

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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# REBUILD A FIGHTING LABOR MOVEMENT

MOBILIZE TO DEFEAT JANUS

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# WHAT WE STAND FOR

## Fighting for the 99%

- ✦ Raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour, as a step toward a living wage for all.
- ✦ Free, high quality public education for all from pre-school through college. Full funding for schools to dramatically lower student-teacher 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 towards fully socialized medicine.
- ✦ 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.
- ✦ Create living-wage union jobs for all the unemployed through public works programs to develop mass transit, renewable energy, infrastructure, healthcare, education, and affordable housing.
- ✦ For rent control combined with massive public investment in affordable housing.
- ✦ A guaranteed decent pension for all. No cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid!
- ✦ 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.
- ✦ Break the power of Wall Street! For public ownership and democratic control of the major banks.
- ✦ 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. Massive public investment in renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies to rapidly replace fossil fuels.
- ✦ A major expansion of public transportation to provide low fare, high-speed, and accessible transit.
- ✦ Democratic public ownership of the big energy companies, retooling them for socially necessary green production. A "Just Transition" for all workers in polluting industries with guaranteed re-training and new living-wage jobs.

## Equal Rights for All

- ✦ Fight discrimination based on race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, and all other forms of prejudice. Equal pay for equal work.
- ✦ Black Lives Matter! 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.

- ✦ Defend immigrant rights! Immediate, unconditional legalization and equal rights for all undocumented immigrants.
- ✦ 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. At least 12 weeks of paid family leave for all. For universal, high quality, affordable and publicly run child care.
- ✦ Fight discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ community, and all forms of homophobia and transphobia.

## Money for Jobs and Education, Not War

- ✦ End the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. Bring all the troops home now!
- ✦ Slash the military budget. No drones. Shut down Guantanamo.
- ✦ Repeal the Patriot Act, 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 environmental, civil rights, and women's campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the corporate parties.
- ✦ Unions and other 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 failed system. No to 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

## Evren Pallares Ó Laoghaire Customer Service Worker Worcester, MA

Growing up racially mixed, I experienced the United States in a unique way. Coming from a poor working class Irish-Italian family and an even poorer Afro-Puerto Rican family I was thrown into a game of mental hoops around my ethnic identity as both sides embraced and rejected me.

Despite the confusion I continued to accept both backgrounds. At a young age I learned from my family about the oppression and exploitation of the Puerto Ricans and Irish.

I saw it was the economic and political systems of the time, feudalism and then capitalism that was the root of the unjust colonization and occupation of Ireland and Puerto Rico. And it was these systems that created and funded TV shows, the press, and our education to push certain racist, sexist and classist narratives to justify and maintain capitalism.

Learning about the role of socialists and the working class in Irish revolutionary struggles exposed me to socialist ideas for seeking liberation from the oppressive nature of capitalism.

By the time I was 12, I had read the Communist Manifesto and argued for socialism in school.

In high school, I led the GSA, ran workshops as a peer leader at a queer community center, and became member of the Worcester Youth Pride Committee. I became



frustrated with how these corporate and liberal organizations didn't address the immediate needs of the queer community. On top of that, a refusal to address sex offenders and racism in the queer community caused me to leave to seek something more concrete, I met Socialist Alternative.

The socialist analysis of pushing for the the empowerment of the American working class to fight for higher wages, health care, education and public housing interested me. Supporting unions and community organizations to mobilize the working class and oppressed in a united front against capitalism was something I was itching to do and Socialist Alternative has been the perfect vehicle for me to do just that. Two years later I am still a committed member of Socialist Alternative, getting involved in Worcester's various union struggles and joining the movements for \$15, affordable housing and rent control, and making Worcester a sanctuary for immigrants. ✦

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# March 14: A Million Students Walk Out

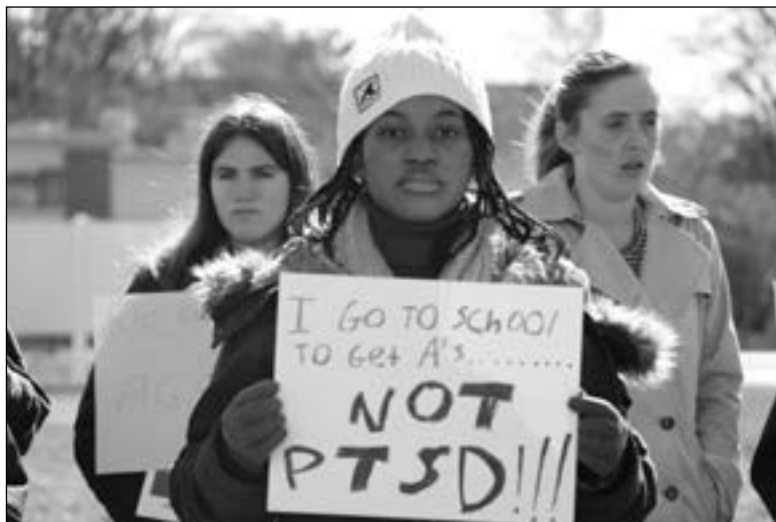
Keely Mullen

On March 14, nearly a million students walked out of school to say #Enough to gun violence. Following the horrific massacre at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL, students across the country have been walking out and demonstrating to demand their elected officials take action on gun control. In city after city, students walked out of class in a coordinated national day of action.

The movement has already won victories as state after state scrambles to pass gun control provisions to put an end to the protests. But there are no signs that students are slowing down in the coming weeks with massive demonstrations planned for March 24 and more walkouts and protests being called for April 20.

## School Repression

While many school administrations ended up supporting the protests, there were many instances where schools, and even police departments, tried to crack down. But these attempts have largely



Students in Hyattsville, MD.

backfired and only hardened the resolve of students to continue the fight.

At Pennridge High School in Pennsylvania where 200 students were given detention for their participation in the walkouts, students used their detention to stage a silent protest by wearing the names of the Parkland victims on their clothes and linking arms for the entire length of their detention. At Washington High School in Atlanta, students

were told they could not leave the school in protest, so instead 50 to 100 students on every floor of the school building knelt in the hallway, invoking the #TakeAKnee movement made popular by Colin Kaepernick. At Atlanta's Washington High School - the alma mater of Martin Luther King, Jr. - one student was quoted saying, "Dr. King carries a legacy even in death, so I feel as if it's an obligation to carry on what he wanted and what he was trying

to fight for and that's why this day is very important."

## Beyond Gun Violence

While these walkouts were called to fight the epidemic of gun violence in schools, it's clear from the on-the-ground reports from Socialist Alternative members that students are driven to fight back not only against gun violence, but inequality, racism, and sexism as well. Students were excited to talk to our members about the women's movement, the fight against police brutality, and the need to get corporate money out of politics.

