

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



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

Issue #13 - May 2015

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UNITE AGAINST THE 1%

REBUILDING THE
LABOR MOVEMENT

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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

Sasha Somer
Seattle, WA

For me and people my age, now more than ever it has become obvious that we face an uncertain future. We face rising tuition costs, no stable job prospects, and the climate crisis looming over it all.

I tried to run away from the world. I worked on a farm, sought to live a simple life and enjoy the world while it lasts. But I learned that even if you are able to temporarily escape, the world goes on without you. And global warming will eventually affect us all.

It became clear to me, if we want a better world then we must confront the root cause of the problems. Whether it's hunger, global warming, or student debt, I've learned that the real reason that this society doesn't work for the vast majority of us is because working people don't control anything. Under capitalism, all the land, the factories, and resources are owned by a tiny elite who use them solely for profit – sacrificing human lives, the



natural world, and civilization itself. That's why so many of the mainstream solutions are unable to fundamentally solve the problem. Like band-aids over bullet wounds, the root cause of the problem remains.

I want to confront this system and expose it for what it is so that we can build a new society, a socialist society, where we decide collectively what to do with our vast resources and the decisions made reflect the needs of society as a whole rather than the profits of the 1%. That is why I am a socialist. ✦

In This Issue and On the Web

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



In the Fight for \$15, April 15 was the biggest day of action yet. This fight is putting the "movement" back in the labor movement. Looking forward, the struggle for a living wage can only grow, as it is bolstered by the energy from Black Lives Matter and a growing environmental movement.

Socialist Alternative is written from the perspective of working people, the 99%. Stay in touch with the movements and analysis! Subscribe online – details below!

In this issue we feature:

- ✦ Kshama Sawant's re-election campaign, the most important electoral battle for the left in the US in 2015.
- ✦ A socialist program on mass incarceration and the war on drugs.
- ✦ Material on rebuilding the labor movement.
- ✦ Analysis of the nuclear negotiations with Iran, immigrants rights, the movement to opt out of high stakes testing and more!

On SocialistAlternative.org you will also find articles on:

- ✦ The Greek Syriza government facing the European Union and the IMF.
- ✦ The California water crisis.
- ✦ And a review of House of Cards Season 3!

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

• 206-526-7185 • info@SocialistAlternative.org
• PO Box 150457, Brooklyn, NY 11215

Stop the Persecution of Pregnant Women

Justice for Purvi Patel

Lorna Garano and Erin Brightwell

In February, Purvi Patel, an Indiana resident, became the first woman in the U.S. to be convicted of “feticide,” and on March 30 she was sentenced to 41 years in prison – she will serve 20 – essentially for the “crime” of having induced an abortion.

This case marks a frightening precedent which, as a *New York Times* headline warned, “could be just the beginning” of a dangerous legal trend aimed at criminalizing women who miscarry or deliver stillborn babies. It also may prove an important legal milestone in the ongoing campaign to undermine and ultimately overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

This draconian and senseless prosecution should be a clarion call for a new mass movement to retake the ground women have lost on the right to reproductive health care in recent years. As abortion continues to be a useful issue for Republicans to galvanize the religious right, particularly during election time, they’ve launched a full-scale attack on abortion access in state after state, passing over 200 abortion restrictions since 2011. In 2013, 56% of women lived in a state considered to be hostile to abortion, compared to 31% in 2000, according to the Guttmacher Institute, an organization that advocates for reproductive freedom worldwide.



right-wing offensive frames women as walking incubators while marginalizing their rights as autonomous individuals.

Although most Democratic politicians nominally support a woman’s right to have an abortion, the Democratic Party has proven itself incapable and unwilling to mount any serious challenge to the criminalization of pregnancy and the rollback of abortion access. We need to build a movement in the streets, campuses, and workplaces for abortion rights, connected to a campaign to end the gender pay gap and for paid maternity and paternity leave as a step toward equal rights for women.

For a New Women’s Movement

Socialist Alternative stands for the right to a free abortion on demand, as well as free health care, and we stand for securing all that is needed for women and families to choose to have a child. No woman should be forced to continue an unwanted pregnancy, and no woman should have to end a pregnancy solely for financial reasons. ✪

Right-Wing Offensive

Several states are routinely prosecuting women for child abuse if they take recreational drugs during pregnancy. Women of childbearing age in these more conservative states are on a slippery slope: having a drug abuse problem, or even an ordinary miscarriage or stillbirth, holds the possibility of landing them in prison. Increasingly, this

Religious Freedom Does Not Equal Freedom to Discriminate

Katie Quarles

The recent state-level “religious freedom” bills in Arkansas and Indiana, which initially included language which would protect businesses from law suits for refusing service to LGBTQ customers on religious grounds, provoked massive opposition. This came on the heels of the Hobby Lobby Supreme Court decision which allowed a company to refuse to provide birth control to its employees through their health plan on the grounds it would violate the owners’ religious beliefs.

Protesters came out on the streets in significant numbers in both states. A national boycott including canceling of planned conventions and concerts was being organized. Many businesses, including Walmart and NASCAR came out against the bills, worried it could hurt their business by creating negative PR.

This reflects a real change in public opinion across the country on LGBTQ rights, with growing support



Demonstration against the “religious freedom” bill in Indiana.

from broader sections of the population. Even within the Republican Party there is a shift on marriage equality with the more reactionary social conservatives on the defensive, at least on this issue.

Pressure from the public and a section of big business has forced both the Indiana and Arkansas governors to retreat, with a provision to ban businesses from discriminating against LGBTQ customers being added in Indiana and the Arkansas governor refusing to sign the bill until

it is amended to be more in line with federal religious freedom laws.

Even so, the bill in Indiana as currently proposed would still allow religious institutions and religious non-profits to discriminate against LGBTQ people and an even more explicitly discriminatory religious freedom bill is in the works in Louisiana which will also require resistance.

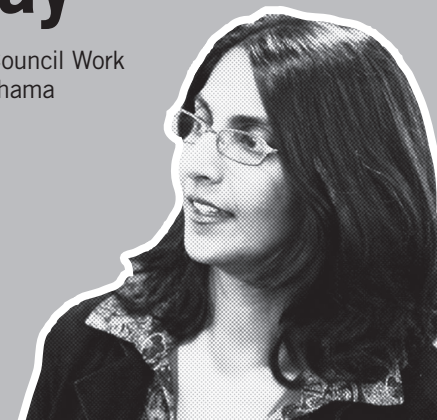
All the attacks of the right against LGBTQ people must be resisted. Socialists believe in the right of religious communities to practice their faith. But owning a private business does not give you the right to discriminate using the cover of your religious beliefs.

The Supreme Court will soon issue a major ruling on marriage equality. But even if marriage equality were to become the law of the land, the movement must continue to end all other forms of discrimination against LGBTQ people, including workplace discrimination which remains rampant in many parts of the country. ✪

Kshama Sawant Column

April 15 Shows the Way

Follow Kshama’s Council Work on Twitter: @cmkshama



On April 15, tens of thousands of low-paid workers and trade unionists took to the streets across the country in the biggest actions yet since fast-food workers first went on strike in New York City in November 2012.

