

The Battle of Wisconsin 2011
and the Lessons for Today

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Build A Political Revolution

Against the

Billionsaire Class



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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. Black Lives Matter.
- ✦ 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. ✦

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

WHY I AM A SOCIALIST

Baba Kofi Weusijana, Ph.D. Associate Professor Cascadia College



As a former student activist, and now as a Learning Scientist and Computer Science educator, I've struggled against the conditions of unequal opportunities and resources available for African-Americans, other people of color, and the poor.

The common theme I see across the oil and religious wars and the attacks from white supremacists and xenophobes is the greed of capitalists. The racist system that endangers my family today was constructed in order to keep "black" workers on the bottom and encourage the allegiance of "whites." It is the greed of companies like Exxon that funded misinformation regarding climate change. Humanity cannot survive long on this planet without discrediting the idea that "greed is good" and that capitalism is just. Capitalism is simply unstable and unjust. It is a system of usury that sucks value out of the general populace for the benefit of the few. It has been the activism of socialists and allied movements that has turned the tide in Seattle. Through the consciousness-raising of the Occupy movement, the courage of

fast-food and school workers to strike, and the organizing strategies and unifying tactics of Socialist Alternative, I've seen activists of various backgrounds come together. I've helped bring neighborhoods together to vote for a city council candidate, Kshama Sawant, who actually has their back because she didn't take a penny from corporations.

For me, socialism is the key to uniting us and avoiding the cynical pattern of band-aid reforms followed by significant losses because so-called "leaders" compromise with business interests. It means building a better world for my children instead of being complicit in its destruction just to survive another day. It is long past time for the 99% to unite against their common oppressors. We need solidarity against the 1%, the plutocrat class. ✦

Appearing on SocialistAlternative.org in February

Celebrating Black History Month

- ✦ Marxism and the Fight for Black Freedom
- ✦ 50th Anniversary of the Founding of the Black Panther Party



Covering the Presidential Election



As part of a new section on Sanders' campaign and the important discussions it has generated:

- ✦ The Health Care Debate: The Fight for Universal Health Care
- ✦ Hillary Clinton and Corporate Education Reform

Planned Parenthood has been the target for right-wing attacks, and *SocialistAlternative.org* will carry analysis of this offensive against reproductive rights and how we can fight back. Another issue making waves in the press is gun control, to which we bring a uniquely socialist analysis.

Working people go through many trials and tribulations just surviving day to day. We will be starting a new section of our website featuring workers' accounts of life on the job in 21st century America.

Don't miss the discussion on the unfolding global economic crisis as well as reports from the 11th World Congress of the Committee for a Workers International, with which Socialist Alternative is in solidarity. ✦

• info@SocialistAlternative.org
• PO Box 150457, Brooklyn, NY 11215



Upcoming!

Seattle People's Assembly

Saturday, February 27,
11 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Seattle City Hall
Bertha Knight Landes Room

We are living in historic times. A revolt against racial and economic injustice is taking place, from Black Lives Matter, to the Fight for \$15, to the growing interest in socialism. But big business, the super-rich, and their corporate politicians are determined to roll back our gains and stop us from winning more. We need to fight back with organized grassroots power. A People's Assembly, hosted by Seattle's socialist Councilmember Kshama Sawant, will be meeting on February 27 to discuss how we can build the strongest movements to challenge the billionaire class in 2016. Washington State Senator Pramila Jayapal, environmental activist Sarra Tekola, housing activist Jon Grant, and many others will be speaking.

Following the People's Assembly, Kshama Sawant and Socialist Alternative's Philip Locker will host a debate [location TBA] at 5 p.m., about the key questions for the presidential elections. Should progressives support Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders? What strategy is needed to win progressive change? ✪

The Second Inauguration of Kshama Sawant

Jess Spear

Seattle City Hall was packed with 400 people on Monday, January 4, for the inauguration of the new City Council. Cheers rang out as some of the councilmembers used their speeches to highlight the need to tackle the affordable housing crisis, homelessness, and police brutality.

But the loudest cheers were reserved for Councilmember Kshama Sawant.

"Sisters and Brothers, socialism is rising. Across the U.S. and globally, young people and workers are rejecting corporate politics and capitalism. They are fed up with the deep inequality, brutal racism, and environmental destruction under this system."

Hundreds of thousands of dollars in corporate cash were spent by the corporate establishment in their attempt to unseat Seattle's

socialist city councilmember. But they failed. Kshama Sawant was re-elected with a decisive 56% of the vote and the overwhelming support of working-class people, young people, and people of color.

"My standing here today is the living proof that, even in the face of hundreds of thousands of dollars of corporate cash, we can elect working-class representatives."

Each councilmember chooses who will swear them in. Kshama was sworn in by Sahro Farah and Osman Osman, two courageous tenants of a slumlord who attempted to raise rents by over 100% and was forced to back down in the face of community outrage. Sahro and Osman are themselves inspiring examples of what is possible when we get organized.

"In this beautiful city, blighted by income and racial inequality, 2016 should be the year we take on the greed of the few to meet the needs of the many. ... We need affordable housing

and a bill of tenants' rights. The crisis of affordable housing will not be solved by helping developers make profits."

It was clear from the inauguration speeches how much Kshama's two years in office have shifted the debate to the left. Yet Kshama's speech stood out in its call for working people to get organized and fight for a better world, a socialist world.

"A socialist society would put people before profits, the environment before big oil ... I appeal to all working people ... join me and Socialist Alternative in our struggle for economic and social justice."

Watch or read the transcript of Kshama's speech at tinyurl.com/2ndInauguration. ✪



Fighting for Trans Rights in Washington State

Interview with Gender Justice League's Danni Askini

Danni Askini is a leading trans activist in Seattle and the Pacific Northwest. She is the Executive Director of the Gender Justice League and is one of the main organizers of Trans Pride Seattle. Here, Socialist Alternative interviews her about the struggle for equal rights for trans people.*

SA: Thanks for making yourself available! I know you are busy fighting to advance LGBTQ rights and, particularly right now, equal access to public restrooms and facilities based on one's gender identity. Why is this such an important issue, and what are the main obstacles the movement is facing?

Askini: I think that this is such an important issue because it really highlights the divide-and-conquer approach of our opposition, which is to target trans people – specifically trans women – and try to frighten the public to repeal core civil rights protections that the movement has won. The main obstacles are public misunderstanding about who transgendered people are, and that transgendered people are far more likely to be the victims of violence than to perpetuate violence. And I think that's really the core obstacle: overcoming that misunderstanding. What opponents are doing is saying trans women are men trying to enter women's restrooms, and

that's how they try to frame it, conflating trans women with pedophiles and people who commit sexual assault.

SA: What is the best way for ordinary people to get involved in the movement and have an impact?

A: Yeah. So part of it is there is going to a protest on February 15, at the Capitol, to defend transgendered people's civil rights; we need to apply pressure to uphold our movement's hard-fought civil rights protections. One of our big concerns is that the caucuses haven't been hearing from supporters of the nondiscrimination law, so we are also encouraging people to call in or email. People can get updates at WAsafealliance.org.

SA: If you win on this issue, what's next?

A: That's a good question. I think what's next is pushing our fight forward by demanding access rights for all restrooms – similar to the ordinance passed in Seattle, which would require all single-use restrooms to be gender neutral. Since the recent victories for marriage equality, we see establishment Democrats like Hillary Clinton - who long opposed marriage equality - trying to be part of the winning team. And we also see an attempt of the establishment to give the credit to



Obama.

SA: How was marriage equality really won?

