger is now exploding." The Socialist Party in Ireland is part of the



Dublin, March 21, 80,000 people march against the water charges.

Committee for a Workers International (CWI), with which Socialist Alternative in the U.S. is also affiliated. Paul and the two other Socialist Party members of the Dáil have played a key role in this unfolding struggle.

## Political Policing

The role of the establishment political parties in bringing in water charges, including that of the Labour Party, has contributed to a rapid decline in support for these parties and a huge opening for the left. The government, made up of Labour and Fine Gael, has decided to respond with a mix of halfhearted concessions and naked repression.

In early February, a series of dawn raids by the police led to the arrest of 17 anti-water-charges activists, including Paul Murphy, in connection with a militant but peaceful sit-down protest three months before during which Joan Burton, the deputy prime minister, was detained in her car for a couple hours. This is a clear attempt to weaken the movement and instill fear among those fighting back. The corporate media played their part by painting a violent picture of protesters and smearing the campaign. But these tactics by the government have only hardened the determination of working-class people to resist.

## Building a Political Alternative

The AAA and Socialist Party are calling for mass nonpayment when the bills come into effect. Penalties will not come into effect until 2016, by which time there must be a general election. This is the only way to defeat the water charges and send a clear message to the government.

The outcome of this struggle will have huge consequences. It also comes as the election of the Syriza government in Greece and the growing strength of the left in Spain are giving hope to people across Europe and in Ireland that austerity can be resisted and defeated. To quote Paul Murphy again: "If water charges can be defeated, it will probably collapse the government but, crucially, it will completely transform the situation and make it extremely difficult for any future government to continue with austerity policies."

A serious discussion is developing among the activists in the water charges movement of how to turn the mass sentiment into a more decisive political challenge to the entire establishment. The Anti-Austerity Alliance and the Socialist Party are urging the widest possible slate of anti-water-charges candidates. This will be a major step toward building a strong political force for working class people in the years ahead. ✪

For more about the Irish struggle against water charges, the Greek Syriza government, and workers' struggles throughout the world, see the website of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI):

**SocialistWorld.net**



## 10 Books That Shook the World

### *The Communist Manifesto*

Pete Ikeler

You've heard of Marx and Engels. They might have been briefly mentioned and then dismissed in your high school English or history class. Something about capitalism, revolution, "proletariat," and "bourgeoisie" – whatever those mean. But what were Marx and Engels' real ideas? Are they relevant today, more than a hundred years after these thinkers' deaths? I will argue that they are and that there's no better way to get a crash course in social history and activism than by reading the *Manifesto*.

The *Manifesto* was written at a key point in history. Shortly after its publication, a wave of revolution broke out across Europe that challenged the very basis of class society. Though these conflicts did not yield lasting socialist states, they marked the arrival of a new political force: the industrial working class. In the 1840s, Marx and Engels foresaw this with far greater accuracy than their peers. Their combined study of philosophy and of the human degradation of industrialism in Manchester, England – as well as their unique vantage point at the crossroads between feudalism and capitalism – allowed them to identify the fundamental dynamics of human history.

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." The opening line of the *Manifesto* sounds bold not only because its authors were encouraging the oppressed to take action, but also because Marx and Engels knew they had made a major discovery – on par with those of Copernicus, Newton, Freud, or Einstein. The *Manifesto* is the most succinct expression of historical materialism: the idea that, since the creation of surplus, human societies have consisted of clearly defined groups with different relations to productive property: slaveholder and slave, landlord and peasant, capitalist and worker. Though the ruling groups often say they're acting in everyone's interests, they really only act in their own; oppressed groups have opposite interests, and the push and pull between these forces – mediated by technology and culture – is what drives societies forward.

The *Manifesto* lays out the tenets of this monumental theory, but it is also a guide to action. By uncovering the deep rhythms of history, it equips readers with a framework for understanding day-to-day struggles over wages, housing, health care, and police brutality. And, although it's taken longer than this text from 1848 might have led you to think, the pathway to a post-capitalist society is by no means closed off. Passages predicting globalization, decline of workers' living standards, and even such formations as "petit-bourgeois socialism" make the *Manifesto* as relevant today as it was when written. ✪



Oil Refinery Workers Strike

# Oil Giants Forced to Concede



Jordan Quinn

The United Steel Workers (USW) and Shell came to a tentative contract agreement on March 12 to set the oil industry standard for local contract negotiations. The agreement comes on the heels of the first national oil workers' strike since 1980. The USW leadership and Shell are hailing the agreement as having positive gains for workers.