While these young people have their anger squarely directed at the Republicans and the NRA who bankroll them, it is also clear they will not easily bend to attempts from the Democratic Party establishment to co-opt the movement. At the demonstration in Washington, D.C., students were seen clamoring over Bernie Sanders as he walked by, begging him to give a speech and thanking him for being an inspiration to them.

These national walkouts are further proof that the rising generation,

facing low wages, crushing student debt, political turmoil, and climate catastrophe, are prepared to fight back. While winning gun control measures at a national level would be a huge victory for this youth movement, these students have their sights set higher and are expressing a desire to fight back against all forms of violence, inequality, and oppression. One student, in discussing the March for Our Lives said, "This is not just about us. ... When we're together marching, this is not going to be different races, different generations - this is going to be a unified people standing together against those who are trying to ignore us."

- ✪ Ban the sale of all assault weapons;
- ✪ Background check the politicians! All NRA and corporate money out of politics;
- ✪ Demilitarize the police - stop the racist violence against black and brown communities;
- ✪ Medicare for all - mental and physical health care is a human right;
- ✪ Tax the rich and big business to fully fund our schools - guns are not school supplies. ✪

# Trump and Kim to Talk – Danger Still Acute

Stephan Kimmerle, Seattle

The prospect of direct talks between U.S. president Donald Trump and Kim Jong-Un, leader of North Korea, appears to have temporarily reduced the threat of a nuclear stand-off between the two countries. In October, Trump criticized his now fired Secretary of State Rex Tillerson via twitter for "wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man." Now he seems prepared for such a meeting.

These developments are leading to rising hopes from many ordinary people, despite the perception that the world is depending on two erratic, uncontrollable men who brag about their nuclear buttons.

## Provocations Continue

Yet at the same time, some of Trump's actions point in a different

direction. The new Secretary of State, former CIA director Mike Pompeo, is more hawkish toward Iran and North Korea. Pompeo insisted in March that the U.S. would not make any concessions to North Korea ahead of talks, but that Kim Jong Un must "continue to allow us to perform our militarily necessary exercises on the peninsula."

The military exercises between South Korea and the U.S. are planned to go ahead in late March and April. As recently as last August, tens of thousands of U.S. and South Korean troops conducted a sea, land and air drill.

These military maneuvers are not an invention by the Trump administration. These provocations and war preparations have been authorized by presidents from both parties, Democrats and Republicans. The aggressive approach goes back to World War II after which U.S. troops

were positioned in Korea to defend the interests of U.S. capitalism. This led to open war from 1950 to 1953.

Niall Mulholland points out: "Appalling as North Korea's weapon program is, it is nothing compared to the 7,000 nuclear warheads the U.S. superpower possesses. The U.S. is the only country to have ever used nuclear weapons, on the Japanese cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, in 1945" (*SocialistWorld.net*, 9/9/2017).

Mulholland describes the regime in North Korea as "a particularly grotesque form of Stalinism but its development has been strongly influenced by the decades-long military threat from U.S. imperialism."

## U.S. Troops Out of the Korean Peninsula!

At the same time, Trump is ramping up the tensions with China. New

rounds of tariffs are more explicitly targeted against the rising economic powerhouse threatening to detonate a global trade war. While up until now, Trump had appeared to have a less aggressive approach towards China to gain more support from Beijing in dealing with North Korea, he now seems to be moving towards throwing such considerations over board.

The chances are still high that either the summit between Trump and Kim will never happen or is just a prelude to a failure and new escalations. While Trump initially accepted the proposals of talks submitted by the South Korean government, the White House later on backpedaled. Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the president's press secretary, insisted that North Korea would need to take steps toward denuclearisation before any such meeting could go ahead.

Unfortunately, despite the talk about the Trump-Kim summit, the general direction still points in a very volatile and dangerous direction. A broader resistance must be built against Trump and the militarism that is ramped up not just by the Republicans, but Democrats as well. All U.S. troops must be immediately removed from the Korean peninsula. All sanctions, which only harm the working and poor people in North Korea, must be ended. Imperialist measures will not bring a lasting peace; they will only lead to new horrors. The only sustainable solution can be found in building a movement based on the common interests of the working people of the North Korea, South Korea, and the U.S. ✪

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# Democratic Socialists of America: How Do We Build the Left in 2018?

**Kshama Sawant, Seattle City Councilmember and leading activist of Socialist Alternative**

At their January meeting, the DSA National Political Committee discussed the Refoundation Caucus proposals outlined in their document "Towards an Independent Socialist Strategy for DSA Electoral Work." The Movement for a People's Party publicly supported these proposals and asked Socialist Alternative to do so as well. This article is our response.

A longer version of this statement (with hyperlinks to important articles) appears on [SocialistAlternative.org](http://SocialistAlternative.org) and other websites. We will be producing more articles about the ongoing important debates within DSA.

From the successful West Virginia teachers' strike to the hundreds of thousands of young people taking action against gun violence, social movements are re-emerging after a lull in struggle. Inspired by the 2016 Bernie Sanders campaign and seeing a capitalist system that offers no secure future, millions of youth are becoming interested in socialist ideas. Perhaps more importantly, tens of thousands of them have looked to join a socialist organization. The 2018 elections are an opportunity to give political expression to these movements, expose the timid big business nature of the Democratic Party leadership and build the socialist left.

While Socialist Alternative and other left groups have grown since Trump's election, by far the biggest gains in membership have been by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) who now have over 35,000 members nationally. As the midterm election approaches, there is excitement about getting more socialists elected to office, and indeed there is a big opening for anti-capitalist ideas. The dominant view in DSA is a pragmatic one - if you want to get socialists elected, the easiest way to do it is to run as Democrats.

This approach is attractive to many activists. If your goal is to



DSA, Socialist Alternative, and other socialists organized a contingent in Boston against the far right in August, 2017.

simply get elected, the obstacles for third parties and independents are quite daunting, but getting elected is not an end in itself. The bigger question is how can we win far-reaching socialist change? Once in office, socialists have faced enormous obstacles to achieving change. The establishment has many ways to apply pressure on politicians of all stripes including socialists. The key question is: "How do socialists use the openings to win elections now as part of a bigger struggle to win change?"

## Lessons from Seattle and Minneapolis

In 2013, I was elected in Seattle, and re-elected again in 2015, both times with "Socialist Alternative" next to my name on the ballot. With just a single socialist vote on the city council, we have been able to set the agenda on many issues: helping win the first \$15 an hour minimum wage in a major city, taxing the rich to build affordable housing, and expanding renters rights. Many of the successes in Seattle helped give confidence to growing movements across the country, particularly the \$15 an hour minimum wage. From the outset we were told that we should not run independently and that we should play down our socialist ideas. We didn't win victories for working people by building electoral coalitions with establishment

Democrats through "pragmatism" or compromising our principles.