A: I would say it was grassroots mobilization and protest – in particular, after [California's] Proposition 8 – that galvanized the issue into cultural consciousness and a largely grassroots movement led by LGBTQ people. That we all deserve the right to marry the person we love: it was a decades-long struggle. I remember when we first moved here, in 1994, people were talking about same-sex marriage. People have been fighting and organizing ... it was not Obama coming along and waving his magic wand and suddenly we got marriage equality. ✪

A Speech by Kshama Sawant

Build the #Movement4Bernie



Kshama Sawant, Seattle City Councilmember

facebook.com /cmkshama
@cmkshama

As Obama wrapped up his final State of the Union speech on January 12, Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant delivered a #SocialistResponse, live-streamed to audiences nationwide. She pointed to the social movements erupting around the country, from Black Lives Matter to the fight for \$15, and welcomed the movement behind Bernie Sanders as a harbinger of hope for the future for working and oppressed people.

The following are excerpts from Sawant's speech, including her call on Sanders supporters to link the campaign to elect Bernie to building a sustained, independent movement to challenge the entire corporate establishment, both Republican and Democratic, whether or not Bernie pulls off an upset over Clinton in the primaries.

Sisters and Brothers,

Obama's final State of the Union was filled with optimism for the future of the United States. I share this confidence, but for very different reasons.

My confidence is based *not* on big corporations or the prosperity of Wall Street and its billionaires. It is based, instead, on the immense potential power of American workers, of the 99%, to fight for a better society against the billionaire class, whose limitless greed threatens our society and our planet. ...

I am [also] optimistic because of ... the incredible groundswell of support for Bernie Sanders and his call for a political revolution against the billionaire class, with

an unprecedented one million people donating and hundreds of thousands attending rallies in almost every corner of our nation. ...

This past year, the bigotry and arrogance of billionaire Donald Trump has dominated coverage of the U.S. presidential race. We must stand up to – and organize in the streets against – the Republican right wing's racist, sexist, and anti-worker agenda.

But what fuels support for this agenda? ...

As workers' living standards fall, there will inevitably be anger that requires a political outlet. It cannot be stopped on the basis of supporting establishment, pro-business politicians. ...

If the 99% have to choose between two Wall Street candidates for president, it is far more likely that workers and youth will stay home – and the Republicans may win. Bernie Sanders is giving voice to the enormous desire for progressive change.

Many of Bernie's supporters are excited to support a self-described democratic socialist candidate. But what is socialism? Millions are asking.

A socialist society would put people before profits, the environment before big oil. ... [Socialism means] the resources of the major corporations are taken into democratic public ownership, rationally planned for the needs of society as a whole.

I am not a Democrat, but I would welcome it if Bernie Sanders were to win the Democratic nomination, as this would be a major blow to the political establishment and to corporate politics.

Defeating Clinton and the Wall Street interests behind her will require Sanders supporters build a massive new grassroots political

force capable of waging a fierce battle against the Democratic Party machine at every level of American politics.

Effectively, this means building a new left political party out of Sanders' campaign that can continue to organize and fight beyond the elections.

Even if big business and the Democratic establishment were unable to block Sanders in their primary, there is no way they would accept having someone representing working people's interests at the head of one of their two parties.

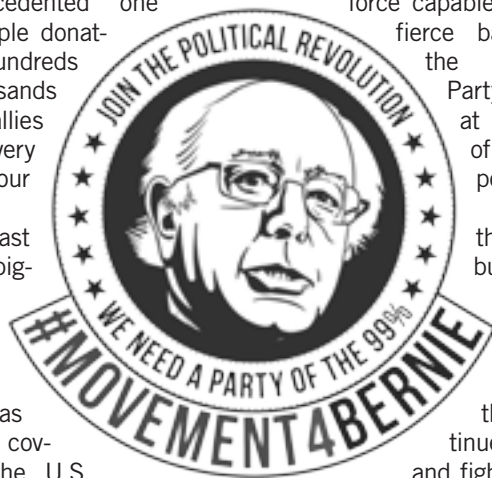
If they failed to force Sanders to make major political concessions, they would go all-out to sabotage him in the general election campaign, preferring to see a Republican win.

If you are electrified by Bernie's message, you should not support Hillary if Bernie loses the primary. Endorsing Hillary would be a sure-fire way to demoralize, demobilize, and wreck the movement building up behind Bernie.

I would instead urge Sanders to continue running as an independent all the way to November, for example on the Green Party ticket with Jill Stein. But our immediate task, of course, is to relentlessly push forward the grassroots energy around Bernie. ...

Win or lose, the most important legacy of this historic campaign will be whether it builds an ongoing political movement against the billionaire class. It is time for something new. The 99% needs its own political party that unambiguously fights for our needs.

We need to build a tool to fight back against the billionaire class, to save humanity and our planet from the failed system of capitalism, and to fight for a socialist world. ☘



#Movement4Bernie Takes Off Around the Country

Bernie Sanders' call for a political revolution against the billionaire class has enthused millions of people who want for a political alternative to Wall Street. But to achieve Sanders' demands for \$15 an hour, single payer healthcare, tuition-free college and the end of mass incarceration will take an organized mass movement.

To this end Socialist Alternative has launched #Movement4Bernie. M4B's initial statement spells out what is needed: "We can turn this into the most important election in decades by building an organized political force behind the Sanders campaign to fight against racism, sexism and corporate domination.

"Bernie's campaign offers the opportunity to fight back. He has opened up an urgently needed debate about an alternative to capitalism, democratic socialism.

"We need a vibrant and visible campaign in every workplace, campus, and community that actively takes up low wages, racism and environmental destruction. We need public meetings and protests connecting Bernie's campaign to the struggles against injustice created by the system.

"We can begin to build a new, lasting, and powerful force – based on the independent power of working people and not big business – that can lead a fight back against the billionaire class and their politicians from both parties after the 2016 election is over."

Since its launch in early January, #Movement4Bernie (M4B) has hosted actions and meetings across the country. This has ranged from a mock debate between Hillary and Bernie supporters at Northeastern University



#MarchForBernie in Boston.

in Boston, meetings on strategies to win Bernie's political revolution in Philadelphia and Democratic debate watch parties in multiple cities. All of these have seen the M4B initiative and socialist politics gain an echo with a section of Bernie supporters, young people, union members, activists from other struggles and many people who are new to left politics in general.

In response to the attacks of the Democratic establishment, there has been a call from a section of Sanders supporters that want to fight, for a national day of action including local "Marches for Bernie" in major U.S. cities. They show that many Sanders supporters are beginning, based on experience, to draw conclusions about the true nature of the Democratic Party.

Socialist Alternative and #Movement4Bernie are taking the lead in organizing these events in a number of cities including Chicago, Seattle, Boston, Philadelphia and Minneapolis. These rallies will include Socialist Alternative speakers linking the fight for Sanders' key demands to the need for a socialist transformation of society, as well as speakers from the Fight for 15, the black liberation struggle and others. In Chicago in particular, the march carries extra importance, as it is linking up with the developing #ResignRahm movement calling for the resignation of Chicago Mayor (and Hillary Clinton ally) Rahm Emanuel.

The #Movement4Bernie initiative could have an important role to play going forward. The increased attacks on Sanders from Hillary and her allies are a risky strategy but a panicked Democratic establishment sees little choice but to fight back in face of Sanders' regained momentum. Socialist Alternative believes that for Sanders to win the nomination requires a political upheaval and the development of a force that can withstand all the establishment's resources. If he doesn't win the Democratic nomination, Sanders should keep going as an independent and not support Hillary. #Movement4Bernie is a rallying point for all those who see the need to keep going and to build a new party of the 99%. ☘

Chicago:

Building a Powerful Movement to Force Out Rahm Emanuel

Steve Edwards

The movement for justice for Laquan MacDonald has unleashed a broad attack on the political establishment in Chicago, implicating “Mayor 1%” Rahm Emanuel and nearly the entire Chicago Democratic Party Machine. Laquan was a seventeen-year-old Black youth whose brutal murder - he was shot sixteen times by Chicago Police in October 2014 - was covered up until after the 2015 Mayoral elections. Thousands have taken to the streets to call for Rahm’s resignation.