As we celebrate May Day, International Workers’ Day, it is appropriate to remember that May Day was born in the U.S. out of the struggle for the eight-hour day in the 1880s. The eight-hour day was the key rallying cry of the labor movement of that time, in which socialists and other radicals played a leading role, both in the U.S. and internationally.

Today, the rallying cry is for \$15 an hour. Like our forebears, we are fighting to build a real, live labor movement that can fuse together all the strands of struggle against injustice and exploitation into one mighty force.

And, as in the 1880s, socialists are called upon to play a key role. After I was elected to the Seattle City Council in November 2013, Socialist Alternative, along with a number of unions and activists, launched 15 Now as a grassroots working-class organization to build on the achievements of the Fight for 15 and to push for a \$15 local minimum wage. We aimed to build a mass campaign with groups in every neighborhood and to mobilize thousands on the streets while threatening the establishment with a ballot initiative.

But when we started fighting for a citywide \$15 an hour minimum wage in Seattle a mere 15 months ago, this seemed to many a long shot. We were up against formidable opponents in the corporate and political establishment. Amazingly, in June 2014 we won in Seattle which pushed the national movement to a new level. Now, 63% of the population supports a \$15 federal minimum wage. 15 Now is leading key fights in Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and Oregon, while a labor coalition has just announced plans for a ballot initiative for \$15 in Washington, D.C. Student campaigns across the country are fighting for a \$15 minimum wage for all workers on their campuses.

Our view was always that the fight for \$15 was not an end in itself but a means to increase the confidence of working people to fight for their wider interests. Winning \$15 in Seattle and then in San Francisco are the most important victories won by working people in a long time, but they are only a taste of what is possible. We know there are many difficult challenges ahead on the road to rebuilding a fighting labor movement, but we are supremely confident in the ability of working people to overcome every obstacle.

Kshama Sawant is a Seattle City Councilmember and a member of Socialist Alternative

Mass Incarceration and the Racist Drug Laws

Tony Wilsdon

The Black Lives Matter movement has brought into public debate the issue of police killings of black people and rampant racism in police departments. But this is only the most public expression of a far deeper structure of mass criminalization and incarceration of black people rooted in an even deeper racism that is built into the foundations of U.S. capitalist society.

Beginning with the capture and forced transportation of Africans to America to work on slave plantations, the ruling elite in America has enforced second-class citizenship on the African-American population. Within 15 years of the overthrow of slavery, a new racist set of discriminatory Jim Crow laws had been consolidated in the South. The Jim Crow laws established a new legal form of exploitation of black people by restricting their right to vote, attend public schools, and use public resources.

As depicted in the recent movie *Selma*, it took the heroic mass struggle of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s to remove the Jim Crow laws in the South. However, the ruling elites were not about to abandon the racist polices that had served their interests so well. Their biggest fear was that black and white workers and poor people would see a common interest in opposing the rich elite, who had built fortunes from exploiting their labor. An integral part of conducting these racist policies has been the need to manufacture a sense of superiority among poor whites who, though they also were doing badly, were told that they were better off than poor and working-class blacks.

“War on Drugs”

Beginning with conservative Republican politicians in the late 1960s, a new system of mass incarceration – this time tied to the newly-launched “War on Drugs” – was introduced. However, this policy had nothing to do with reducing drug use. For example, there is a high level of cocaine use among well-off white executives, but there is no policy of systematic harassment and arrest of them. Instead, the “war on drugs” was created as a weapon aimed



to re-establish the mythology and stigma of “black criminality” that has been a core ingredient of the racist narrative in the U.S. It was also a direct attempt to undercut the radicalization of a generation of black youth coming out of the black liberation movement of the ‘60s and ‘70s and to prevent them linking up with radical-minded white youth.

In a previous issue of our paper, Eljeer Hawkins states, “Today both parties of big business – Democratic and Republicans – follow policies that criminalize black and brown youth using this same strategy of associating blacks as ‘criminals,’ ‘welfare queens,’ and ‘menaces to society.’ This method of social control is so normalized in U.S. society that it’s not even critically questioned by the mainstream. Crime and drug activity have been racialized, despite similar crime rates among different ethnicities and whites,” (“Book Review: *The New Jim Crow*,” 11/2012).

The so-called War on Drugs was directed overwhelmingly at one section of the population: black citizens. Whipped up by sensational and false newspaper headlines about crack cocaine addiction, sweeps began in black neighborhoods. High arrest numbers were then used to justify the

continuation of the policy. Backed up by Supreme Court decisions, systematic arrest of black youth for standing on street corners was then justified. Extremely long mandatory minimum prison sentences were established for low-level drug dealing and possession of crack cocaine.

Mass Incarceration

The statistics are staggering. In *Invisible Men: Mass Incarceration and the Myth of Black Progress*, Dr. Becky Pettit states, “Among male high school dropouts born between 1975 and 1979, 68 percent of blacks (compared with 28 percent of whites) had been imprisoned at some point by 2009, and 37 percent of blacks (compared with 12 percent of whites) were incarcerated that year.”

From 1980 to 2008, the number of people incarcerated in America quadrupled – from roughly 500,000 to 2.3 million people.

Blacks and Latinos, who account for a quarter of the general population, make up 58% of the prison population. Black Americans are only 12% of drug users, yet they are 38% of those arrested and 59% of those incarcerated in state prisons for drug offenses.

A growing fight-back against these racist policies has opened up

debate about the need for reform. In New York City, Bill de Blasio was recently elected mayor partly because of his promise to end the hated “Stop and Frisk” program. While de Blasio has scaled back Stop and Frisk, he has not stepped back from the underlying policy of aggressive policing in black neighborhoods. He brought back former police commissioner William Bratton, the mastermind behind “Broken Windows.” This aggressive policing doctrine of harassment and arrest for minor crimes continues to maintain the New York Police Department as an occupying force in the black community. It was the policies and training of the NYPD and big business that led directly to Eric Garner’s death. These policies, centered on aggressive policing in black neighborhoods across the country, were further exposed in the recent Justice Department report on Ferguson.

In her groundbreaking book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander correctly argues that these new drug laws and the wider criminal justice policies that surround them represent a new Jim Crow policy of mass incarceration. She explains, “people whose only crime is drug addiction or possession of a small amount of drugs for recreational use find themselves

locked out of the mainstream society and economy – permanently,” (p. 92). Upon release from prison, these men and women are systematically denied voting rights, employment opportunities, federally funded public assistance, and housing, rendering them outcasts in U.S. society.

This demonstrates the urgent need for the movement to also address the economic roots of poverty that afflict large sections of the black community, as well as the Latino, white, and Asian communities. By linking the struggles against racism and poverty, we can build unity among workers irrespective of color or race. But we also need to fight to end the root causes of these problems: capitalism, a system that perpetuates poverty and racism. We need to replace it with a society based on cooperation and solidarity: democratic socialism.