The information put out so far by both Shell and USW about staffing, maintenance, and fatigue is a bit vague and only states that "local discussion" and semiannual review meetings are secured by the contract. Safety issues were the main reason for this strike. While discussion is important, reviewing fatigue-related injuries or even deaths is not the same as preventing them. Fortunately, the workers won a "no retrogression" clause, meaning companies can't go back

on prior agreements, yearly wage increases from 2.5% – 3.5% over four years, and an 80/20 health care premium rate. If other oil companies accept the pattern contract, then the strike will likely end. Specific issues are being negotiated locally which may prolong the strike in certain areas.

It is clear that the USW strike has pressured the oil companies into granting concessions. However, it is unfortunate that the USW leadership did not bring more of its members out on strike to force these wealthy companies to make further concessions, including clear, enforceable language on safety issues.

This strike has already increased the militancy of the members, which will be needed to force the companies to deliver on their promises. The strike also showed the unforgiving nature of these giant corporations and how we are forced to fight for our very survival under capitalism. ✪

# Electrical Workers Strike and Win in Massachusetts

Francesca Gomes

On March 6, after a militant, three-week-long strike, United Electrical Workers (UE) Local 279 ratified a contract with Weir Valves and Controls in Ipswich, MA. The results of this strike illustrate the accomplishments that are possible when trade unions are willing to take risks and stand up for fair labor practices and a fair contract.

After three weeks on the picket line in the cold New England winter, the workers forced management to drop its demands regarding temporary workers and overtime. Jay Gallant, the local's chief steward, says: "We turned away trucks, cut off their supply lines. Even non-union drivers were supporting us. The company was bleeding, and we knew it ... The

company declared an impasse, and all the stuff we had been fighting against was removed, so with that, we voted to bring the fight inside."

UE is a small union which has maintained many of the best traditions of the labor movement, including real, democratic membership involvement and a serious approach to disputes. They led the occupation of the Republic Windows and Doors factory in Chicago in 2008 and did not endorse Obama for his second term due to his attacks on organized labor.

This successful strike by UE members against a greedy and abusive management should be viewed as an inspiration and as evidence that, when unions fight, they can win.

For a full version of this article look online at [socialistalternative.org](http://socialistalternative.org). ✪

Seattle University

# Adjunct Professors Fight for a Union

Rosie Daniels

On February 25, Seattle University (SU) adjunct professors, together with hundreds of student and faculty supporters, walked out of classes to demand higher wages, better working conditions, and the right to form a union. Throughout the country, thousands participated in National Adjunct Walkout Day.

With few benefits and little opportunity for career advancement, adjunct professors are treated as low-wage contract workers. Crammed into overcrowded offices, they face countless hours grading papers and mentoring students off the clock. They have short-term, contingent contracts that offer no job security. Many adjuncts who hold doctorates even qualify for food stamps. These conditions are directly related to adjuncts having no union to support them.

The adjunct faculty of SU have been working for years to unionize because they know that a only a union would give them the power they need to negotiate an improvement in their conditions. Seattle University, a wealthy private institution that charges its students



\$35,000 a year, has spent time and money on busting up unionizing efforts because it knows unions would give the adjuncts power.

In 2014, the adjunct faculty put the union question to a vote, but Seattle University took possession of the ballots and refuses to count them. However, the National Labor Relations Board has now ruled that SU must count the ballots.

Kshama Sawant, who is a member of the American Federation of Teachers Local 1789 and former SU adjunct professor, enthusiastically supports adjunct professors in their struggle and spoke at the SU rally. She also wrote a letter of solidarity letter to them, which can be viewed at: [sawant.seattleu.gov](http://sawant.seattleu.gov). ✪

# Us vs. Them

COLUMN

Ryan Mosgrove

## Wall Street Bonuses and You

More than 160,000 Wall Street employees earned a total of \$28.5 billion in year-end bonuses in 2014. That's double the wages earned by the entirety of America's one-million-strong workforce earning the federal minimum wage, (The Institute for Policy Studies, 03/11/2015).

Sarah Anderson, author of the report titled "Off the Deep End: The Wall Street Bonus Pool and Low-Wage Workers," writes: "The bonus pool is so large it would be far more than enough to lift all 2.9 million restaurant servers and bartenders, all 1.5 million home health and personal care aides, or all 2.2 million fast food preparation and serving workers up to \$15 per hour." Who says we can't end poverty in the U.S.?

## McDonald's and the Minimum Wage

McDonald's appeared in a federal court in March to contest Seattle's recent minimum wage law which would bring millions of workers to \$15an hour, (*The Huffington Post*, 03/09/2015). They argue that it's not "fair" to treat franchise businesses differently than other small businesses, which the law phases in differently. What is the legal basis for McDonald's defense? The law that outlawed slavery, of course!