Mayor Emanuel is trying everything to save his political career, ruthlessly sacrificing other officials like the police superintendent in a desperate effort to contain the damage. A November poll showed 52% of Chicagoans felt Rahm should resign immediately. With the growing threat of a teachers strike, an unending stream of corruption scandals, questions over public pensions and beneath all of this the slow-burning resentment over the longstanding neglect of working-class communities, one of the most powerful public officials in the country is in the fight of his political life.

For a Political Alternative to the Democratic Party Machine

Unseating Rahm Emanuel would represent an important victory for the #BlackLivesMatter movement. But the #RahmResign movement, taking on the Democratic Party Machine and its deep ties to big business and real-estate developers, raises entirely new questions. For example, who would replace Rahm and the majority of the Aldermen and city officials he controls? How would working class people hold them accountable? Most importantly, how can we build a movement which engages hundreds of thousands of ordinary people to fight a cunning and powerful enemy which will stop at nothing to maintain power?

Building a movement requires sacrifices. But working class people, who sacrifice their time and energy every day, require clear goals and a way of reaching them. This means the movement needs democratic structures which can engage wider sections of the working class in the process of winning. Also, there are numerous other



communities which are under attack by the same machine which gunned down Laquan McDonald and then covered up his murder. The movement needs to consciously reach out to parents fighting for quality schools, teachers fighting for a decent living, tenants fighting for affordable housing, workers fighting for decent public transportation, and pensioners trying to carve out a decent retirement. These are all potential allies in the struggle.

A united movement is not a nice socialist ideal, but a concrete necessity to win. The Democratic Party machine in Chicago understands this, and will act accordingly. It will reach out to conservative black clergy to try to isolate young black activists as being “too radical.” It will appeal to an imaginary “silent majority” of Chicagoans, who are alleged to be content with their condition, and who feel “inconvenienced” by the protests. It will attempt to immobilize the movement by setting up endless committees, inquiries, and investigations. At best, these inquiries amount to the status quo, and therefore, the death of more black youth at the hands of the Chicago Police. This means developing clear demands that speak to the needs of the working class in Chicago, and which cannot be compromised by the Democratic Party machine.

Teachers’ Union Joins the Struggle

On January 6, the Chicago Teachers’ Union’s (CTU) House of Delegates voted to call on Rahm and State’s

Attorney Alvarez to resign. Following on its 96% December 14 strike vote, this puts the CTU firmly on the side of the #RahmResign movement and against the corrupt City administration.

Now the call needs to be implemented. The CTU, along with allies such as the National Nurses’ Union which is bending every muscle to get out the vote for Bernie Sanders, should join with these growing and diverse movements to begin to build a party of the 99%.

Also important is the radicalization around the Bernie Sanders campaign. It is essential to rally his supporters into a growing movement. A rally in Chicago on January 23 brought out thousands downtown to march on the Chicago Board of Trade. This demonstrates that there is a rapidly growing energy to build a political alternative to the two-party corporate system; a party that takes no corporate money and is based in movements and communities, not downtown boardrooms.

In Chicago, and in most other major U.S. cities, the Democratic Party has been in power for decades. Reversing neoliberal policies that have destroyed black and working-class communities requires far more than just replacing one wing of the Democratic Party with another. For example, the Mayoral campaign of Chuy Garcia, who was part of the Democratic Party establishment, offered nothing fundamentally different for working people. We will have to build a citywide alternative at the grassroots, involving activists from different movements. The labor unions, especially the CTU, should be stepping in to help organize this movement. ☘

Thousands #MarchForBernie in Chicago



Photo Credit: Shana East

Nick Wozniak

Thousands of Bernie Sanders supporters filled Chicago’s Daley Plaza on Saturday, January 23 to #March4Bernie alongside supporters in 30 other cities. Chicago’s vigorous rally called for a \$15 minimum wage, universal health care and education, and taking up Sanders’ call for a political revolution against the billionaire class.

Chicago Socialist Alternative played a key role in organizing the rally. Under the banner of #Movement4Bernie, Socialist Alternative joined with a wide layer of activists to build a movement to elect Bernie and win his radical program. Speakers included labor leaders from National Nurses United, the Chicago Teachers Union and CWA-NABET, #RahmResign leader Lamorn Reccord, immigrants’ rights activist Maria Paz Perez, and 10th Ward Alderwoman Sue Sadlowski-Garza.

Socialist Alternative member, and lifelong South Sider, Darletta Scruggs ended the rally by pointing out that Bernie is best posed to defeat the right-wing attacks of Donald Trump: “You don’t defeat right-wing populism with corporate politics.”

The diversity of participants shows the strength of Bernie’s call to unite movements and take on the billionaires. This process has taken on renewed urgency in the wake of Rahm Emanuel’s cover-up of the police killing of Laquan McDonald, leaving the Chicago Democratic Party establishment in crisis.

The march ended with a boisterous rally outside the Chicago Board of Trade, a symbol of the greed and financial misconduct that wrecked the economy in 2008. The march’s destination also marked a new beginning, for it was at the Board of Trade four years ago that Occupy Chicago set up their encampment. Today, the same spirit shouting “We are the 99%” is drawing conclusions about the need for a Party of the 99%. Socialist Alternative called on participants to join SA and attend the #Movement4Bernie mass meeting on February 13 as we build an organized force to win the fight against the billionaire class. ☘

THE BATTLE OF WISCONSIN, 2011



George Martin Fell Brown
Madison, WI

Five years ago, the city of Madison, Wisconsin became the setting for the U.S. labor movement's biggest battle in nearly twenty years, as hundreds of thousands took to the street against the anti-union legislation of right-wing Republican Governor Scott Walker. The protests saw twice-daily demonstrations for a month; a two-week occupation of the state Capitol in Madison; a second, shorter occupation of the Capitol; and a prolonged sick-out of Madison and Wisconsin teachers. And the idea of a general strike was seriously posed within the labor movement.

The "Battle of Wisconsin" was also an early stage in a much wider revival in political struggle. Protesters took inspiration from the Arab Spring that began a month earlier. And, in turn, it provided inspiration for the Occupy movement later on in the year. All this led *Time* magazine to declare "the protester" to be 2011's person of the year. At the same time, the movement in Wisconsin was defeated, and the blows Walker dealt the labor movement have also emboldened corporate politicians to launch a wave of nationwide assaults on organized labor. Nonetheless, the Wisconsin uprising, both its potential for victory and its ultimate defeat, provide valuable lessons for the struggles of today.

Scott Walker vs. the Working Class

Scott Walker came to power in 2010 as part of the "Tea Party revolution" that saw hard-right Republicans sweep the midterm elections. Fueled by the legitimate anger at Obama's bailout of big business during the 2008 financial crisis, the Tea Party diverted that anger into support for right-wing attacks on the working class. Throughout the financial crisis, politicians in both parties scapegoated public-sector workers as "privileged." But Walker went a step further and declared an all-out war.

The weapon Walker wielded was Act 10, known at the time as the "Budget Repair Bill." Like the misnamed "right-to-work" laws, Act 10 meant that public-sector unions had to manually collect dues and workers could refuse to pay dues while still keeping the benefits of union membership. But Act 10 went further. The unions would no longer be able to collectively bargain over any issue other than wages.