Socialist Alternative Calls For:

- ✦ An end to the racist War on Drugs. Decriminalization and legalization of marijuana use. Treat drug addiction through rehabilitation, not criminalization. Release from jail and strike clean the criminal records, including reinstatement of voting rights, of all those arrested for minor, nonviolent drug offenses.
- ✦ End “Broken Windows” and “Stop and Frisk.” Recall all military-grade weapons from police departments.
- ✦ For community control of all aspects of policing. Local policing to be overseen by committees of democratically elected representatives from the community and trade unions. Independent, anti-racist candidates from community organizations and unions should run for these boards.
- ✦ End Poverty. For guaranteed quality jobs with a \$15 an hour minimum wage.
- ✦ A massive investment in public education, transit, health care, and other economic services paid for by taxes on the super-rich and corporations.
- ✦ Build the emerging black freedom movement through coordinated national protests against racism, police violence, and economic inequality. ✦

Join the Campaign to Re-Elect Kshama Sawant

Join the many endorsers and supporters of Kshama Sawant's re-election campaign! We are proud to announce that the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers District Lodge 751 (IAM 751) has endorsed the Kshama Sawant re-election campaign! Representing over 33,000 workers, IAM 751 has a rich history of challenging

the rapaciousness of Boeing executives and corporate America and winning gains for working people and the middle class through struggle. IAM 751 joins Teamsters locals 117 and 174, International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) 19, Washington Federation of State Employees 1488, and others on the growing list of unions endorsing Kshama as their representative on the Seattle City Council. You will find a list of endorsements on the campaign website.

Kshama refuses to take any donations from corporations and developers. She lives on a worker's wage of \$40,000 after taxes and donates the rest of her council income to support building social justice movements.

Fighting Corporate Cash

The big developer Vulcan, an engine for the gentrification in District 3, was already donating in the race against Kshama. The anti-teachers'-union "Alliance for Education" stepped in with its money to stop Kshama. Non-union hotel owners threw in their cash to remove Sawant from City Hall.

We can defend this seat – but we need your help! Volunteer



and donate now, on KshamaSawant.org

Donate Now

Please visit KshamaSawant.org now and dig deep to keep Kshama as the driving force for working people on Seattle's city council. The maximum for individuals is \$700 for individuals and \$1400 if you are married. Can you donate \$100, \$500, or \$1400 now? Every dollar helps to push back against the corporate donors trying to buy elections. 🗳️

#ReadyForKshama

Kshama Sawant's reelection campaign is the most important battle for independent left politics in the U.S. in 2015. But at the same time the 2016 presidential election is already underway and a major topic of political discussion.

We are ready for a president ending the discrimination against women, closing the gender pay gap, ending poverty wages – which predominantly affect women – implementing a \$15 an hour minimum wage.

Unfortunately, Hillary Clinton is not the change we're waiting for.

Hillary Clinton

Clinton's gender alone does not mean she will make strides on decisive issues to change the situation for women in the U.S.

Clinton is Wall Street's candidate to continue the politics of bailing out banks – she voted for it – and hawkish militarism – she cast her ballot for the Iraq war. She's completely absent on the minimum wage debate and trailing on social issues, as she just came out in support for gay marriage ... in April 2015!

Is she the best we can get to avoid another Bush presidency – this time Jeb – or a union-bashing Scott Walker?

No, there are alternatives.

Warren Wing Waiting

The "Elizabeth Warren wing" of the Democratic Party is not happy with Clinton. New York City Mayor – and former Hillary Clinton campaign manager – de Blasio is hesitant to endorse Hillary.

300,000 have urged Warren to run. Warren has fought to regulate the banks and to tackle student debt. This points in the right direction, but in the view of Socialist Alternative, it does not go far enough.

But even if we put aside our larger differences, the question remains: How can we win even the limited regulations of the banks that Warren is advocating? Wall Street considers Warren's modest proposals a declaration of war. The power of corporate politics – including PACs, super PACs – and media under big business control – will not be altered without the mobilization and organization of hundreds of thousands of working people.

If Warren were to run for President – which she has said she will not do – and were to win the Democratic primaries, would the corporate-dominated leaders of the Democratic Party be prepared to tolerate such a mass mobilization within its ranks? No. Warren could not be expected to build an independent force of working people and undertake a battle against the big banks and large corporations when she seems to shy away from running against Hillary Clinton at all.

Sanders' Storm Before the Calm?

Bernie Sanders criticized Hillary Clinton for not being "prepared to take on the billionaire class," and he is getting ready to run. He could inspire hundreds of thousands. Unfortunately, Sanders also plans to stay within the framework of the Democratic Party. After the

primaries, will he just leave the activists he encouraged to get active, telling them to fight for Hillary against Jeb Bush or any other right-winger?

We urge Bernie Sanders to go all-out in the presidential election and run as an independent socialist. His campaign could bring together working people to create the backbone of a party really able to challenge the billionaires.

Ready for Kshama

We need to build an alternative, not just for the presidential elections, but to implement and enforce completely different policies. The domination of the top .1% will not be broken through the channels of their parties. Working people need to organize independently.

If the much-better-positioned Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren do not take on this vital challenge, others like Jill Stein of the Greens will offer an independent voice.

In response to Hillary Clinton's announcement to run for president, @OccupyWallStreetNYC tweeted #ReadyForKshama.

Clearly Kshama's not running for national office, nevertheless her race for a City Council seat in Seattle's 3rd District this year is of truly national importance. It shows workers, young people, and left activists that we can run our own candidates – independent of corporate cash and the Democratic Party – and win! We can use such hard won positions, to promote organizing from below as Kshama did with winning \$15 an hour in Seattle. If you agree, join us! 🗳️

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

Arctic Drilling Rigs in Seattle?



James Kahn

After Shell Oil spent \$4 billion lobbying in Washington, D.C. to win support for Arctic drilling, activists in Seattle are mobilizing to stop them. A Shell drilling rig is on its way to Seattle. Shell plans to use Terminal 5 of Seattle's port to repair the rig and send it back to drill in the Arctic "no matter what in the pursuit of profit," said Kshama Sawant in a phone conversation with Greenpeace activist Aliyah Field, who was aboard the oil platform headed for Seattle.

"It is activists on the ground – ordinary people like all of us – who will be building this movement, who will be reminding everybody that this is the People vs. Shell Oil," said Kshama.

"As long as Shell and big oil corporations control all these resources, we don't have a say in these backroom deals that they made. The lesson is that we cannot control what we do not own," said Kshama later in that same call. "These climate-destroying corporations need to be transferred into democratic public ownership to allow a transition toward clean energy, and we need a massive green jobs program where we can demonstrate that we can create good living-wage jobs and maintain the sustainability of our environment." 🗳️

REBUILDING A FIGHTING LABOR MOVEMENT

WHY THE WORKING CLASS IS CENTRAL TO SOCIALISM

Bryan Koulouris

Occupy brought a discussion about economic inequality to the forefront of political debate in this country. Importantly, the movement named an enemy: the richest 1%, the people hoarding cash, buying politicians, becoming politicians and getting bailed out by the government. Meanwhile, the rest of us, the 99%, form the vast majority and are getting ripped off by those at the top. But figuring out a strategy to change the world requires that we must go deeper in our understanding of inequality, class, and power in society. This question is made even sharper by the events of April 15, when tens of thousands of low-wage workers came out on the streets in over 200 cities across the U.S. in the biggest day of action yet for the union-backed Fight for 15. Even the corporate-dominated media talked about this as indicating the potential for the reemergence of the labor movement as a serious force in U.S. society. We in Socialist Alternative also see this potential, as well the huge challenges ahead.