They argue that, since businesses are legally people, it's unfair to treat them differently under the law simply because of the color of their skin – or, in this case, their connection with a multinational corporation with billions in assets. Yeah, that makes perfect sense.

No surprise: McDonald's is the most hated company in the U.S., (*The Huffington Post*, 01/17/15).

## Who's Hoarding the Wealth?

In these hard economic times, everyone is pitching in to help our country get back on its feet. Right? Well, everyone except the 304 biggest U.S. corporations, naturally. According to a report from Bloomberg news which reviewed the filings of 304 U.S. companies, they have a combined total of \$2.1 trillion hidden in overseas accounts, preventing these assets from being taxed. A fifth of this is held by just eight companies, which include tech giants like Google, Apple, and Microsoft, who squirreled away \$69 billion in 2014 alone, (*SFGate.com*, 03/04/2015). ✪

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Mass Protests Against Police Killing in “Liberal Madison”

# Justice for Tony Robinson

George Martin Fell Brown  
Madison, WI

On the evening of Friday, March 6, Tony Robinson, an unarmed, black 19-year-old, was killed in his own home by Madison police officer Matt Kenny. He was shot five times. Robinson has joined the ranks of Mike Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Dontre Hamilton, and other victims of racist police violence.

Protests were swiftly organized by the Young, Gifted and Black Coalition. Hundreds of students have walked out of classes, and thousands of all ages have marched, stopped traffic, and stormed the Wisconsin state Capitol. In the wake of the massive labor struggle of 2011, Madison has now become a center of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Madison prides itself as a supposed bastion of liberalism in a sea of reaction: “70 square miles surrounded by reality.” Madison was supposed to be different, and so were its police. When same-sex marriage was legalized in Wisconsin, Officer Kenny publicly delivered wedding cakes to city hall for the newly married couples. But even before the shooting, a black adult in Madison was eleven times more likely to be arrested than a white adult. Tony Robinson’s murder has broken through the city’s liberal façade.

Madison’s liberal Democratic mayor, Paul Soglin, has increasingly discredited himself through his response. He was dismissive of the protests from day one, and he was booed in a debate when he blamed victims of police shootings for not following orders. Police Chief Mike Koval denounced protesters for hurting police officers’ feelings. But the protesters are undeterred and demand justice. ✪



Following the death of Tony Robinson at the hands of Madison, WI police, protesters occupied the state Capitol building.

## The Battle of Wisconsin

A Socialist Alternative Publication

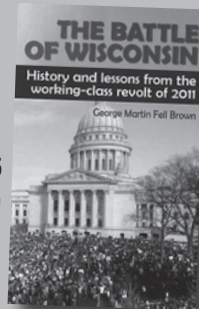
Read the true story of the 2011 struggle for union rights in Madison, Wisconsin.

By George Martin Fell Brown \$5

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## Elizabeth Warren

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Defense Authorization Act for 2014, allowing the military to indefinitely detain individuals.

To take a different example, while Warren supports an increase in the minimum wage, she only advocates for an increase to \$10.10 an hour, far less than the \$15 an hour that is needed to raise low-wage workers out of poverty.

But Warren’s biggest limitation is that she completely accepts the framework of the Democratic Party, which at the national level is utterly beholden to corporate interests. In 2012, the Democratic Party received \$565 million in corporate cash. This corporate money acts as a veto on any serious attempt to get the party to adopt policies that contradict corporate interests.

Unfortunately, in the face of relentless Republican-led attacks, Warren, like the rest of the Democrats, does not seek to use her position to give workers a voice independent of big business and corporate cash. For example, she does not use her position to publicly advocate for fast-food workers to actively participate in days of action against poverty wages. Avoiding such clashes with big business means not going beyond the limits the party establishment and their and corporate backers are willing to accept. This is no accident. Going down this path would lead to Warren’s complete isolation in leading Democratic Party circles – and, despite her courage in taking on Wall Street in her speeches, unfortunately that’s not what she’s prepared to do.

If Warren is really serious about wanting to fight back against the “rigged system” she so vehemently condemns, then she and “the Warren wing” need to declare their complete independence from corporate cash and join those, like Kshama Sawant, who are trying to build a new political force to represent the interests of working people and the poor. ✪

## Explosive Contradictions in U.S. Politics

continued from p. 4

### Building a Real Alternative

A little more than a year ago, Kshama Sawant won 95,000 votes and became the first socialist city council member in Seattle in more than a century. Through Sawant initiating the 15 Now grassroots campaign with the backing of a number of unions, working people in Seattle were able to beat back corporate resistance and win the \$15 minimum wage in a major city for the first time. This has transformed the issue nationally and emboldened activists in a number of other cities and states to push for similar, or even better, measures.