And, even then, wages would be capped to the rise in the Consumer Price Index. So the workers could only bargain against pay cuts and not for pay raises. On top of this, the unions had to hold annual recertification votes in which 51% of the bargaining unit had to vote to renew the union. Although it was billed as a means to balance the budget, it was really a naked attempt to crush public-sector unions in Wisconsin.

But the workers gave as good as they got. The protests began on Valentine's Day, with a demonstration led by the Teaching Assistants' Association (TAA) in Madison in which they delivered a valentine to Walker asking him not to break their hearts. But the protests soon ballooned. The next day, over a thousand high school students across the city walked out of classes in solidarity with their teachers. The day after that, the teachers themselves called in sick and flooded the Capitol. Demonstrations grew to 8,000 people inside the Capitol and, on a typical day, tens of thousands outside. Under pressure from below, the 14 Democratic state senators fled to Illinois to prevent the Senate from achieving a quorum and passing the legislation. At its peak, the number of protesters rivaled the population of Madison itself.

The protests transformed consciousness. People who never took part in activism before were crawling through windows to occupy the Capitol. Solidarity messages came from Egyptian trade unionists and the Green Bay Packers. People around the world ordered solidarity pizzas to feed the protesters. The protests cut through all the anti-union propaganda. It seemed like Walker himself was the only person not on the workers' side.

The workers had moved into action, and they had public opinion on their side. Victory appeared to be in their grasp. But there was no organized force with a strategy to win. An early slogan in the protests, "One day longer! One day stronger!", assumed that simply keeping up the protests would be enough to stop Walker. But Walker didn't back down. To win, it would have been necessary to escalate the struggle through strike action. And it was here that the Democratic Party and the union leadership played a demobilizing role.

General Strike

From the beginning of the movement, the call for a general strike was raised. First advanced by the far left, it was taken up by sections of the broader movement. In countries like Greece, general strikes have become routine. But in the United States, a general strike was a big step for the labor movement. So it was incredibly significant that the South Central Federation of Labor (SCFL), with delegates representing 97 unions and over 45,000 workers in the greater Madison area, officially endorsed a general strike. The motion was nonbinding, but it demonstrated that a general strike was a serious possibility.

With Walker unwilling to budge, a victory would require an escalation of action. In this situation, Socialist Alternative put forward the slogan of a statewide, one-day, public-sector general strike. On its own, a one-day strike isn't usually enough to win a struggle, but most of the workers were not prepared, at the time, to enter an indefinite strike, especially when public-sector strikes were illegal. A one-day

general strike would have been a big step forward and could have given the workers the confidence to defy anti-strike legislation, to engage in even more serious action and spread the fight to the private sector.

But while there was huge support in the ranks and among some local leaders for a general strike, most of the higher-up leaders – especially national leaders of key public-sector unions like the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) – sought to hold back the struggle. For decades, the labor movement was not schooled in class struggle, but in the struggle to elect Democratic Party politicians. Even with their unions' very existence at stake, the union leaders were not prepared to engage in disruptive strike action that would upset their Democratic Party allies. Instead, the unions focused on lobbying the moderate Republican senators and launching a campaign to recall Scott Walker. Some union leaders offered to accept all the concessions demanded by Walker except for collective bargaining. Others refused such concessions but placed their faith in the "One day longer!" approach.

What was missing was a well-organized socialist force in the local unions. Such a force could have galvanized the mass sentiment for a general strike, challenged the Democratic Party's demobilization, and defied the pressure of the national union leadership. Without this force, the movement was defeated.

By March, the "One day longer!" strategy exhausted itself. First the occupation of the Capitol gradually shrank. Then, on March 9, the Republicans found a loophole in the



recall the Republicans.” But the bill had gone through and the protests had been derailed.

Aftermath

Through the recall election, the class struggle was transformed into an electoral struggle between a corporate Republican and a corporate Democrat. The Democratic candidate, Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, was particularly uninspiring, having already lost to Scott Walker in 2010. Barrett sought to distance himself from the movement that made the recall possible. He refused to commit to reversing Act 10. As mayor, Barrett himself used Walker’s legislation to extract concessions from municipal workers under his control. Without any inspiring challenger, Walker not only survived the recall, he was re-elected yet again in 2014, this time running against former Trek Bicycles CEO Mary Burke. In the 2014 election, Walker was able to hit from the left, attacking Burke as an outsourcing capitalist.

Throughout all of this, Act 10 remained in effect. The consequences for the labor movement have been devastating. The AFT lost 50 percent of its membership and AFSCME lost 70 percent. The bulk of this membership was lost between the protests and the recall election. In 2015, Walker took his war into the private sector, making Wisconsin the 25th “right-to-work” state. Walker’s successes in Wisconsin have inspired further attacks on unions in other states, as well as nationally.

But while the Wisconsin workers may have lost the battle, the war is not over. The transformative effect the Wisconsin uprising had on consciousness is still being felt today. Wisconsin directly inspired Occupy and kicked off a whole new wave of struggles, from the Fight for \$15 to Black Lives Matter. There are now new signs of struggle in the Wisconsin labor movement, as well. The struggles of Milwaukee teachers against school privatization show how public-sector unions can still fight back in a post-Act-10 Wisconsin. In the private sector, the recent Kohler strike revived the classic labor tactic of mass pickets. The defeat in Wisconsin has given labor a more difficult terrain to fight on. But workers are still fighting back. The ground is being laid for the rebuilding of the labor movement – but, for this to happen, the lessons of the Battle of Wisconsin must be learned. ☘

quorum law and were able to pass Act 10 without the Democrats present.

During the movement, the 14 Democratic Senators who fled the state were viewed as heroes, dubbed the “Fab 14.” But when it came to finding a way to defeat Walker’s attacks, the “Fab 14” revealed the demobilizing role of the Democratic Party. This was starkly demonstrated by “Fab 14” Senator Chris Larson from Milwaukee. After the passage of the bill, he returned to Wisconsin and declared, “Now ... we trade in our rally signs for clipboards and we take to the streets to

Defeat “Right to Work”!

Rebuild A Fighting Labor Movement

Marty Harrison, Philadelphia

v. Detroit Board of Education.

The explosive growth of the Wisconsin demonstrations in 2011 from thousands to tens of thousands, the dogged defense of the occupation of the Capitol, and the outpouring of solidarity from across the country and around the world revealed the willingness of American workers to fight and gave some insight into the character of the future resistance of the U.S. working class.

It also illustrated some of the obstacles to rebuilding a militant working-class movement: the union leadership’s readiness to concede without a decisive fight and the spinelessness of their Democratic “allies,” revealed at every turn. The battle was lost because the union leadership had no strategy to fight corporate interests and no political alternative to the Democrats. And, critically, there was no sizeable organized left in the unions which could demonstrate a strategy to fight back and defeat the attacks.

Employers have spent decades reorganizing the workplace and the economy to protect themselves and their profits from the power of organized labor. Their paid-for politicians rewrote the tax code and criminalized effective union tactics. They moved unionized manufacturing jobs to low-wage, nonunion locations and created low-wage, nonunion precarious jobs in the U.S. economy.

The Friedrichs Case

The corporate media and right-wing ideologues then dialed up the rhetoric aimed at these low-wage taxpayers against the “privileges” enjoyed by public-sector workers on their dime, that is, their tax dollar. Now, union dues are being interpreted as “speech” by the courts. The latest volley in this battle, *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, is now in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. It revolves around the issue of “fair share,” or agency fees charged to nonmembers represented by a union to cover the basic expenses of representing nonmembers in contract negotiations and disciplinary proceedings, services which the union is legally obliged to provide.