The Working Class

The corporate-dominated media wants us to believe that we're all "middle class" and that the working class is a thing of the past. However, socialists say that people who have to work for an employer in order to live, from a well-paid engineer to a low-paid

dishwasher, are all part of the working class. Working people produce the vast wealth of society, but we only receive a small part of that in our wages, while the employers, especially the capitalists, extract huge profits from our labor.

Socialists see working people as the central force to change the world and end all forms of oppression. This isn't out of some nostalgia for categories of the past. To change the world, we must first understand it: who has the potential power in society, who is exploited, and who has the capacity to fight back and win.

The working class is the vast majority of society. We build everything; we make everything; we transport everything; we provide all the services, teach all the kids, open all the cash registers, clean all the floors, mend the sick, and cook and serve the food. We do everything that makes this system run, and if we're sufficiently well organized, we can force the employers to make significant concessions by shutting down key areas of the economy and mobilizing ourselves as an independent political force. Ultimately, we can use this power to transform society.

Why Unions Matter

While the working class is not yet organized enough to bring about decisive change through mass strike action or electing a

government of workers' representatives, we do have power in collective organization. Unions are the strongest organizations we have to improve our living standards, but they are declining in membership, almost never take strike action, and are under attack from laws undermining our right to fight. With Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker recently signing "right to work" into law, fully half of all states now have laws severely hampering trade union activity.

The super-rich attack unions for a reason: they know what unions have done in the past to undermine super-profits and improve the lives of working people. Unions make the working class stronger because, in unions, we can bargain together, instead of as individuals, for better benefits and pay. When strike action is necessary, a well-organized union is indispensable. When unions are strong, wages even for nonunion workers go up, as the bosses give concessions to cut off the desire of workers to organize. In the past, unions won the abolition of child labor, the eight-hour day, the five-day workweek – establishing the weekend! – as well as massive improvements in workplace safety.

Unions give workers a sense of their collective power and their shared interests in opposition to the billionaire class. They point toward reorganizing society on the basis of solidarity and cooperation, not the markets.

As unions have declined in the

last historical period, workers have been forced to work longer hours with forced overtime, working conditions are becoming more dangerous, and "benefits" like good health plans and pensions are increasingly a thing of the past.

While understanding the potential power of the working class and the labor movement, we need to work out effective strategies to address the huge changes in the workforce that have taken place in the last period.

Assault on Our Organizations, Our Living Standards

The last forty years have seen a huge shift toward "globalization" – including removing restrictions on capital flows and trade. Trade deals like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have been done at the expense of workers, at the expense of both in "advanced" and developing countries. Neoliberal policies were implemented in country after country, leading to privatization of huge parts of state services, attacking the historic gains of working people, implementing austerity, and – inevitably – leading to a massive increase in inequality.

During the decades-long onslaught against working people, union leaders made huge concessions to employers, giving away high wages and benefits. It was argued that it was necessary to give up good wages and benefits in

order to persuade companies to keep production in the country. But the jobs disappeared anyways, many to "outsourcing" but most due to automation. Union density dropped sharply. Industrial workers who were still unionized were increasingly disengaged from their union structures after experiencing decades of sell-out contracts with no fights. High-wage union jobs were shipped out by the thousands, with little to no resistance put up by unions or their leaders. Now, in the current "recovery," we face a situation where the vast majority of new jobs being created pay low wages.

Well-Paid Workers

Despite the vast decline in the number of unionized workers and of the industrial workforce, the industrial working class still has massive potential power. Workers in industry still make up nearly 20% of the overall workforce, and some industrial unions continue to wield real power. For example, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) has the ability to shut down the West Coast ports, through which over 40% of U.S. trade moves.

Many unionized industrial and manual workers are very well-paid in comparison to many young people entering the workforce now, but this doesn't mean that they're "middle class." Socialists don't define class based on how much money you make; we define it based on who you work for, how you get paid, and what you do at work. Again, in order to survive, workers have no choice but to sell to the employer their ability to work. Dockworkers are well-paid because they fought their employers through unionization and strikes.

Many people see themselves not as workers, but as professionals. But socialists see a distinction between skilled workers, like nurses, and top managers, whose role it is to control a workforce and squeeze as much productivity out of them for as little cost as possible.

Some jobs that were previously well-paid due to unionization are now being ushered into the low-wage workforce. This is true of many truckers and auto workers. Many of these workers, if organized, could choke corporate profits considerably. For instance, many business plans run on tight timescales, with "just in time" shipping. A strike, or even a slowdown, of warehouse workers and truckers could make all the Walmarts and big grocery chains shake in their boots while looking at potential lost profits.

The concentration of workers in the big urban centers greatly increases the potential power of the working class. But this would mean the unions reaching out to build powerful solidarity actions and launching new organizations of struggle that can help others get organized and win. For example, transit workers throughout the country, organized mostly into the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), have a leadership that is more focused than most on organizing and building movements. ATU is one of the few unions to have come out against the Keystone XL pipeline, connecting with the broader environmental movement and the community's desire for cheap, high-quality mass public transit that would benefit both the union in good jobs created and the environment in less greenhouse gases emitted. Coalitions of unions and the broader community, fighting for better conditions in society, can be a model to mobilize millions into action.

Hospitals and schools have become increasingly privatized, as the super-rich try to make money off of anything – our sickness, our children's future. This process of squeezing our

vital services has also led to more and more people who previously saw themselves as only professionals – nurses, teachers, etc. – getting organized and fighting back.

Fighting to Transform the Unions

The long retreat and decline of the unions in the U.S. over the past four decades and the largely ineffective policies of most union leaders have, unfortunately, created a situation where the bulk of the remaining unions lack a dynamic internal life. Real democratic control of the unions by their members is a precondition for developing the kind of fighting approach essential to rebuilding union strength.

Many top union leaders are paid far, far more than the workers they represent. This means that they are out of touch with the day-to-day reality of their members. We advocate that elected union leaders are paid the average wage of the workers they represent; they should receive increases when their members do. They should be subject to recall at any time and held accountable by their members.

A tragic example of a union with a heroic, fighting past which has ended up agreeing to seemingly endless concessions is the United Auto Workers (UAW). New hires in the “Big Three” American automakers represented by the UAW now only make \$16 an hour! By contrast, the National Nurses Union (NNU), which was only formed in 2009, has fearlessly advocated bold reforms that would benefit working people generally, refused to tailor its message to suit Democratic Party politicians, and it has not been afraid to call its members out on strike in defense of their interests.

Rebuilding unions as fighting organizations requires building an alternative to the present dominant current in labor: We need leaders who base themselves on the collective power of the membership, fight back against the ongoing attacks of the top 1%, and don't accept the limitations of what the bosses and their system say they can afford. In many cases, this requires building coherent left opposition groupings in existing unions. In other cases, it will require building new organizations. This is where socialists have a crucial role to play within the workers' movement: to offer such an alternative and to fight to rebuild the unions on such a basis.