Socialist Alternative also played a key role in winning the \$15 minimum wage in Minneapolis, the first Midwestern city to adopt it. Building on this victory, Socialist Alternative member Ginger Jentzen ran a powerful campaign for city council in Minneapolis. While Ginger was narrowly defeated electorally, the movement-building aspects of the campaign were successful. Our campaign moved affordable housing and corporate control of city politics from "side issues" to the center of political discussion. We built movements for housing justice while consciously building the socialist movement and gaining important experience. DSA is well-positioned to run at least five to ten strong campaigns like this throughout the country this year aiming not just at winning votes but also to popularize socialist ideas and build movements.

## DSA, the Democrats and Political Independence

The DSA is now a broad organization debating ideas and tactics. There are different groupings and tendencies within it. A potentially significant development has been the launch of the DSA Refoundation Caucus which Socialist Alternative welcomes even if we don't agree on all issues. Refoundation argues for DSA to adopt a more radical

program and run more independent candidates with an approach that can build movements of working people.

Refoundation can gain an echo because the thousands of new DSA activists breathing life into its branches are not tied to the politics of DSA's past. While DSA historically has been a fully reformist organization dominated by compromising union officials which consistently supported even the most conservative Democrats, this approach is broadly rejected by their new members. Many of DSA's new activists are pushing it to take a more boldly socialist and combative approach.

Building a socialist movement that can help win victories for working people will require a clear analysis of the Democratic Party. This is a party that is controlled by the most powerful corporate interests in the world. They would rather see the system stabilized than use the many opportunities they've had to build a real mass resistance to the rotten Trump regime. The Democratic Party leadership tells activists to "wait until November" and put all our efforts into getting them elected. We should reject this. Mass action from protests to civil disobedience and strikes is the best terrain to mobilize working people, the oppressed and youth to win battles and meaningful social change. Our electoral strategy should reflect this.

Socialists should engage with those looking to transform the Democrats, but should also warn about the fundamentally pro-capitalist nature of this institution and the political role it plays for the billionaire class. We need to boldly pose an alternative to ruling-class politics with viable independent socialist campaigns connected to the call for a new party of working people that can defeat the right-wing agenda once and for all.

Despite the fact that thousands of activists are currently getting involved in the effort to transform the Democrats into a left or "people's" party, sentiment for independent working-class politics is growing. For instance, Gayle McLaughlin, Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA) candidate for Lieutenant Governor in California is running an independent left campaign which Socialist Alternative has endorsed and we're excited about their aim to turn RPA into a statewide organization.

## How Socialists Can Win in 2018

We agree with the conclusion of the Refoundation Caucus that DSA should run its own viable independent socialist candidates rather than just endorsing the already-existing electoral efforts of left activists. DSA's looseness and unclear approach to elections wasn't a barrier to its growth in 2017, but now the DSA is faced with the question of what it does next. Most progressive workers and youth will be focused on defeating the Republicans in 2018, but the Democrats won't give effective expression to the movements developing due to their pro-capitalist nature.

Given this, there will be opportunities in carefully-selected districts to run viable socialist campaigns to give expression to the anger against inequality and right-wing attacks on our living standards. Five or more viable independent DSA campaigns in 2018 - drawing from the lessons of the most effective independent left efforts including those

continued on p. 11



Defend Seattle's Voice for Working People

# Police Lawsuit Aims to Silence Kshama Sawant

Ty Moore

Seattle's socialist City Councilmember Kshama Sawant is facing two defamation lawsuits, the aim of which is to silence an outstanding representative of working people and the oppressed. The first is from two police officers who shot and killed a black man in 2016. The other is from a landlord notorious for his tenants' complaints about conditions. A broad-based independent defense campaign is being prepared, which Socialist Alternative will fully support.

These lawsuits are part of a broader effort from a section of the establishment and the right wing to silence and criminalize dissent. There have been various bills brought forward around the country, in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests, imposing draconian penalties for different types of unauthorized protest. The Trump administration has also made clear its sympathy with these efforts.

## The Killing of Che Taylor

In February 2016, two policemen shot Che Taylor in Northeastern Seattle after he followed orders to get down and put his hands in the air. The two officers who shot Taylor were the closest of a number of policemen surrounding his car. A widely circulated police dash-cam video of the incident appears to show Taylor's hands in the air and moving to the ground, in compliance with officer commands, when he was shot at point-blank range. The police claimed Taylor was turning to pull a gun out of a holster as he got of the car but they have refused to release additional video they have of the "death scene." Taylor was hit by four of the seven bullets fired and died of his wounds.

No weapon was found on the victim. A weapon was later reported to be in the car, though even the official inquest found he was attempting follow orders, putting his hands in the air, when he was shot. However, as is almost always the case in these situations, the official inquest jury did not result in a decision to prosecute the police. One of officers, Spaulding, has now killed two people, the other victim being a mentally ill Native American killed during a domestic dispute.

## Defamation Lawsuits

Kshama Sawant, speaking at a protest outside City Hall, called the shooting by the officers a "brutal murder." In a brazen attempt to intimidate Sawant and all those challenging police violence in the black community, these two policemen then filed a defamation lawsuit against Sawant. A defamation suit can cost hundreds of thousands in legal fees – clearly beyond the pay of the average Seattle police



*Kshama Sawant marches with immigrants protesting the detention of Daniel Ramirez Medina, a DACA recipient.*

officer. Many speculate that the officers' lawsuit is being secretly bankrolled by a group or individual looking to silence BLM and Sawant.

The judge ordered the officers to provide more specifics for their allegations. Instead, the officers are trying to blackmail the City of Seattle into a settlement. Giving a deadline of April 2, the officers are threatening to re-file their lawsuit, this time against both the City and Sawant. We are demanding that the City not give in to this blackmail and not give a dime of taxpayer money to these cops. Any settlement would be used to cast a shadow of guilt over Kshama, creating a further chilling effect for anyone standing against police racism and killings.

"It's a very, very high bar" to prove defamation, says Emily Chiang, legal director at the ACLU of Washington, (*TheStranger.com*, 8/25/17). It seems that the real aims of those secretly bankrolling this lawsuit are to drag the case out in the media for as long as possible in order to attack and undermine Kshama in the court of public opinion. This is especially dangerous with a potentially tough re-election battle shaping up next year, as big business and the political establishment are determined to defeat the socialist in City Hall.

Meanwhile, Seattle landlord Carl Haglund has also launched a lawsuit accusing Kshama of defamation for calling him a "slumlord." In 2015, Kshama and tenant activists scored an important victory in forcing Haglund to back down from major rent hikes at one of his apartment buildings, which tenants complained was infested with mold, roaches, and rats among other code violations. Councilmembers Sawant and Nick Licata then

successfully passed an ordinance to outlaw rent hikes in Seattle for housing units with code violations. Haglund's lawsuit is a clear case of sour grapes.