“Right to work” refers to states, sectors, or industries where the unions are barred from collecting these fees, but not freed from the obligation to represent the free-riders. In the 2014 case, *Harris v. Quinn*, the Supreme Court ruled that unions do not have the right to assess agency fees from home health workers in Illinois, but the ruling did not extend beyond that specific group of workers. The decision in the *Friedrichs* case, due by June, is expected to be applied to unionized public workers in the 25 states where fair share is still legal, reversing the Court’s 1977 decision *Abood*

The elimination of agency fees will significantly undermine public-sector unions: their ability to negotiate contracts, to represent their members, and to organize new workers. Those who argue that the elimination of agency fees will strengthen the unions by forcing them to work harder for nonmember support conveniently ignore the facts: the South and Southwest have been largely “right-to-work” since shortly after the 1947 implementation of the Taft-Hartley Act prohibited the “closed shop,” and they remain largely union-free to this day, despite the heroic efforts of workers and unions there.

Billionaires on the Offensive

These campaigns against workers and their unions enjoy near-limitless funding from billionaire ideologues like the infamous Koch brothers, supporters of Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker. The richest man in Illinois, Kenneth Griffin, is a sponsor of Illinois Republican Governor Bruce Rauner, whose agenda includes eliminating public-sector unions’ fair share payments and establishing local anti-union “right-to-work” zones all over the state, cutting out prevailing wages in public construction contracts, empowering local officials to tear up public workers’ bargaining rights, and gutting the state’s workers’ compensation laws.

Agency fees are not the right’s only target. Pensions are currently in their crosshairs, threatening the well-being of seniors in states like Illinois and California and cities like Philadelphia. And not just public pensions: a provision in the federal spending bill for 2015 allows multi-employer pensions to cut the benefits of retirees currently collecting benefits, historically considered sacrosanct.

Nor do the threats come simply from the right. The Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) pushed by President Obama and the Chamber of Commerce, and up for a vote in Congress in coming months, poses a direct threat to union jobs, labor protections, and the environment.

What Is to Be Done?

Resistance develops in the space between expectations and the experience of reality. While the media touts the economic recovery and record corporate profits, income and wealth disparities have reached levels not seen since the 19th century Robber Barons smoked cigars in top hats and tail coats. Fast-food workers in New York City plunged into that void in December 2012 with the bold demand for a \$15 an hour minimum wage and a union.

continued on p. 11

The Battle of Wisconsin

A Socialist Alternative Publication

By George Martin Fell Brown

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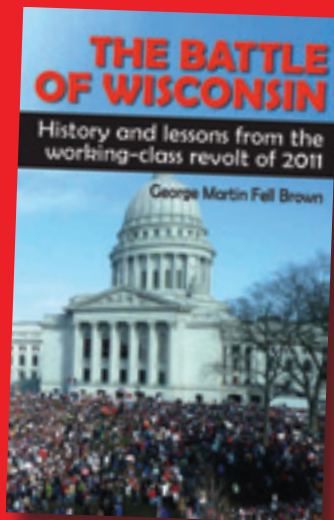


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Socialism Means Internationalism

Sanders' Foreign Policy Falls Short

Tony Wilsdon and Tom Crean

It is beyond question that the key issues which have attracted millions of ordinary people to Bernie Sanders' campaign center around his call for a "political revolution against the billionaire class."

But, inevitably, the Democratic debates have also featured extensive discussion on foreign policy, especially in the wake of the ISIS-inspired attacks in Paris and San Bernardino. Socialist Alternative has frequently pointed out that we have serious disagreements with Sanders on foreign policy, but the sharpening of the political debate makes it necessary for us to comment on this at greater length. However, in doing this it must also be acknowledged that, to date, most progressive workers and youth see not so much Sanders' deficiencies in foreign policy as the contrast with Hillary Clinton's record.

Sanders vs. the Warmonger

As Sanders has frequently pointed out, Clinton enthusiastically supported the disastrous invasion of Iraq in 2003, whereas he didn't. She was also one of the architects of the bombing campaign in Libya – which, as we warned, would inevitably lead to the country's fragmentation and create an opening for right-wing Islamic forces, now including ISIS.

Clinton is a warmonger who has, apparently, never met a military adventure she didn't like. Progressive workers and youth – a large part of the Democratic Party's base – understand that U.S. intervention in the Middle East has solved nothing for the people of the region and has not made ordinary Americans "safer." They are opposed to endless war and, therefore, while Hillary believes foreign policy is her strong suit, her positions are not attractive to large parts of the party base.

Socialists Oppose Corporate Interests Overseas

A genuinely socialist foreign policy must be an extension of a socialist domestic policy based on fighting for the needs of the working class. Capitalism has an insatiable drive to maximize profits. This results in exploitation of labor and extraction of raw materials at the cheapest possible price, caring nothing for the effects on the environment. This drive for profits extends beyond national borders and is played out on a world scale in competition and conflict between different capitalist powers.



Presidential debates have brought foreign policy issues to the fore.

Under capitalism, so-called "national interests," once you strip away the rhetoric, are really "national corporate interests." This is demonstrated in so-called free-trade policies which are written behind closed doors by corporate lobbyists and "foreign aid" which is tied to goods from specific national corporations. To Sanders' credit, he strongly opposes corporate free-trade deals like the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

But Sanders does not extend his opposition to anti-worker trade agreements to exposing the underlying corporate interests behind U.S. foreign policy. Instead, he focuses on opposing "unilateral" action by the U.S. and urges partnership with other capitalist powers. For example, he backed the U.S./U.N. invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in 2001, now in its 15th year with no end in sight.

A socialist foreign policy should be based on clarifying the naked class interests behind U.S. foreign policy and supporting the struggles of working people internationally. As capitalism operates internationally, so will working-class struggles have to be international to be successful.

Imperialism and Syria

Sanders is right to call the Syria conflict an "incredible quagmire." Each major power, from Russia to Saudi Arabia, is pushing its own interests. U.S. foreign policy is based on maintaining its rapidly declining influence in the area and is in no way based on the interests of the Syrian people caught between the twin barbarisms of Assad's regime and ISIS. Sanders, unfortunately, backs Obama's bombing campaign while echoing a number of capitalist commentators who do not see the point of putting U.S.

combat troops into Syria. Rather, he talks about "a battle for the soul of Islam" and developing a coalition of nations – including Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Jordanian monarchy – to fight ISIS.

But a coalition of dictatorships – many of which, like Saudi Arabia and Iran, have actively helped to stoke the sectarian tensions which are now deepening the crisis – is only a recipe for endless conflict. As we pointed out a couple months ago:

"The working class and poor farmers of Iraq and Syria and the Kurdish people can only rely on their own self-organization to put an end to this nightmare.

"United nonsectarian self-defense of threatened communities and minorities is vital and can be an important lever through which a grassroots movement fighting for socialist change can be rebuilt.

"By standing uncompromisingly against all imperialist forces, local reactionary regimes, and sectarian death squads – and supporting the rights of self-determination for all communities – such a movement could find mass support among the regional and international working class."

Sanders' mistaken foreign policy reveals his political limitations. Nevertheless, it does not negate the enormously progressive aspects of his campaign as it politicizes millions of workers and young people. But what is critical, as we have consistently pointed out, is to use this campaign to begin building a new political force, independent of all corporate interests, to represent the interests of the 99%. It will be an essential task for a new left party in this country to expose the corporate nature of U.S. foreign policy and adopt a clear policy of solidarity with the struggle of workers and the oppressed around the world. ✪

Sanders Calls for Clean Energy Revolution

Jess Spear

In contrast to the nonbinding emission reduction targets set at the Paris Climate Summit, Bernie Sanders has announced a plan to reduce U.S. emissions by 40% by 2030 and 80% by 2050. His plan includes a tax on major polluters, putting a price on carbon emissions and investing in energy efficiency, public transit, and renewable energy.