Turning the Tide: Perspectives for Struggle

Despite the overall retreat, some working-class organizations, like the Chicago Teachers Union and the NNU, have been influenced by radical activists and have leaders who want to fight back. With the renewed discussion on inequality, thousands of young people have been radicalized, getting involved in the Occupy movement or Black Lives Matter. A new generation is entering into an economic crisis and an uncertain future.

Occupy and Black Lives Matter are two movements that indicate the likelihood of increased class struggle. In the 1970s, activists who went through the antiwar, women's liberation, civil rights, and black power movements struggled to transform unions.

of the country. A similar climate could be emerging now, but in the context of a deep economic crisis and potentially explosive struggles.

Community protest campaigns supported by unions can ignite truly mass struggles. The immigrant rights movement of 2006 led to mass strike action which shut down ports and thousands of businesses throughout the country. The key organizations in the fight for a \$15 minimum wage, including Fast Food Forward and 15 Now, are all centered on workers outside the unions but supported by key unions. To win real gains, low-paid workers will need to build their own democratic fighting organizations that are committed to taking forward their struggles. Organizing in fast food and the vast service sector poses many complex challenges. But the massive energy on the streets across the country on April 15 shows that there is a tremendous desire to fight and overcome these obstacles.

Political Representation

In every serious struggle, unions not only clash with individual bosses, but with their media, their politicians, and the police used in the interests of the top 1%. This is a political battle. Most union leaders today avoid this issue and do all they can to trail the big-business Democratic Party as a lesser evil to the right wing. This is one of the reasons why the working class is isolated politically in the U.S. but the anti-establishment mood is there to rally millions to fight against corporate rule.

With over 90,000 votes, Kshama Sawant's 2013 election as the first socialist member of the Seattle City Council in over 100 years spurred a battle to increase the city's minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Winning \$15 in Seattle last June has inspired similar fights in cities throughout the country. To build on these victories and take advantage of the anger at the establishment, we need a mass working-class party, supported by fighting labor organization and community groups, to run hundreds of candidates who challenge the right-wing attacks of the Republicans and the inept response of the corporate-dominated Democratic Party.

Movements against discrimination, as in the 1960s and 1970s, can be important sources of new strength for the working class movement, and unions should actively support these fights. Capitalism produces many types of oppression and exploitation beyond class. The increasingly black and Latino working class is at the center of all production, distribution, and services, the exploitation of which produces all corporate profits. Therefore, workers have both the power and the interests to end capitalism and all forms of oppression, even in a country where we're all told we're “middle class.”

Young activists radicalizing today to fight against oppression need to learn the lessons of labor history and the terrain of the class battles today. Only with this conscious approach can workers rebuild a fighting labor movement that can lead the struggle to transform society. ✪

Ten Books that Shook the World A People's History of the United States Howard Zinn

Jeff Booth

“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.”

-Karl Marx, The German Ideology

A People's History of the United States by Howard Zinn is an exception to a powerful rule: corporate rule over mass production under capitalism, including the mass production of ideas, reinforcing corporate rule over society.

A People's History breaks through this rule, in both method and content. It helps undermine capitalist ruling ideology by simply turning it on its head.

We're normally taught the top-down history of “great men,” or of ideas somehow competing equally in a vacuum of “objectivity,” or of capitalism as a “natural” state of human society – or all of the above.

Zinn's *History* examines U.S. history from a different perspective – influenced by Marxism and anarchism and stressing the words and actions of non-rulers, the vast majority of people, the 99%.

It's an unusually interesting introduction to U.S. history, a surprising one for many youth. It debunks myths Americans are indoctrinated with at a young age. Figures such as Columbus (gold-crazed murderer), or the Founding Fathers (slave masters), and others are exposed.

A People's History is useful for activists who want to begin a conversation about class society and socialism in the context of U.S. history, especially a conversation with those who aren't familiar with activism or radical politics.

One example from the book: “Eugene Debs had become a Socialist while in jail in the Pullman strike. Now he was a spokesman of [the Socialist Party, which] ... had 100,000 members, and 1200 office holders in 340 municipalities. Its main newspaper, *Appeal to Reason*, had half a million subscribers... There were fifty-five weekly socialist newspapers in Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and summer encampments that drew thousands of people.”

Who knew, right? There are many moments like this throughout *A People's History*. In a capitalist-dominated society, working-class history is buried. Reading *A People's History* is a way to begin rediscovering our history. ✪

“[The] circumstances of my own life... demanded of me a new kind of history. By that I mean a history different from what I learned in college and in graduate school and from what I saw in history texts given to students all over the country.”

**-Howard Zinn,
A People's History of the United States**



New York State Public Schools

Opt Out Revolt Against High Stakes Tests

Eleanor Rodgers, Brooklyn

My eight-year-old daughter Nora is part of a mass movement. She is one of thousands of children in New York state who opted out of this year's high-stakes tests.

Journalists and opt-out groups are scrambling to get a fix on exactly how many families opted out. The education authorities, normally so keen on data collection, deny tracking this figure, but what is clear is that, out of the 1.1 million children eligible for the tests, it's in the hundreds of thousands.

The strength of the opt-out movement varies dramatically from district to district and school to school. In Long Island and upstate New York, there are several districts where more than 80% of students opted out. In New York City, the overall numbers are lower, but they vary dramatically from school to school. In my daughter's school, 17 out of approximately 330 students opted out, but in our district there is one school with a 95% opt-out rate and several with opt-out rates of over 35%.

A Long Time Coming

This "anti-testing tsunami" as the New York *Daily News* described it, has been a long time coming.

Since the 2001 passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, corporate "education reform" nationally has been driven by a focus on high-stakes testing to provide data which is then used to close schools and attack the teachers' unions. High-stakes testing has also forced teachers to teach to the test, which is deeply detrimental to teaching and learning.

In New York, parents have seen their schools' funding cut in successive budgets, while the amount of money spent on testing increases. They've seen test scores artificially inflated for several years so politicians could claim the success of the reform agenda, and then they've experienced their children's dismay when the results were adjusted downwards by the state in a "correction." Most recently, the badly mismanaged introduction of the new Common Core curriculum saw students taking tests aligned to standards that their teachers had not yet been trained for.

The final spur to action this year was provided by Governor Cuomo. He tied a proposal to base 50% of teacher evaluations solely on test scores to the state budget, which also included further major cuts to education funding. In New York



The author's daughter, Nora (far left) protesting budget cuts outside her school in Brooklyn.

Photo by Anna Gustafson

City, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) organized a week of action, which featured the largest mobilization of parents in recent history, and went into lobbying overdrive to ensure the Democratic-led State Assembly would not pass Cuomo's bill.

In the end, the worst cuts were removed in budget negotiations, but the teacher evaluation bill passed. Stuningly, the UFT claimed this as a victory on the basis that Cuomo was forced to accept an amended bill which gives oversight of the evaluation system to the "independent" Board of Regents – an appointed committee that oversees New York schools – rather than being directly run by the governor.

While NYSUT, the statewide teachers' union, as well as Randi Weingarten, the national president of the American Federation of Teachers, have come out in support of parents who are choosing to opt out, the UFT, unfortunately, continues to advise its members not speak out on the issue of testing.