## The Real Agenda

Kshama has a long record of speaking out against violence by the Seattle Police Department (SPD). This lawsuit seeks to silence her and to send a warning shot to other prominent voices who might speak up against police killings of black people. Unfortunately, there is a long history of similar intimidation tactics, from both police and other powerful forces seeking to defend the institutional racism which is hardwired into American capitalism. Recently, Colin Kaepernick – the NFL quarterback who sparked waves of anti-racist protests among athletes by taking a knee in solidarity with victims of police violence – has been blacklisted by the NFL.

The attitude of the establishment toward Kshama on this issue is exemplified by the Seattle Times which has failed to expose

the racism and abuses by the Seattle police. Yet, they have had four op-ed articles criticizing Sawant's objections to the way the SPD treats black and Latino people. The paper and a number of establishment figures campaigned, unsuccessfully, against the City's legal department agreeing to defend Sawant, which is standard practice in lawsuits against city officials for actions taken in their official capacity. Not surprisingly, the paper has also vehemently opposed Kshama's candidacy in 2013 and 2015.

## We Will Not Be Silenced

Our movement must continue to point out how police officers who use excessive force and kill people in situations where they are not in imminent danger are rarely prosecuted and even more rarely convicted. This is linked to the deep institutional racism still shaping law enforcement and government policies, resulting in communities of color bearing the brunt of police violence. Yet now, for stating that such policies are murderous, Kshama is under attack.

Local authorities have failed to act in defense of victims of police violence and hold the SPD accountable, despite a Department of Justice (DOJ) decree in 2012 related to excessive use of force by the department. The DOJ's report revealed that SPD officers systematically escalate situations when arresting people for minor offenses. Fifty percent of the cases where police used excessive force involved people of color – in a city that is 70% white.

Police violence is not only directed against blacks, but also immigrants, social activists, and labor activists. We need a broad defense campaign to bring these injustices to light and to help publicize other cases of police violence.

Violence and intimidation are part and parcel of the structural racism which is embedded in American capitalism. Brutal inequality and poverty, alongside the "war on drugs" and gentrification have devastated many communities. We need living-wage jobs, health care for all, and affordable housing rather than repression to address deep social problems. ☘

## Donate to the Kshama Solidarity Campaign!

Let's use this case to mobilize a huge public outcry in defense of democratic rights and free speech for anti-racist activists who dare to speak out in favor of black lives and against police brutality. We believe a powerful campaign can be organized to defend a rare elected politician who is prepared to expose the systematic racism and violence of the Seattle Police Department. ☘

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kshama-solidarity-campaign](http://www.gofundme.com/kshama-solidarity-campaign)







# Lessons Teacher

movement, point precisely to the class contradictions in Trump country. Led in part by leftists, the rank-and-file revolt won the support of the mass of the West Virginia working class in a stand-up fight with a reactionary, Republican-dominated legislature.

## How the Strike Was Organized

Despite mainstream media framing the wildcat strike as spontaneous, the strike began because of the work of dedicated rank-and-file teachers who had been organizing in their schools to politically and logistically prepare for a strike. The union leaders, not anticipating or wanting a strike, tried in vain to make gains through backroom negotiations with the state legislature. They failed, in the words of one teacher, to “do the job we are paying them to do: organize a strike.” When the strike began, they had little ability to contain it as action had been organized from the bottom up. As a result of this organizing and the experience of the strike, a new radical leadership is developing within the teachers’ unions in West Virginia, some of which identifies as socialist.

The teachers built solidarity with other school service personnel and, more broadly, through demanding a 5% raise for all public sector workers. The strike vote included non-union members and the community was actively involved in the strike. This built a strong movement that was able to stand up to hard-line tactics from the state legislature

and public attacks on the strike by Republican legislators. Through their own families, many teachers were connected to militant labor traditions of the past, especially of miners. Wearing red bandanas, teachers and fellow workers echoed the miners’ revolt in the battle of Blair Mountain in 1921. One teacher, echoing a common sentiment, said “if the strike is illegal, all that means is that we don’t have to play by the rules they made for us.”

## “Until They Sign It, Shut It Down”

On February 27, union leaders and the Democrats announced a deal to give teachers a 5% raise and all other public employees a 3% raise. They asked teachers to trust them to finalize the deal and go back to work.

The teachers were seething with anger. Faith in the politicians’ “guarantees” had evaporated and they saw that the status of PEIA was not addressed. As the union leaders failed to respond to workers’ questions about the deal, rank-and-file leaders encouraged teachers to stay on strike. One teacher expressed that, up until that point, he had been confident in the union leadership to lead the strike. But ordinary teachers lost faith as it became clear that the leadership was not able to deliver on its promises. The teachers voted the next day with their feet to continue the strike.

Community support was organized for the striking teachers and, as the state legislature attempted to punish the strikers by lowering the raise to 4%, teachers threatened to occupy the capitol building. The strike being already underway, teachers prepared over the weekend for the long haul, vowing to remain until their demands were met and to accept no

## Chuck Cannon

“Until they sign it, shut it down!” chanted teachers from all 55 counties across West Virginia at a demonstration in the capitol building on the eighth day of an illegal strike. The teachers, three quarters of them women, defied being called “dumb bunnies” and “red-necks” by right-wing politicians, showing up to the capitol building wearing bunny ears and red bandanas. Winning a 5% raise for all public employees in a “red” state that only recently passed right-to-work, the teachers exposed the mass anger in society against the neoliberal agenda of cuts to education, health care, and social services while handouts are given to the super rich and corporations.

While the mainstream media largely ignored the strike at the start, workers around the country followed the events in West Virginia on social media. The victory is likely to inspire an increased determination by working people to fight for a decent standard of living. In Oklahoma, one of the few states that pays teachers less than West Virginia, teachers are now planning a statewide walkout that may take place in April. There is also talk of strike action by teachers in Kentucky and Arizona. 3,000 teachers also went on strike in Jersey City, NJ.

As the Supreme Court considers the Janus case – an attempt to impose “right to work” on the whole public sector nationally and thereby dramatically undermine union strength – the teachers’ stand is all the more inspiring. This fight shows that working people and unions do not need to take these attacks as done deals – they can be beaten back!

After 30 years of retreat by the labor movement that has decimated union membership, West Virginia teachers have drawn a line in the sand. Massed in the capitol building they showed their unity and determination, chanting “Not 1, not 2, not 3, not 4, 55 are at your door!”

## Background

Third-lowest paid in the nation and facing

not only a teacher shortage but increasingly difficult challenges with many students coming from impoverished homes in the midst of a raging opioid epidemic, West Virginia teachers have had enough. Echoing the ghosts of past militant labor struggles, the strike was born out of a rank-and-file revolt and deep reservoirs of class consciousness. The teachers demanded a 5% pay hike for all public employees and for the legislature to address the ballooning costs of their health coverage through the Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA). They were represented by two unions: the West Virginia Educators Association (WVEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

West Virginia Governor Jim Justice, a billionaire coal baron, has, like previous governors, given huge tax breaks to extractive industries such as coal and natural gas. His administration has asked the working class of West Virginia to make sacrifices and accept austerity while he owes millions in back taxes in West Virginia as well as Kentucky.