This plan is estimated to create 10 million living-wage jobs in the renewable energy sector, cutting across the argument used by fossil fuel corporations that it's either jobs or climate action. Importantly, it also includes a rebate system to offset the increased costs on consumers and proposals for a just transition whereby workers would be assisted as they move out of oil and gas jobs.

Challenging the Billionaire Class

At the heart of the Sanders climate plan is taking on the fossil fuel corporations that have used their enormous power to increase their profits, putting us all at risk. Sanders would ban fossil fuel lobbyists in the White House and end the billions in subsidies granted to fossil fuel corporations every year. There is no case to be made that fossil fuels should be protected, subsidized, or supported in any way.

All of this would represent a tremendous step forward.

Yet even with lobbying banned and subsidies ended, the fossil fuel industry would still be left with tremendous resources to defend and maintain their monopoly on energy. They will use these resources to mount a ferocious fight-back against any regulation, delaying our ability to rapidly move to renewable energy. In fact, the recent lawsuit filed by TransCanada against the U.S. government for \$15 billion shows how corporations will use any means necessary to stymie government regulations and protect their profits.

This poses the question of how to defeat these corporate oil and gas giants. The whole past period has seen close collaboration between both major parties and the fossil fuel industry.

Ending the power of the big fossil fuel corporations and investing in a just transition away from fossil fuels will take a movement of working people and the building of a new political party of the 99%. With our own party, backed by grassroots movements, we could take the resources, tools, and factories of the energy industry out of the hands of CEOs and owners and bring them into public ownership, under the democratic control of workers and the community. Once profits are removed from the equation, we can democratically plan out how to use the least amount of fossil fuels necessary in the transition to 100% clean renewables. ✪

Spanish Elections Mark Shift to the Left

Cora Bergantinos Crespo,
based on report from **Socialismo Revolucionario (CWI in Spain)**

The Spanish elections on December 20 registered a fundamental change in the political situation and composition of the parliament. This change has been building through mass mobilizations and social movements fighting austerity over the past years, and it was also reflected in the local elections in May, when left Popular Unity candidates won in Barcelona, Madrid, and elsewhere.

The most important aspect of the change reflected in these elections is the breaking of the two-party system: the two main traditional parties, the right-wing People's Party (PP) and ex-social democratic Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) together lost over 5 million votes. While the PP lost over 3.6 million votes, PSOE also had its lowest vote since the end of the Franco dictatorship. On the other hand, two new parties erupted into parliament, including the right-wing populist Ciudadanos (Citizens) but especially Podemos (We Can) which, with its anti-austerity and "anti-system" argument, won over 20% of the vote and 69 seats, together with its allies.

Podemos' Comeback

Podemos enters the national parliament with over five million votes in its first general election. When Podemos was launched in October 2014 as an alternative to austerity, it was polling even higher than the PP and PSOE. The capitulation of Syriza – the left-wing anti-austerity coalition in Greece that accepted the austerity measures imposed by the European markets in the summer, along with the appearance of Citizens – cut across this momentum. Since then, Podemos has been shifting its rhetoric rightward.

However, the skillful performance of Podemos' leader, Pablo Iglesias, in TV debates, as well as the strong intervention of key social movement leaders, all contributed to the current partial recovery. In the end, Podemos came very close to PSOE, which was only about 340,000 votes ahead of it in second place. Considering the decline in the initial enthusiasm, the effect of Syriza's betrayal, and the rightward shift of their politics, Podemos' result in the elections are no doubt a success.

Pro-independence sentiment has been growing in Spain, especially in Catalonia, largely due to the rejection of the austerity imposed by the PP government. In 2013, more than one million rallied demanding independence from the Spanish state. Thus, it's not surprising that in Catalonia, "En Comú



Podemos came in third with 20.66% and 69 seats in parliament in December, 2015.

Podem," the list supported by Podemos as well as the United Left and others, was the biggest party, in a historic victory. Similar left alliance lists came in second place in Galicia and Valencia: both traditional fortresses of the PP.

These results show that Podemos won its best results in lists where a genuine uniting of forces, including the left and workers' organizations, took place – as Socialismo Revolucionario, affiliated to the Committee for a Workers International supported by Socialist Alternative, has consistently advocated. This was also demonstrated by the experience of May's local and regional elections. Building such unity now in the struggle against austerity is the urgent need of the hour.

Volatile Situation

The perspectives for the next government are very open, given the volatility of the situation. While PP and PSOE are still the two major forces in parliament, both need to create a coalition in order to form a government. It cannot be ruled out that new elections will be called if neither party succeeds. It is most likely that any government will be a minority government and will be inherently unstable.

This situation must be taken advantage of by the left and working-class movement to increase the level of struggle and mobilization against the new government, not only in defensive but also offensive struggles to win back rights and living standards which have been lost in the last years.

It is important that the left does not ignore the capitalist, pro-austerity character that a new PSOE government will have (though less severe and brutal than that of the PP). Thus,

while Podemos and other left forces may be correct to call for the formation of an alternative government to kick out the PP, they must not enter the governing coalition: the PSOE leadership is firmly pro-capitalist, and doing so would mean having to take responsibility for pro-capitalist policies. They must retain political independence and, in return for supporting a PSOE government from the outside, demand real, concrete concessions that satisfy the needs of the workers and the poor. And if such a government continues to implement austerity and attack the working class, they must be prepared to withdraw their support and bring it down.

The most important way to get concessions from a minority government – be it PSOE or PP – is through struggle on the streets and in the workplaces. Such governments are much less stable and easier to pressure – or ultimately, bring down – through mobilizations.

The experience of Syriza in Greece has shown the limits for a reformist government to act within the capitalist system if it is not willing to take bold socialist measures to break with the capitalist austerity agenda.

It is, therefore, necessary to prepare the working class and the left for taking power into the hands of the majority through new democratic organizations armed with a program of democratic public ownership to plan the economy in the interests of society rather than the big companies and the super-rich, and of respect for the rights of all peoples. This must include organizations such as Podemos and United Left, as well as social movements and trade unionists, and it must be based on real democracy from below, in the formulation of a far-reaching program as well as the election of leaders and candidates. ✪

Will Worldwide Downturn Spread to the U.S.?

Tom Crean, Editor of Socialist Alternative

The new year has seen enormous volatility in world financial markets, including in the U.S. The slowdown in the Chinese economy is accelerating and dragging the world economy toward the edge of another downturn. Many countries have not properly recovered from the previous downturn in 2007-08, which opened up the deepest crisis of the capitalist system since the 1930s.

The analysis in the financial pages seems almost universally gloomy. Especially worrying to financial commentators is the threat of competitive currency devaluations in East Asia, driven by the steady slide in the Chinese renminbi. The collapse in commodity prices – also driven by the Chinese slowdown – is already hurting a number of "emerging" economies which had experienced growth on the basis of producing raw materials for the Chinese market.

A key question is: What impact will these international developments have on the U.S. economy? Despite the significant growth in – largely low wage – jobs in the U.S., growth remains low. Given the weaknesses in the U.S. economy and the seriousness of the situation internationally, there is a real possibility of the first recession in the U.S. caused exclusively by developments in the world economy.

A major problem for the capitalist elite in the U.S. and internationally is that they have fewer tools to deal with a serious downturn than they did in 2007-08, when they were able to coordinate a response and prevent a full-scale collapse. For example, major central banks have pushed down interest rates to 0% or near 0% and would not be able to push them down further.