The Next Step

The question is whether the opt-out revolt can become the beginning of a decisive showdown to end or severely curtail high-stakes testing. The example of New York is certainly likely to inspire anti-testing groups around the country. But activists need to clearly understand how hard

corporate interests will fight to preserve the testing edifice. An indication of this are the editorials in New York newspapers attacking parents as dupes of the teachers' unions.

One of the weaknesses of the opt-out campaign to date is that there is far less participation in poor and working-class communities than in more affluent areas. The entire working class, not just parents and teachers, must be mobilized to save and transform public education. Opting out must be linked to mass mobilizations. Parents and teachers should organize an ongoing, grassroots, democratic campaign with town hall meetings, production of leaflets and posters, and the further development of a program to take back education. We also need to stand independent left candidates who will oppose education reform and truly represent the interests of working people. ☺

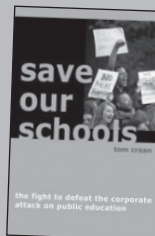
Save Our Schools

The Fight to Defeat the Corporate Attack on Public Education

By Tom Crean

\$5

Send checks to
PO Box 150457
Brooklyn, NY 11215



Read online at SocialistAlternative.org

Five Reasons Why You Should Join Socialist Alternative Right Now

Patrick Ayers

1. We are helping lead the fight back against the 1%

Socialist Alternative is the organization that launched the campaign that got Kshama Sawant elected to the city council in Seattle. We used the victory to build a movement for a \$15/hour minimum wage. Alongside the fast food workers who lead the way, unions and others, we helped win the highest minimum wage in the country, legitimizing the demand for a \$15/hour minimum wage and showing that when we organize around fighting demands, we can win. In Minneapolis, Philadelphia and more than 20 other cities we are helping bring together workers, unions, young people, and others to spread the fight for \$15 in all 50 states.

2. We are building a political movement that's completely independent of corporate influence

The political system is dysfunctional and awash in corporate cash. But, our campaign for Kshama Sawant won 95,000 votes without taking a dime from business. Unlike most politicians, Kshama kept her campaign pledge to fight for a \$15 minimum wage, not by making backroom deals but by using her office as a platform to build a grassroots movement. She takes only the average wage of a worker in Seattle, keeping only \$40,000 of the exorbitant \$120,000 a year salary from the city council and donating the rest to a solidarity fund to assist grassroots struggles. Our victories demonstrates what's possible if we break from the two parties and rely on our own independent power. We call on the left, unions, and other progressives to come together and run independent pro-worker candidates like Kshama Sawant in every city as a step toward building a new party for the millions, not the millionaires.

3. We have confidence that working people, people of color, women, youth and all oppressed people will fight back and change society

Capitalism faces a historic crisis. 95% of all the gains of the so-called recovery have gone to the 1%. While the 1% sees record profits and stock prices, we see record levels of poverty and inequality. Women and people of color are affected disproportionately, while climate change is made worse by capitalism's addiction to fossil fuels. Already, we have seen the beginnings of a fightback with the uprising in Wisconsin, Occupy Wall Street, fast food

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Major Shift Behind the Proposed Nuclear Deal with Iran

Robert Bechert
International Secretariat
of the Committee for a
Workers International

If it goes ahead, April's outline of a nuclear deal between the so-called P5+1 powers – the five permanent UN Security Council members, including the U.S. plus Germany – and Iran would mark a major shift in relations. Even if the final ratification of the deal is delayed, the negotiations themselves were evidence of the realignment of forces taking place in the region.

Disastrous Aftereffects of the Iraq Invasion

While China's economic growth and growing international influence have chipped away at the United States' world position, the disastrous aftereffects of the invasion of Iraq brought to an end the brief period of the 1990s when the U.S. dominated the world scene. This invasion was disastrous first and foremost for millions of Iraqis and secondly for the war's architects. The limits to U.S. power were seen in the collapse of Bush and Cheney's hopes of establishing a new order in the Middle East by eliminating or neutralizing forces hostile to the U.S. In fact, the opposite happened. Not only did the Iraq invasion destabilise the entire region, it also strengthened Iran – in the opposite of what Washington intended.

The Aftermath of the Arab Spring

The 2011 revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East initially struck new blows against the Western powers, as some of their strongmen allies – especially Mubarak – were overthrown. They had a real fear that revolutions would spread to other countries and develop beyond removing autocrats and dictators into social revolutions.

But while this initial revolutionary wave was derailed, resulting in enormous lost opportunities for the working class and poor to secure a break with oppression and capitalism, the subsequent counterrevolution did not restore the previous position for imperialism. In fact, imperialism has lost direct influence, as the counterrevolution unleashed centrifugal forces largely based upon nationality, tribal, or religious divisions. This development, seen most clearly in the tearing apart of Libya and Syria, created more misery and instability throughout the region. It was against this background that the explosive advance of ISIS and other fundamentalist groups only added to the gloom of imperialism.

Worries of the Old Allies

The main imperialist powers, sensing the weakness of many of their traditional Arab allies, were forced to reach out to possible new



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Foreign Affairs Minister of Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif

allies – hence Western support for the leaders of the autonomous Kurdish area of Iraq. In Iraq, a *de facto*, unofficial working arrangement developed between the U.S. and the Iranian forces supporting the Iraqi government in its battle with ISIS. It is against that background that behind-the-scenes efforts to achieve a rapprochement with Iran deepened – something which the outline deal has taken to a new stage.

But this tactic threatens to undermine the Western powers' relationship with the rulers of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, many of which have supported and funded various Sunni fundamentalists. These largely autocratic, feudal rulers are in competition with Iran and fear that Iran, now playing a decisive role in Iraq, will use the Shia populations in countries like Bahrain and Saudi

Arabia to extend its reach.

This is one reason why the U.S. is warning Iran not to get involved in the developing civil war in Yemen.

At the same time those among the Western strategists who are more fearful of Iran are not confident this deal does enough to weaken Iran's nuclear program.

Some of the region's Western allies, especially the Israeli and Saudi regimes, are opposed to any deal out of fear of losing out in a new balance of power, and in the Saudi case there is a further fear that an increase in Iranian influence will stimulate protest by their Shia minority.

Iran Strengthened, But Full of Contradictions

Currently, Iran's "Supreme

Leader" Ali Khamenei appears to be supporting "centralist" President Hassan Rouhani's attempt to reach a deal.

The prospect of a deal that lifts the international sanctions on Iran has further fuelled the hopes for change, especially against the backdrop of the oil price drop and the effects the sanctions have had.

But the change can give greater confidence to the Iranian working class to struggle for its demands. This could be a key development.

The Iranian working class is, with Egypt and Turkey, one of the largest in the Middle East. Iran is a developed society; as in Turkey, around 70% live in urban areas. A revival of the revolutionary traditions of the Iranian working class would have an important impact in the entire region, potentially offering an example of mass struggle which, if accompanied by socialist ideas, could show a way out of the poverty and violence that has characterized the Middle East under the rule of feudalists, religious bigots, and capitalism.

GOP Opposition and Obama's Policies

Meanwhile, the Republicans, with the help of Israeli premier Netanyahu, have moved to oppose the outline deal for both electoral

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Québec 2015 – A Heated Spring

Deirdre Grégoire, Montréal

This spring in Québec, thousands of university students went out on strike to protest austerity and the proposed cuts to public services. They were met with brutal reaction, both from police and university authorities. This report is brought to you by Deirdre Grégoire, a participant in the student struggles and a member of Alternative Socialiste (CWI - Québec).