This is a model of what must be done nationally on a much larger scale. An independent left political alternative to the entire establishment must be built which gives voice to and supports the struggles of working people, women, people of color, immigrants, environmental activists, and LGBTQ people. A rebuilt fighting labor movement can be the spine of this new political force which can begin to challenge the capitalist system itself, the root of the endless misery we face. ✪

## SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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PO Box 150457  
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(206) 526-7185  
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www.twitter.com/SocialistAlt

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CANADA (604) 738-1653  
contact@socialistalternative.ca  
www.socialistalternative.ca  
QUEBEC info@AlternativeSocialiste.org  
www.AlternativeSocialiste.org



# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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## Justice Department Lifts the Lid There Are Hundreds of Ferguson's

Sandy Arias

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and the Department of Justice (DOJ) have lifted the lid on the ugly reality of “criminal justice” in Ferguson. Of course, the only reason this investigation happened was due to the pressure from Ferguson’s youth revolt following the killing of Michael Brown which stayed on the streets for months and ultimately sparked a national movement!

The report details how city officials turned a blind eye to the racist practices of the police and courts, sometimes encouraging them, as long as these practices boosted revenue. Ferguson’s courts used extortionist policies to use the most minor offenses to trap people in a never ending cycle of fines, arrest warrants, and court fees for years. Police ensured a steady stream of people passed through the court system, often times, through unconstitutional means. The DOJ found police used the threat of incarceration almost exclusively for the purpose of collecting payments.

Given the report’s damning evidence, Attorney General Eric Holder has threatened to sue the city if it doesn’t enact reforms and threatened to disband the local police force if necessary. Six officials have already resigned in the fall out from the report, including the

Ferguson’s manager and the police chief, Thomas Jackson.

### Limits of Reform

At the Selma March commemorating the 50th Anniversary of Bloody Sunday, President Obama said, “What happened in Ferguson may not be unique...but it’s no longer endemic, or sanctioned by law and custom.” While the state of Missouri is not Mississippi under Jim Crow, it is simply not true that the problem is not endemic. There are literally hundreds of Ferguson’s across the U.S.! This report should be a call to action in all the other Ferguson’s.

There are, of course, serious limits to the reforms being proposed which include civilian involvement in police decision making, stopping the use of arrest warrants to collect fines, and lowering bond amounts. For one thing, there is no proposal to limit the police’s right to use lethal force against unarmed civilians whenever they deem there is a “threat” to an officer. Holder and Obama, despite bemoaning the level of mass incarceration in the U.S., do not point to any credible road to ending it. Clearly, the main goal of these reforms is to restore the “credibility” of the police and court system which is now

questioned by millions.

Nevertheless, the reforms contained in the report, if implemented, would represent an easing of the massive and oppressive police regime faced by black workers and youth in Ferguson, where the movement began, and that represents a victory for the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM).

### For A Real War on Poverty

Another question that this report leaves unanswered is: How will poor cities with no significant tax base raise money for the programs and services they need? Instead of using militarized policing to fund ever more militarized policing, we need a massive federally-funded living-wage jobs program targeting the most deprived communities. This must be combined with a federal \$15 minimum wage. We cannot truly say “Black Lives Matter” if we’re not also improving the material circumstances of America’s black and brown people, alongside fighting against police violence.

As Socialist Alternative has repeatedly said, there is an urgent need for the unions and the national civil rights organizations to bring their resources to bear in the fight for economic and racial justice.

### What Now?

As we go to press there have been further militant protests in Philadelphia, Virginia, and Madison, Wisconsin against police brutality. BLM is not going away.

The Justice Department report provides an opportunity for activists to build on the limited reforms being forced on Ferguson - toward a true mass movement to win deep-rooted reforms in communities across the country while also fighting for the redistribution of wealth that is essential if there is to be a decent existence and a future for the youth in all communities.

### Socialist Alternative Demands

For elected civilian boards with full powers over the police. Independent anti-racist candidates from community organizations and unions should run for these boards. End the policies which have led to mass incarceration of black youth, including the war on drugs. Stop the militarization of the police! For a \$15 an hour minimum wage, guaranteed jobs for all, and a massive investment in public education, transit health care and other economic services paid for by taxes on the super-rich and corporations. ✪