Another economic catastrophe could temporarily shock the working class; however, it would also lead to a much deeper radicalization and raise the potential to build massive movements to challenge capitalism.

We will be covering every phase of these developments and the resistance of working people to the inevitable attempts to make them pay for the crisis of the capitalist system.

In addition to *SocialistAlternative.org*, go to *SocialistWorld.net*, website of the Committee for a Workers International, which unites working-class activists and youth in 45 countries. ✪

Interview With an App-Based Driver

How to Organize Uber



Don Creery works full-time driving for Uber. He is one of the leaders of the App-Based Drivers Association (ABDA) in Seattle, which is affiliated with Teamsters Local 117. In this excerpt from the longer interview that appears on SocialistAlternative.org, he tells what it is like to organize independent contractors.

SA: What are the hardest aspects to working for Uber or Lyft?

Creery: Having to do it twice a day. ... I'll start the morning rush hour, I'm fresh, and the morning rush hour doesn't seem to be as stressful. ... Now, because of the rate cuts, I oftentimes have to work the afternoon rush hour, as well. Prior to the rate cuts, I would've logged out by then. ... I'm tired, I'm more likely to get stressed out, I'm more likely to make a mistake in the afternoon than in the morning rush hour. I shouldn't be driving two rush hours in a day. That's the hardest aspect: the hours are longer for driving jobs.

SA: How did you get involved in organizing drivers?

C: In August 2014 was when the rate cut happened. August 3: now, I had been clearing like \$150 easily a day, sometimes \$200, never working 8 hours; I worked all day that day, I got 18 rides, and my gross, before Uber got their cut, was \$118. I was fairly stunned. I looked at the mile-rate and was stunned. It was always there, but when you're making a higher rate of pay, it's something you don't pay attention to; it's baked in, you don't worry about it. ... So, when the rate cut happened, I [called up the Teamsters].

The Teamsters decided that Seattle would be the place to focus the energy [around ride-share drivers] because Teamsters 117 is the largest local to the west of the Mississippi, has the most resources, people, etc. There was also the feeling that the demographic, due to [passing the \$15 minimum wage] and the makeup of the city council was very amenable to this being the place that it would be. The goal would be a collective bargaining bill.

SA: Talk about how you recruited drivers to ABDA.

C: Oh lord. Go up to Broadway and see if cars that were parked had the Uber emblem or the Lyft moustache. Or someone is sitting there

and waiting and just going up and knocking on the window and asking, "Are you an Uber or Lyft driver?" Talking to them. Starbucks on Olive Way, drivers hang out there. Starbucks on 23rd and Jackson, drivers hang out there. Slow, tedious process: you don't get many people that way, but that's the alternative we had to do. We hung out at mosques when services let out; that actually worked a little bit better. It'd let out and we'd get like three or four people who signed up for more information.

Then Uber really made this whole thing happen. In February [2015], they brought us all together to make this announcement about "rate changes," which we all knew was gonna be [further] rate cuts. Rates were cut another 25 cents a mile. Next thing I hear, there are meetings being planned; the Teamsters are being flooded with phone calls. We had a series of meetings with 75-100 people at each meeting. That was where it really took off. We had great meetings.

SA: What did you win?

C: The collective bargaining [law] is going to give us the right to negotiate for better pay and negotiate for a lot of small things, like the driver-rating system being not automated. Right now, it's an automated system where your rating goes below a certain level and you're automatically deactivated. There can be reasons for that. Maybe you're a driver that's Muslim [and get] called a terrorist and told, "go back to Arabia," but no one's going to put on their low rating as a reason, "I don't like Muslims." They're just not going to put anything.

SA: What message do you have for other app-based drivers or independent contractors around the country?

C: You have to get organized. We're really, really vulnerable in these jobs, and that's the whole idea. You're standing by yourself and it's NOT working. You have to get organized. Right now, it's about drivers, but the whole intent is long term: to address the independent contractor situation. California is working on a statewide bill to be applied to all independent contractors. ☺



Boston: Anti-Pipeline Movement Heats Up

Andy Moxley and Seamus Whelan

For over a year now, the Boston neighborhood of West Roxbury has been leading a struggle to resist the building of the West Roxbury Lateral (WRL) high-pressure gas pipeline. Several important victories have since turned the battle against WRL into a flashpoint for the wider struggle against corporate destruction of the planet in New England. Socialist Alternative members have played a key role in the grassroots organizing efforts of Stop the West Roxbury lateral pipeline (SWRL).

The WRL pipeline is proposed to carry gas at pressures almost twice that of the pipeline that exploded in San Bruno, CA, in 2010. An explosion could wipe out 30 blocks of West Roxbury, a dense residential neighborhood. Spectra Energy is building this pipeline in order to export natural gas at high prices to foreign markets.

The grassroots community group leading the struggle, SWRL, got its start just over a year ago. Socialist Alternative has participated in these efforts since its inception, helping to organize mass public meetings, rallies, marches, and vigils, putting local politicians on the spot. Once construction began, SA members and others put forward the need for direct action in conjunction with the movement to stop the pipeline. At this point, dozens of people have been arrested, slowing construction's pace. The Mass Nurses Association and Mass Teachers Association have joined the fight against the pipeline, working alongside environmental and faith groups to stop the construction of the WRL.

The Democratic-Party-led local government has been forced to respond, though without the necessary urgency. For

example, when Spectra Energy took the City of Boston to court to push through the pipeline, the city establishment merely asked them to change the route instead of canceling the project. This was seen as a failure, and local politicians continue to avoid the issue.

However, grassroots organizing is getting the goods. Local pressure stopped Spectra's street-digging construction a week earlier than planned. In fact, Spectra Energy has admitted that the biggest obstacle it faces in implementing plans for regional pipelines is local community campaigns that have sprung up to oppose them. The West Roxbury campaign has proven to be one of the most determined and combative struggles against the fossil fuel industry's destructive plans.

Socialist Alternative argues that alliances and coalitions between community campaigns, the environmental movement, and labor unions need to be strengthened and expanded. Unaccountable energy regulatory bodies like FERC and ISO-NE need to be scrapped. They should be replaced by agencies that are democratically run and controlled by energy workers and the community. These agencies would organize and regulate energy in the public interest rather than for private profiteering at our expense.

The 99% should challenge establishment politicians that speak louder for big energy and the 1% than they do for ordinary people by running our own candidates against them. This could serve as a basis for a new party of the 99%, independent of big business. Instead of for-profit pipelines, we need a system that can plan a future for working people based on clean energy and sustainable union jobs for all workers. ☺

Movie Review

The Big Short

Tom Barnat

The Great Recession cost seven million working people their homes and ushered in a new era in which poverty wages and job insecurity are the new normal. Against that background, it is a strange choice to base a story about the housing crash on a sympathetic cinematic portrait of hedge fund whiz-kid hedge-fund managers. Yet through its narrative of greedy mortgage bankers, Wall Street speculators, and bond agencies, *The Big Short* brings an understanding of the collapse to a mass audience, while exposing the underlying corruption of the financial system.

We follow Michael Burry, Mark Baum, and Ben Rickert – Christian Bale, Steve Carell, and Brad Pitt, respectively – as they investigate the subprime loan bubble and the securitization of those loans which will eventually take the economy off a cliff. The movie presents a story of people who made enormous sums of money by “shorting” – that is, gambling on a drop in value – of the subprime mortgage market in 2006-2008. Brad Pitt states the most honest assessment of these sharks when he says, “You just bet against the American economy, and if you win, hardworking people will suffer, so try not to celebrate.”