Bernie Sanders won all 55 West Virginia counties in the 2016 primary. No wonder, since Hillary Clinton was quoted as saying “I’ll put coal miners out of business.” Clinton’s neoliberal policies in the general election were overwhelmingly rejected by voters. But without a credible pro-working-class candidate on the ballot, this opened the door to the right populism of Donald Trump. While anti-immigrant sentiment certainly played a significant role, West Virginians primarily voted for his promises of jobs and protectionist trade policies.

While much of the American liberal left concluded that the working class in states like West Virginia, which voted 68% for Trump, should be dismissed as one reactionary mass, Socialist Alternative explained the contradictory reality and the need for the labor movement to take a stand and build a movement that spoke to the common interests of all working people while also boldly fighting racism, nativism and sexism. The West Virginia teachers, less likely to vote Trump than the state as a whole, and also inspired by the emerging women’s





# Workers of West Virginia Strike



## Workers Defeat

## Republican Establishment

compromises or promises.

Seeing the rank and file revolting and the process of radicalization underway, union leaders and Democratic Party politicians attempted on the morning of March 6 to demobilize and end the strike yet again. Alongside the governor, they appeared before the striking teachers massed outside the state senate doors to announce that the strike had been won and that the teachers should go home.

Shouting from the crowd, many teachers asked to see this victory in writing. Teachers and other workers chanted “Words mean nothing, sign the bill!” Legislators explained that state senate rules demanded 24 hours for the finance committee to review the bill before they could sign it. The teachers responded with chants of “Until they sign it, shut it down!” Some teachers sat as many prepared to occupy the capitol building. After a few hours, all the red tape that Democrats had used as an excuse for why the bill could not be finalized disappeared and both houses had signed the bill. And while the 5% increase is a clear victory, the question of health care costs remains to be properly addressed. This could spark another phase of the struggle in coming months.

Before and during the strike, the Democrats played the role of middlemen between the teacher unions and the Republican-controlled legislature. They attempted to channel anger into the November election. While the call to get out and vote in November was taken up by the teachers, such as in the popular and frequent chant “In November, we’ll remember,” it will be important for the teachers and their allies of West Virginia to seriously discuss how their interests can be represented in the political arena. Beyond electoral politics, the strike shows that even with reactionary politicians in office, gains can be won through mass mobilizations and class struggle. Many teachers expressed that, after a week of empty promises, they trusted neither the Democrats nor the Republicans nor the union leadership to give them victory.

### What Solidarity Looks Like

The West Virginia strike showed the country what solidarity looks like. The \$320,000 plus raised online for the strike fund and the

hundreds of pizzas that rolled in on carts daily were the most visible examples. Union members from across the country

arrived to stand shoulder to shoulder with the teachers. The strongest show of solidarity came from the working class across the state of West Virginia itself.

Socialist Alternative members from Pittsburgh, Columbus, Philadelphia, and Seattle traveled to Charlestown to stand in solidarity with the striking teachers. We engaged in many conversations, listening to what workers had to say and expressing our support for their struggle. Teachers were more than happy to talk to us even though there was some suspicion of “socialism.” But once we established that we were there to listen and support their struggle, they were actually excited to speak with open socialists.

DSA members and other leftists on the ground in West Virginia and embedded in the unions deserve credit for helping to lead and radicalize the strike in opposition to the union leadership.

### Lessons for the Future

The key question coming out of this strike for the labor movement nationally is whether this is the beginning of a real turnaround after decades of retreat. It has to be acknowledged that there were specific factors that helped the teachers in West Virginia, including powerful traditions of solidarity and the serious shortage of qualified teachers. Given poor pay and the very difficult nature of the work, the authorities could not realistically threaten to fire and replace the teachers with people from outside the state.

The role of women in this fight can’t be understated. The West Virginia strike was led in part by radical women in the rank and file. Predominantly female workforces such as teachers

and nurses have been on the forefront of militant labor struggles over the last period. In the midst of a budding mass women’s movement around issues like equal pay and sexual harassment in the workplace, women in labor unions have a pivotal role to play in building a wider fightback by working people.

The momentum coming out of the West Virginia victory is a crucial opportunity to start a serious fightback of public sector workers, led by militant teacher unions. Twenty years of savage attacks on public education have left teachers across the country deeply discontented. Despite the unrelenting anti-teacher propaganda from the mainstream media, there is mass support for teachers when they stand up and go on strike as the Chicago teachers did in 2012 and Seattle teachers did in 2015. The West Virginia teachers have demonstrated, as those strikes did, how unionized teachers can mobilize much wider forces by championing the interests of their students. As the Chicago teachers said “Our working conditions are our students’ learning conditions.”

There are real obstacles facing insurgent forces in the public sector unions, including the leadership of the national teacher unions that has favored trying to use “political influence” rather than collective power to push back. In practice, this almost always means supporting and lobbying Democrats. But under Obama, the Democrats were in the lead in attacking teachers through high stakes testing, attacking seniority rights, and privatization schemes, including trying to replace public schools with charter schools.

The unions’ “political strategy” is completely bankrupt. Bernie Sanders’ 2016 campaign started to point the way toward a real political strategy for labor by refusing corporate

**“As long as people stick together, change happens.”**  
**Amy Fauber of Stonewall Jackson Middle School in Kanawha County**

# Seattle Wins Women's Shelter Funding

Tiffani McCoy

Over 300 activists attended a recent committee hearing organized by socialist Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant in response to the city's proposed cuts to women's shelters and services. The audience was a mixture of activists who became emboldened during the city budget struggle in fall 2017, community members who would have been affected by the proposed cuts, and some newer community members who were interested to find out why the booming city of Seattle was proposing these cuts to women's shelters and services. Within a week of this meeting, the cuts to these centers were reversed by the city council!

In the city of Seattle, where Jeff Bezos, the richest man in the world resides (and makes \$230,000 a minute), we also have one of the worst homelessness crises in the nation where longtime residents, especially persons and communities of color, are being displaced by rapidly rising rents and property values. Given that it's been over two years since a homelessness state of emergency was formally declared, it is outrageous that "progressive" city officials still continue to conduct business as usual, with platitudes and abstract plans to address this crisis sometime in the future. The city went in the wrong direction this past budget season by imposing a new request that every current provider of homeless/low-income housing and services rebid for their annual funding and show how many people they have

successfully transitioned into permanent housing. This formula is absolutely mad in a city with a severe lack of subsidized low-income housing to offer to folks seeking to leave the shelter system.