Over 35,000 students are currently on strike, and 75,000 took to the streets on April 2 to protest the Liberal government's austerity measures. Comité Printemps 2015 (Spring 2015 Committee), a coalition of radical students, is leading the current student demonstrations.

Comparing 2015 to 2012

Though the turnout this spring is impressive, it pales in the face of the 2012 student movement – the largest student movement in Canadian history. At its peak, over 300,000 students were on strike to protest proposed tuition hikes. The strike was successful in that the Parti Québécois (PQ) government elected in the fall cancelled the tuition hike. However, the PQ did not end austerity, a result which posed many questions to students and workers.

While many years of groundwork were necessary to build the 2012 strike, the Spring 2015 strikes were built over the course of a few months, sometimes passing only by a few votes. The Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante (ASSÉ), which formed the backbone of the 2012 strike, has

a strong democratic structure, with elected leaders who are accountable to their constituents at all times. By contrast, Comité Printemps 2015 boasts a horizontal structure with no leadership: There are no specific campaigns nor demands other than for a general strike against austerity, and all decisions are made by unelected subcommittees with no accountability. This structure, and the narrow focus of Comité Printemps 2015 on the most radicalized students, has hurt their ability to reach out to the general student population to join the movement.

Repression

Repression from the government, the police, and even the university administration to this year's movement has been fierce: Ten students are facing expulsion for their

involvement in political actions, and police have been admitted onto campus to enforce an injunction forcing a return to class. The ruling class is showing its fear of the student movement. In order to obtain real gains from them, we must work within the already existing democratic student structures in order to rally the whole student population, and next the working class. ☘

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):



Pressure Building for \$15 at Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport

Ginger Jentzen
15 Now Organizer, Minneapolis

After nine months of pressure from 15 Now, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM), the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) and Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton, who appoints the commission, are publicly debating raising wages at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP). Along with unions at the airport, 15 Now is entering negotiations with the MAC with a demand for \$15 an hour for all MSP workers.

The governor has come out publicly in support of a \$10 an hour minimum wage at MSP, (*Pioneer Press*, 03/25/15), in an attempt to deflect workers' demands for \$15. MAC Chairman Dan Boivin announced public discussion on the wage issue, admitting, "There will still be commissioners who will want to talk about higher wages ... They think '15 Now' makes more sense," (*Pioneer Press*, 03/27/15).

15 Now initiated the demand for \$15 an hour at MSP, with the support of Delta ramp workers organizing with the IAM, followed by the SEIU local as part of its organizing drive. In the fall, over 2,000 workers signed a petition for \$15 an hour and staged a series of demonstrations, culminating in over 250 supporters participating in a day of action last December. The action received massive media attention, in part because Delta retaliated against leading 15 Now and IAM organizer Kip Hedges for speaking out on low wages.

The many airport demonstrations have already resulted in workers winning paid sick days by MSP subcontractors, and forcing low-wage subcontractor



A 15 Now demonstration on April 15 at Minneapolis-St. Paul airport.

PrimeFlight to raise wages. The governor also appointed two rank-and-file airport workers to the MAC, including the first East African and low-wage worker, Ibrahim Mohammad. These interim victories demonstrate the pressure mounting on the MAC to set labor standards at MSP that are in workers' interests.

We enter into negotiations with the MAC and the governor's office knowing that there is broad labor support for \$15 an hour by virtually all unions representing workers at the airport. Some proposals being discussed would keep the wage floor quite low, while others might leave some workers without a raise while providing one for others. But some victory is likely soon, despite efforts by Delta, Air Serv, and others behind the scenes to minimize any wage hike.

A victory for a \$15 minimum wage at

MSP would put substantial pressure on large companies like Delta, United, and others to set a higher wage floor generally and to not subcontract cabin cleaning and other currently low-wage jobs to the lowest bidder. It is crucial for 15 Now, labor unions, and airport workers step up the fight in the weeks ahead. Any substantial raise for even a portion of workers would be welcomed, but we must continue to demand a \$15 an hour minimum wage for all workers.

A victory is possible, but it will take a major mobilization and a firm commitment by union leaders because large anti-union companies like Delta will use their economic leverage over the MAC to water down any rise in wages. 15 Now will be mobilizing to win the strongest possible proposal to bring all workers up to \$15 an hour. ✪

COLUMN

Us vs. *Them*

Ryan Mosgrove

Playing Ball With Big Business

Georgia lawmakers are notorious for cracking down on people in their state who take from local resources while putting almost nothing back in. Unless you're a billionaire. Then it's fine.

In March, the Supreme Court of Georgia approved a deal between the City of Atlanta and the Falcons football franchise for building the Falcons' new stadium, which would give the project tax breaks on materials exceeding millions of dollars in lost revenue and would hand over another \$200 million in taxpayer money to help fund the project. This must have been music to the ears of Falcons owner Arthur Blank who, according to *Forbes*, has a net worth of over \$2.5 billion. Yeah, Georgia has a real problem with freeloaders, (*ESPN.com*, 03/16/2015).

Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous

According to a recent *New York Post* article, the city's property tax code has overwhelmingly benefited the rich. For instance, "One57," the recently completed skyline condominium – which, as of January 2015, was the most expensive residence ever sold in New York City – paid less than \$18,000 in property taxes in 2014. That's an effective tax rate of around 0.0017%. At the same time, while NYC's elite are seeing a boom in the real estate development market, working people are being left out in the cold.

According to the Coalition for the Homeless, child homelessness hit a record high in 2015, with over 25,000 children living on the street, (*New York Post*, 03/09/2015). ✪

follow Ryan on Twitter @basebenzi

Five Reasons to Join Socialist Alternative

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and Walmart strikes, #BlackLivesMatter, and big protests against the Keystone XL pipeline. We believe this is just the beginning. Massive struggles of workers, youth, people of color, women, immigrants, and others are on the horizon. These movements will challenge this rotten system, and building a strong socialist movement now will be vital to winning more historic victories.

4. A socialist world is possible

More and more people are beginning

to draw the conclusion that an alternative to the dysfunctional capitalist system is needed. A Pew Poll at the end of 2011 found that half of young people aged 18-29 who answered viewed socialism more positively than capitalism. We call for building a mass movement around the day to day issues, and linking those struggles to the need to go beyond capitalism. We call for breaking the power of big business by taking the top 500 corporations in public ownership and running them democratically under workers control and management. This would serve

as the basis for a radical transformation of society where we could plan the economy to meet the needs of people and the environment, not profit. We are in solidarity with the Committee for a Workers International fighting for a socialist world in more than 40 countries on every continent.

5. There has never been a better time to join than right now

There is a historic opportunity to rebuild

a fighting socialist movement. In Seattle, Kshama Sawant is up for re-election this year. It is by no means guaranteed that she will win, and we need your help to build an unprecedented grassroots campaign to defend her city council seat for working people. In other cities across the country, we will be fighting campaigns to raise the minimum wage to \$15, while also campaigning to win support for a socialist transformation of society. Sign up to become a member of Socialist Alternative today! ✪

15 Now Goes to College

Keely Mullen
15 Now Northeastern

This spring, at Northeastern University in Boston, students and workers made history by being the nation's first student body to vote for a campus-wide \$15 an hour minimum wage. A coalition of nine progressive student groups, led by Socialist Alternative, united under the banner "15 Now Northeastern" to put \$15 an hour on the student government ballot.