Mortgage Speculation Runs Rampant

There are two stories here. The first is the orgy of speculation on real estate, which led banks to sell mortgages to buyers that the banks knew would be at considerable risk of defaulting, many of them working-class and people of color. One way this was done was through the infamous “adjustable rate mortgage” (ARM), which could double or triple payments after an initial period. Then, as people began to fall behind on their payments, the same banks that had given them ridiculously easy terms at the outset now

swooped in and foreclosed on their homes.

The second story is how, by securitizing these mortgages, they made a bad problem much, much worse. Part of the drive to push as many mortgages as possible was so they could be “bundled” into a “mortgage-backed security” (MBS) and then sold as a bond. Once the banks started selling ARMs by the thousands, these bonds became a mix of a thin layer of good mortgages covering over these subprime mortgages. Eventually, the bonds became worthless. Although ratings agencies were supposed to assess these securities for the garbage they were, they essentially colluded with Wall Street to hide the actual state of affairs.

The Big Banks Ignore the Problem

The tension of the movie is sustained by the realization of Michael Burry and others that these securities are junk and that, the second the housing market starts to slow down, the inability to pay investors will cause a complete collapse in the financial markets. The protagonists are repeatedly astonished and disgusted with the incompetence and venality of day traders, investment managers, and ratings analysts.

Yet though Burry and Baum realize the catastrophe facing the housing market, their actual role is finding a way to earn huge amounts of money off the collapse. The major device they use is the credit default swap. In a credit default swap, the buyer of the swap pays the seller any payments due up to the bond’s maturity date. In return, the seller agrees that, if the bond defaults, the seller will pay the buyer its full value plus interest. Burry and friends use this method to buy up securities they know will default, and wait for the inevitable payoff.

Although we are clearly supposed to be sympathetic to these fund managers, the film shows these parties pocketing a handsome payoff.



The inevitable human suffering is essentially an afterthought, shown briefly through one wrenching sequence of families living out of their cars.

The film is entertaining and will hopefully draw a mass audience, but there is a level of critique it does not really achieve. And that is a core element of capitalism itself: the constant drive for more profit at any cost. If that is achieved by turning people’s hard-earned mortgages into worthless commodities and foreclosures, so be it.

In one of the final scenes, the narrator spins a fantasy of banks being broken up, Wall Street execs going to jail, and regulation being put in place to prevent further crashes – only to say at the end, “just kidding.” As the film hints, nothing has really changed, as unsustainable debt levels, mortgage-backed securities, and too-big-to-fail banks are still in place, showing the complete inability of capitalism to regulate itself. ☹

“Right-To-Work”

continued from p. 7

Low-wage workers across the country took up the call, walking off the job and risking arrest in national days of action.

With militarized police murdering black men and women, seemingly leaving them without recourse, black youth jumped into that void when they refused to back down and go home in Ferguson, New York City, Baltimore, Minneapolis, Chicago, and elsewhere.

Budget cuts, layoffs, privatization, and the attacks on public-sector unions – specifically their right to strike – combined to create a perfect storm in public education. In 2012, Chicago teachers forged a coalition with students and parents and struck. This December, they again voted overwhelmingly to authorize a strike, if it becomes necessary. Seattle teachers struck for a week in September and won significant gains!

There are also courageous struggles for immigrant rights, in defense of women’s reproductive rights, and for gender equality and LGBTQ rights, but a fighting labor movement is critical to uniting all these struggles with the social power of working people into a mighty challenge to corporate rule. A new leadership needs to be built which can transform unions into fighting organizations. This must also include organizing for an independent working-class political party. Kshama Sawant’s election and re-election as a socialist city councilmember in Seattle show what can be done on the local level. This should be replicated in cities and states across the country. Now, Bernie Sanders’ campaign is engaging hundreds of thousands new to politics, and we must make the most of this opportunity to create a new organization in its wake. As a first step, the union movement needs to unite with activists from other movements to put up a determined public struggle to defeat TPP and the huge attack on union rights represented by the *Friedrichs* case. ☹

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

In Your Area

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PO Box 150457
Brooklyn, NY 11215
(206) 526-7185
info@SocialistAlternative.org
facebook.com/SocialistAlternativeUSA
Twitter: @SocialistAlt

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PORTLAND, OR
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TACOMA, WA
(253) 355-4211
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INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

Socialist Alternative is also in political solidarity with the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), a worldwide socialist organization in 47 countries, on every continent. Join us!
CANADA
(604) 738-1653
contact@socialistalternative.ca
www.socialistalternative.ca
QUÉBEC
info@AlternativeSocialiste.org
www.AlternativeSocialiste.org

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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The Poisoning of Flint

Philip Snyder, Grand Rapids

A state of emergency has been declared in the city of Flint, Michigan. A belated response to a severe lead contamination of the city's drinking water - which itself was the result of a bid to save money no matter what the human costs by an unelected emergency manager. Despite the protests of city residents, the lead crisis went unaddressed for nearly a year. This is too little, too late for the residents of Flint - especially infants and young children - who now face lifelong health problems, including brain damage, stunted development, behavioral troubles, and anemia. There is no cure for lead poisoning.

Flint, once known for being the home of General Motors, is predominantly African American and 40.1% of Flint's 102,000 citizens are living in poverty. Republican Governor Rick Snyder used the recession and the fiscal crises of cities like Detroit and Flint as an excuse to attack public sector workers and appoint emergency financial managers in these communities. The role of these emergency financial managers is to ensure that the already wealthy city bondholders see

a return on their investment, and to do this they are given powers that override elected officials and signed union contracts.

The contamination began in April 2014, when Flint changed its municipal system to source water from the polluted Flint River. So intent was the Governor and his emergency manager on cutting the budget that the city did not take steps to account for the corrosiveness of Flint River water, and lead from Flint's aging pipes leached into the water supply as a direct result.

The entire crisis could have been prevented with the simple addition of an anti-corrosive agent to the treatment process - an incredibly cheap additive that is used by every municipal water system - but this basic safety measure was discarded as an unnecessary cost. Cynically, water rates were raised to be among the highest in the nation, and today Flint residents are still being charged for that poisoned water.

Even though Flint residents began complaining about the color, taste, and smell of their tap water almost immediately and articles exposing the water's problems began appearing as early as October 2014, no

official action was taken to address these issues until September 2015. Indeed, Governor Snyder may be apologizing now, but emails released by his office show an administration seeking first to deny the situation and then deflect blame.

Austerity is Life Threatening

The poisoning of Flint shows that budget-cutting and austerity is literally life threatening. It shows the callous indifference of the right wing establishment to the lives of black and poor people. And it shows the need for us to get rid of the entire rotten capitalist system, which again and again creates such disasters.

Once the scandal fully broke it became impossible to ignore. Small demonstrations were organized by Flint residents - many calling for Governor Snyder's resignation. Bernie Sanders echoed this call at a recent debate and Socialist Alternative agrees. In fact, all those responsible should go to jail.

Defeating the right in Michigan will require building a sustained movement against Snyder, the emergency managers, and their

vicious austerity agenda. It must be a movement that unites working people and youth, unions and the unorganized, both on the streets and by running independent candidates apart from the two parties of big business. Only through this type of movement can we mount an effective challenge to the politicians who created, or even allowed, this mess to occur.

Working people are asking: "How could this have been averted? What recourse do I have against such a state government?" It is true that this would have been far less likely to occur in a wealthy community. It would have also been far less likely to occur when the labor movement and especially the United Automobile Workers, which is centered in Michigan, were at their height. At that time working people had an organized force that the bosses had no choice but to respect. Today the labor movement is a shadow of its former self. This is the force that must be rebuilt to create a just, democratic system where the lives of poor and minority people are valued. ☺