Kshama Sawant, who now serves as the chair of the Human Services Committee, did not follow a business-as-usual strategy in addressing these cuts. Instead of going along with the cuts, she and Socialist Alternative demanded that cuts be completely reversed and that funding for the services be expanded instead. She then moved her committee meeting to evening to maximize attendance and brought activists, community members and service providers to show how these cuts have negatively affected the homeless. It was after this tremendous hearing that the cuts have been successfully reversed!

Let's be clear, the reversal of these cuts was not inevitable. Had it not been for a strong movement built during the budget fight in the fall, the agitation and mobilization by Socialist Alternative, and Sawant being the chair of the Human Services Committee, the reversal of these cuts would have been an uphill battle. As of November 2017, Seattle voters elected a Democratic female mayor, and have a supermajority of Democratic female city councilors. It is shocking that even with this supermajority there would be cuts to women's shelters and homeless services in such a wealthy city! This shows that even with female Democrats in office, the fight against sexism can be undercut by



cuts to critical social services.

One reason that women's shelters and homeless services are being cut is that the city is prioritizing rapid rehousing over other interventions to address the housing and homelessness crisis. Rapid rehousing is a 3-6 month rental voucher program paid for by the city to get people into housing right away. Unfortunately these rental vouchers are paid directly to private sector landlords who decide the rental value based on the market, not human need. Also, once these rental vouchers dry up, these residents are then responsible for paying market rate rent and it is not uncommon for them to become homeless again. What we should be investing in instead is, high quality, city-owned housing to address the broken for-profit housing market.

We were able to defeat these cuts to women's shelters and services by organizing people willing to fight back and demand real solutions to our housing and homelessness crisis. If the city continues to come up with half measures to solve this crisis, Seattleites will continue looking for avenues to fight for real solutions. Kshama Sawant and Socialist Alternative, alongside other community activists, will continue to build a strong movement to fight against predatory housing policies and for affordable housing for all. ✪

# Boston Organizes Successful Take Back the Night March

Gates Godfrey

During February and March, the Boston branch of Socialist Alternative focused our work on the women's movement, growing out of the explosive #MeToo movement and the exciting women's marches of the past two years. We launched a Socialist Feminist Discussion group to bring together people interested in discussing the limitations of establishment feminism in inability producing real results or real gains for the vast majority of women, as well as connect the dots between the struggle for women's liberation and the struggle against capitalism. This group met three times, discussing #MeToo and the harassment faced by working class women every day in their workplaces. We also discussed sexism's intrinsic links to capitalism, and the need for a new women's movement that fights for concrete gains for all women, not just superficial reforms or improvement in the situation for a select few.

These discussions culminated in an organizing meeting to plan a Take Back the Night march against sexual violence and harassment, rape culture, and gun violence. For too long it has been unsafe for women to walk alone at night, and this demonstration was to celebrate International Women's Day, as well as show that enough is enough when it comes to violence against women. Despite freezing temperatures, the rally was extremely energetic; speakers talked about the connections between racist police brutality and sexism, the anti-gun violence movement, the need for a \$15 minimum wage, and how all of this relates ultimately to the fight against capitalism. We put forward concrete demands, and they were met with enthusiasm by the crowd. These demands were:

- ✪ End Workplace Harassment – A Union for All Workers!
- ✪ Free Reproductive Care – Medicare for All!
- ✪ End the Violence – Stop the NRA!
- ✪ Stop the Deportations – Drive Trump Out!
- ✪ \$15 Minimum Wage for ALL!
- ✪ Fund Affordable Housing – Tax the Rich!

Our success in Boston shows that women are fed up with the lip service being provided by the establishment when it comes to their health and safety, and the health and safety of others. Enough is enough! ✪

# Illinois Graduate Students Win Strike!

Melisa Bailey & Michael Johnson

The two-week-long strike waged by Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO), Local 6300 IFT/AFT AFL-CIO at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) against the university administration has been won!

Negotiations for the 2,700 graduate students began in early 2017. Over a year later, and only after 1,200 members and community participated in strike and picket action, the UIUC graduate students have beat back the neoliberal attacks led by Illinois Governor Rauner, and gained ground in wages and benefits. Members of Socialist Alternative, one of whom is a member of GEO, have joined GEO on the picket lines and rallies in solidarity. The second week saw escalation in tactics including a one-mile march to the University

of Illinois President Tim Killeen's mansion on Tuesday, March 6. That evening, members of GEO occupied the office of President Killeen. Occupiers were joined the next day by members of the non-tenured faculty union, members of local SEIU and ASCFME, and members of the Champaign-Urbana community. That evening, a second occupation was started, this time of the office of Chancellor Andreas Cangellaris.

With two administrative offices occupied and support pouring in from unions and students across the nation, the administration was forced back to the bargaining table, ready to make concessions. A new and fair contract was signed by the administration on International Working Women's Day, March 8, and was accepted by the GEO membership on March 9, with 98% of the vote in

favor of the proposed new contract.

The members of GEO have won the guarantee of tuition waivers for all UIUC graduate students holding teaching and graduate assistantships, a step toward ensuring academia will remain accessible to students of all backgrounds. Additionally, members won an increase in the minimum salary, with a 4.5% increase retroactive to the end of the previous contract and 2% increase annually for three years, as well as decreases in health care fees, with the University paying 87% of premiums (up from 80%) and 25% of premiums for one dependent up from nothing currently.

This is a victory for not just the graduate employees at UIUC, but a victory for all unions, students, and working-class people. ✪



# Spain: Feminist Strike Brings Millions to the Streets



Read more on international news at [SocialistWorld.net](http://SocialistWorld.net), website of the Committee for a Workers International.

## Izquierda Revolucionaria, Sister Organization of Socialist Alternative in the Spanish State

Never in the history of the class struggle in the Spanish state has there been such a deep and massive mobilisation against the oppression of working class women, against inequality and violence against women. It reflected not only the anger of working class women and the youth with the capitalist crisis and the reactionary government of the conservative People's Party (PP), but also the enormous discontent throughout society.

The feminist strike on March 8 was unprecedented. First, because this movement was built from below, on the initiative of hundreds of women's collectives, social movements and left organisations, which worked for months to make this success happen. Second, because the leaders of the PP and Ciudadanos [a new right wing liberal party] viciously opposed the strike and marches, showing their political agenda in favour of institutionalised sexism and inequality. Third, because the leaders of the biggest trade unions and of PSOE

[the social democratic party], who wanted a controlled, de-caffeinated day, have been completely overcome yet again. The strategy of social peace and demobilisation was dealt a hard blow on March 8.

In Madrid, there were more than one million people on the streets, stretching for miles. And Madrid was not an exception. The same happened in Barcelona, Vigo, Ferrol, Gijon, Bilbao, Gasteiz, Valencia, Malaga, Sevilla, Zaragoza, Tarragona, Cadiz, Toledo and dozens of other cities. It was a mobilisation which surpassed all expectations.