Whereas in previous years Northeastern's student government struggled to gather the number of ballots necessary to validate the election, this year's ballot including our \$15 an hour proposal was met well before voting closed with a total of 4,564 votes – nearly 1,000 above the threshold. When the ballot results were released on April 6, it was announced that 15 Now passed by a margin of over 76 percent. This victory is historic not only for us at Northeastern, but for students, workers, and colleges nationwide.

Student-Worker Solidarity

Though our 15 Now campaign at Northeastern wants to see improvements in the material conditions of workers at our university, this is also an effort to build student-worker solidarity that can hold an increasingly corporate higher education system to account.

Both workers and students involved in the campaign recognize that overpaid university administrators and overfunded university prestige projects are leaving us all swimming in debt.



15 Now Northeastern campaigners spoke to thousands of students.

Rather than paying for workers' raises by increasing tuition that will lead to the further impoverishment of debt-ridden students, our coalition demands that top-paid administrators take a pay cut so that workers' raises come out of the pockets of the University's wealthiest employees.

The University's recent announcement that tuition for the 2015/16 year will be increased nearly five percent shows the need for student-worker solidarity. The school also announced a meager 2.5 percent raise for Northeastern staff, which amounts to little more than \$0.33 per hour. 15 Now is linking the struggle for \$15 with the fight against tuition hikes,

further strengthening the unity between campus workers and students.

Throughout the coming months, 15 Now Northeastern seeks to enter into public negotiations with the school's administration in order to implement the student body's vote for \$15. We demand that, instead of creating an opaque committee made up of students and administrators, the University should hold a democratically run public hearing for the purpose of discussing the implementation of \$15 an hour. This demand for a public hearing is inspired by similar demands that have been made by 15 Now campaigns in Seattle, Portland, Minneapolis, and across the country.

2,600 Students Get a Raise at University of Washington



Reclaim UW, a coalition of UW students and workers, on April 1.

Alongside a broad student and labor coalition, 15 Now has campaigned for all University of Washington workers to get \$15 an hour. After demonstrations and a disruption of the UW Board of Regents meeting, the University announced a raise to \$11 an hour for all workers, impacting 70 staff and 2,600 student workers. However, this has not satisfied workers or students, who continue their campaign for \$15 an hour.

Spreading Campus Campaigns for \$15 an Hour

15 Now is already active on a number of campuses across the country and is preparing to launch many more chapters this year. With a model in place at Northeastern and the victory at the University of Washington, a new wave of campus living wage campaigns is in the works. Start a chapter of 15 Now on your campus! Contact us at www.15Now.org.

Iran

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and, for some, foreign policy reasons. They hope to exploit the remaining popular hostility to Iran after U.S. diplomatic staff were held hostage for 444 days in 1979-1981 and fears – especially among many Jews and evangelical Christians – for Israel's future.

However, the Republicans – and the Democrats who supported them – have a big responsibility for the deepening chaos in the Middle East as a result of George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq in the interests of Big Oil and trying to maintain a grip on the region.

But Obama's move on Iran does not represent a move toward more peaceful policies. While acknowledging the power the autocratic Iranian regime has gathered, the Obama administration has approved more arms sales than any U.S. administration since World War II – the majority of which have gone to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.

Protests in the U.S. and the Western countries aiming to stop any arms exports and military interventions by the U.S. and its allies are important acts of solidarity with working people and the poor in the Middle East in the struggle to build a mass movement against the competing ruling elites and classes of the region. Only by ending their rule can the threat of nuclear war and other armed conflicts be truly ended.

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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PO Box 150457
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CANADA
(604) 738-1653
contact@socialistalternative.ca
www.socialistalternative.ca
QUEBEC
info@AlternativeSocialiste.org
www.AlternativeSocialiste.org

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Issue #13 - May 2015



DEFEAT THE ATTACKS OF THE RIGHT

FULL RIGHTS FOR IMMIGRANTS

Tom Crean

Immigration Reform

The fate of millions of undocumented workers for whom the threat of deportation had been lifted by President Obama's executive order last November now rests with a three-judge panel in New Orleans. Twenty-six Republican-led states brought the legal challenge, which resulted in a right-wing judge in Texas putting the whole program on hold in February.

From the start, we in Socialist Alternative have said that, while Obama's executive order is an important step forward which we welcome, it does not go nearly far enough. After six years of record levels of deportations on his watch, the executive order promised to lift the constant terror of families being ripped apart for less than half of the undocumented population. We have consistently called for lifting the threat of deportation for all those who have been forced by economic circumstances, often the result of U.S. policies, to make their way to the United States.

The political establishment in Washington has been deadlocked for years on the question of "comprehensive immigration reform." Big business supports the idea of granting status to immigrant workers but with a very long "path to citizenship" and minimal legal rights as a way of maintaining the flow of cheap labor and keeping immigrant workers in a third-class status.

On the other hand, the right wants to maintain and intensify the current regime of terror in immigrant communities and spend billions on ever-higher fences at the southern border. They use the issue of immigration, along with gun rights and abortion, to whip up their base.

With 11 million undocumented workers here, the third-class status of these workers only serves to divide the working class. It forces a whole section into accepting poverty wages, thus undermining all wages. This can be cut across by a joint fight for full legal rights for all undocumented workers, an end to poverty wages for all, and a

massive works program to create jobs, housing, social services, and free education for all through college. On the basis of a joint struggle for these demands, working people in the U.S. have no interest in maintaining the current position of millions of undocumented workers. In fact, the opposite is the case: Full rights for all immigrant workers will enormously strengthen the position of the working class in its fight with the 1%.

Mass Struggle

In 2005 and 2006, immigrant communities rose up and demanded their rights. Millions came onto the streets across the U.S. in the biggest mass demonstrations in the country's history. This culminated on May Day 2006, when hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers went on strike. The port of Los Angeles was shut.

This inspiring mass movement succeeded in pushing back the attacks of the right and pointed the way toward the revival of a fighting mass labor movement. Unfortunately, it was largely isolated from the native-born

working class and was then ground down by ferocious repression. Since then, immigrant "Dreamer" youth have maintained a heroic struggle against the unjust immigration laws. Workers facing deportation have gone on hunger strike in ICE jails.

Today, as tens of thousands of workers and youth take to the streets calling for \$15 and a union and to assert that Black Lives Matter, there is a real opportunity to build a mass movement of working people that would unite key sections of the native-born working class and immigrant workers around a common set of demands. Such a movement must be independent of the Democrats, who at every step loudly proclaim their sympathy with immigrants but are only willing to countenance reforms acceptable to corporate America.

- ✦ End the threat of deportations for all undocumented workers and their families
- ✦ Full rights for all immigrants
- ✦ Repeal all anti-trade union laws
- ✦ For a mass organizing drive to bring all low paid workers into the unions. ✦