## For Revolutionary Socialist Feminism

Sindicato de Estudiantes (SE – Students Union) and Libres y Combativas, a socialist feminist platform launched by SE and the comrades of Izquierda Revolucionaria (part of the Committee for a Workers International) have played a key role. Our call for a 24-hour student strike was massively supported. 90% of students in secondary schools and 80% of university students joined the strike. Thousands filled the streets in our student demonstrations.



On March 8, the need for a revolutionary, anti-capitalist class-struggle feminism was clear. Izquierda Revolucionaria and Libres y Combativas distinguish ourselves clearly from “transversal” feminism which the system incorporates. This armchair feminism of posing, allows our oppressors like the prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, to wear feminist purple without even blushing. On March 8, we made clear that women's oppression is linked to class oppression. Not all women are our allies, and those of us who suffer violence, church control, precariousness, unemployment,

etc have nothing in common with Angela Merkel [German prime minister] or other capitalist women. They defend the system and accept the sexist discrimination and violence against women which is part of the source of their privileges and power. They exploit us just like the capitalist men with whom they serve in power in cabinets, businesses and parliaments.

## Down with the PP Government!

Despite the bureaucracy of the CCOO and UGT [labor federations]

only calling for a pathetic two-hour strike per shift, which they didn't even organise in most workplaces – only organising symbolic gatherings – millions of women overcame fear and threats to go on strike. Women workers filled out the demonstrations, despite the fact that the media did not give them their due (giving prominence to actresses, journalists, and politicians spouting their “transversal” feminism). Working class women made March 8 a historic day.

All of this vitality, shown on March 8, must continue in an organised fashion until the PP's policies are defeated and Rajoy and co are removed from power. Izquierda Revolucionaria and Libres y Combativas calls on all workers and youth to continue the struggle for our present and our future, building a feminist movement which cannot be assimilated by the ruling class. A working class, revolutionary, anti-capitalist feminism. Build it with us! ✪

Read the full version of this article at [SocialistAlternative.org](http://SocialistAlternative.org)

# Italian Elections: Growth of Right Populism

## George Martin Fell Brown

The Italian election on March 4 saw the biggest political shake-up in over 20 years. The two dominant establishment parties, the Democratic Party (PD) of Matteo Renzi and Forza Italia (FI) of Silvio Berlusconi, suffered humiliating defeats while anti-establishment parties got over 50% of the votes. There is fully justified anger at the Italian political establishment. But, without a mass organized working-class force, this anger has been channeled into reactionary populist forces.

The PD has been in power in Italy since 2013. Although the PD traces its roots to the Italian Communist Party, it has long since embraced neoliberalism and austerity. The PD's time in power has been centered around labor “reforms” making it easier to fire people and pension “reforms” forcing people to retire later. Italy was hit particularly hard by

the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the PD worked to revive the economy on the backs of the working class. In other countries affected by the economic crisis, like Greece, Spain, and Portugal, anti-establishment anger led to the massive growth of new left formations. But in Italy, a vacuum existed on the left that was filled by a comedian.

The comedian in question is Beppe Grillo. His comedy was known for attacks on the corrupt political establishment and concern for the environment, but he had no real political program beyond that. In 2009 he launched the Five Star Movement (M5S) which has seen unexpected electoral success. In place of a clear program, Grillo put forward the idea of “internet democracy” where online polls would substitute for internal party democracy. With an amorphous political program and a decisive denunciation of the corrupt political establishment, M5S has been able to ascend from a literal joke to the biggest

party in Italian politics.

But being the biggest party in Italian politics will put M5S's anti-establishment credentials to the test. Without an absolute majority, the party will have to form a coalition government with an establishment party, or with the far right, in order to form a government. The current party leader Luigi di Maio, has been consciously rebranding the party as safe for business, backing off its opposition to the EU and its support for progressive taxation. But it has maintained its reactionary anti-immigrant populism.

The other party to make gains out of the anti-establishment mood is the Lega Nord, lead by Matteo Salvini. The Lega Nord is a far-right, anti-immigrant party, originally based on calling for northern Italy to secede from the Italian republic. The entire election saw a whipping up of anti-immigrant hysteria, not only by M5S and Lega Nord, but by the establishment parties as well. This has

spilled out beyond the election itself, with the shooting of six immigrants by a right-wing terrorist during the campaign.

The rise of reactionary populists and right-wing, anti-immigrant sentiments is the result of the lack of a mass organized left force to tap into the anti-establishment mood. Fortunately, the first tentative steps towards building such a force have been seen in the Potere al Popolo coalition. Formed a few weeks before the election, it was only able to win just over 1% of the vote, and was unable to win parliamentary representation. But it has held meetings in across the country attracting thousands of people, especially youth, and is poised to grow. Regardless of what sort of government forms in the wake of the election, it will be a government of crisis. In the course of this crisis the building of an anti-capitalist alternative through struggle is more vital than ever. ✪

# Amazon Pays \$0 taxes in 2017

## We Need Public Ownership of Key Corporations

Tony Wilsdon

A window has been opened onto the inner life of Amazon and its billionaire CEO Jeff Bezos. What has been revealed is not pretty. In 2017, with profits on U.S. operations of \$5.6 billion, Amazon paid \$0 in taxes. Yes, zero! This makes you wonder, how can they do that?

The hundreds of thousands of low wages worker toiling in inhuman conditions in his sprawling warehouses pay far more in taxes. Yet with Trump's recent tax cut for the rich, Amazon will receive a \$789 million tax break in 2018. Amazon is the second-highest valued corporation in the world, with assets valued at almost \$1 trillion. Jeff Bezos, with wealth of \$130 billion, is the richest person in the world.

How did Amazon, founded in 1994, grow to become the wealthiest company in the world? Central to its success has been Jeff Bezos' libertarian pay-no-taxes ideology, linked to a ferocious drive to maximize profits at the expense of the public and his employees.

As described in a Newsweek article, "Amazon: How the World's Largest Retailer Keeps Tax



Protest in Seattle.

Collectors at Bay," the company moved its international headquarters to Luxembourg, a tiny nation with secretive tax laws. This deal is still being investigated for possible corruption of EU public officials. Franklin Foer, author of *World without End*, describes how Amazon used the Luxembourg headquarters to dodge "a bill of at least \$1.5 billion that would otherwise have been paid to the U.S. government."

It should be no surprise that Bezos established his Amazon

empire based on a strategy of extreme cost-cutting, low-wage warehouse employees working at a brutal pace in his warehouses, and driving independent bookstores and other local retail businesses out of business. His repeated refusal to pay local taxes on internet sales robbed local communities of sales taxes, forcing them to implement cuts in needed services.

Now, Amazon is looking to rip off the public by demanding billions of dollars in public taxes

from cities across the country for the privilege of hosting Amazon's second headquarters in their city. Offering 50,000 jobs, Amazon is promising a possible lifeline for depressed cities. This has set off a Hunger Games-style contest to see which state or city can gift the most public money to the wealthiest person in the world. The highest bidder so far is New Jersey, where state and local officials offered a combined \$7 billion in tax incentives to lure Amazon to the city of Newark.

### Housing Crisis in Seattle

However, a review of the consequences of Amazon's residency in Seattle sheds a very different light on the value of their presence. Amazon is the largest employer in Seattle, employing an estimated 40,000 workers in recent years. Amazon's growth has helped transform Seattle from a city where working people could afford to live into a playground for the rich. In the last six years, Seattle rents have increased 57%. The average renter now paying nearly \$2,200 a month for a one-bedroom apartment!

This has created a massive social crisis, with a dire shortage of affordable housing, record levels of homelessness with working class and poor families forced to flee the city for the suburbs. This is drastically transforming the economic and racial nature of the city, with gentrification proceeding at an accelerated rate.

It is no accident that Kshama Sawant was re-elected to the Seattle City Council in 2015 for a second term as an open socialist on the slogan "Make Seattle affordable for all." Sawant's council office is helping spearhead a growing movement for affordable housing, including a bill to tax big business to pay for the construction of affordable housing.

The dog-eat-dog logic of capitalism rewards the most voracious business practices. Jeff Bezos and Amazon are demonstrating why Socialist Alternative calls for the public ownership of the top 500 major banks and corporations, and for them to be run by working class people in the interest of working class communities as part of a democratic socialist economy. ✪

## Socialist Alternative Member Helps Lead Successful Union Drive

**Michelle Sola**, a member of *Boston Socialist Alternative*, is helping to lead a union drive at a South Norfolk, MA day program for adults with developmental disabilities. Workers recently voted 58% to join AFSCME. **Elan Axelbank** interviews Michelle on the state of the campaign and what sort of union they want to form.

### What's your job like?

I work as a Program Coordinator in a day habilitation program for adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities. My coworkers and I design and implement individualized support plans, lead group rooms, and teach social skills and activities for daily living. After 18 years, I have held every single direct care position in this program and am deeply committed to serving our clients.

### Why are you and your coworkers fighting to form a union?

Our longtime clients require more medical management and hands-on assistance as they age, and over time the complex physical

and medical needs of the individuals we serve has increased. Management has not responded to the increased demands.

Our staff-to-participant ratio has not changed. There are ongoing issues with the facility, improper equipment, and a lack of basic supplies. Last year, management closed down one of our group rooms and dispersed the program participants across the remaining ten rooms, increasing our already extensive workload.

This was one of the last straws for us. A group of us started meeting after work. We came up with a more carefully considered proposal and won the reversal of some of the worst components of the consolidation. In these meetings, the word "union" began to come up, and a few weeks later we started collecting cards. Within two weeks, we reached 65% and filed a petition.

If we and the services we provide aren't respected, the program suffers. If we're not protected, neither are the individuals we are honored to serve. This is why we're forming a union.

### What sort of things has the company done to fight the forming of a union?

Management has been holding captive audience meetings in the middle of the workday and we have had middle management hand out anti-union flyers to every worker individually. We were all getting called into the office and questioned about our involvement in the drive.

Management hired a union busting "labor educator" who walked the halls all day every day monitoring our activity and almost daily handing out flyers full of lying, anti-union propaganda. We did some research and found that he charges between \$1,500 and \$2,000 a day. Meanwhile, management refuses to keep basic protective equipment in stock like latex gloves.

Their biggest attack was when they tried to divide the bargaining unit, claiming that Program Coordinators, my position, are actually supervisors and therefore couldn't be in the union. Mind you, 9 out of 10 Program Coordinators are pro-union. They tried to

convince the other workers that we have different interests since we make more money, but we simply responded, "We have no problem with you all making more money. Let's form a union and fight for it."

### As a new union member how do you think we can rebuild a fighting labor movement?

We're going to build an active union membership, steered democratically by rank and file members. We're ready to stand together to make bold demands of management and not let the recent timidity of the labor movement hold us back. We plan to form connections with other union and nonunion workforces in human services and build our power as workers in this industry.

Rebuilding unions as worker-led organizations is crucial to fighting back against escalating attacks from our the bosses and the 1%, and replacing the out of touch and overpaid existing leadership of most unions. We can rebuild a fighting labor movement, and as a socialist I'm ready to do my part. ✪



# No to the FBI's Social Media Task Force

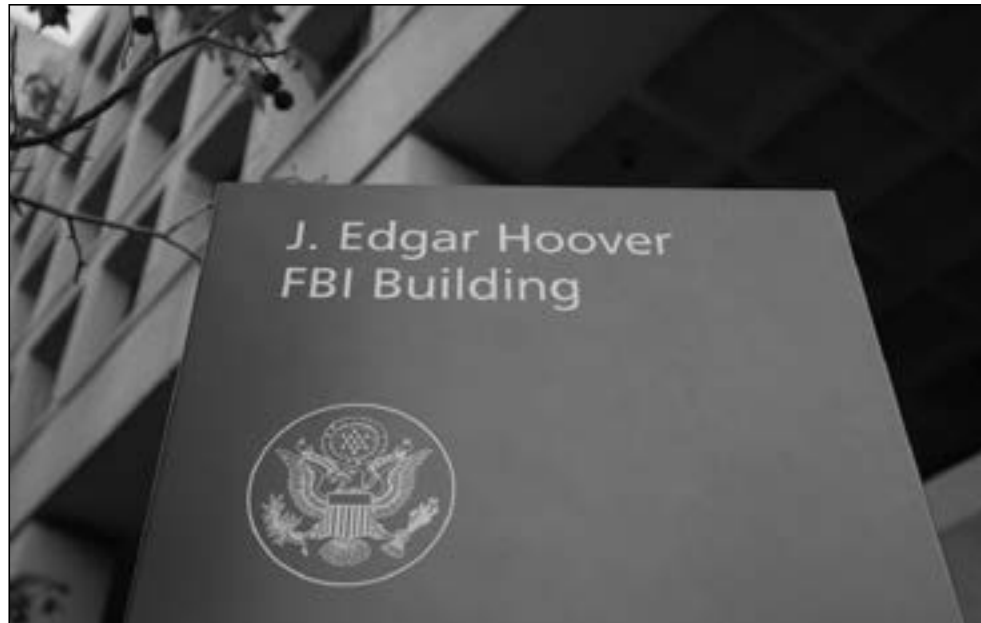
George Martin Fell Brown

The FBI's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election has taken on a new focus – the spreading of propaganda and disinformation over social media. What has been revealed so far, including the spending of \$100,000 on memes, ads, and Facebook event pages on the part of unknown social media troll farms, is frankly pathetic especially when one compares this to the way the U.S. has intervened to overthrow democratically elected governments in the past from Iran in 1953 to Chile in 1973.

Part of the response to the "Russian threat" is a new FBI task force to monitor social media. It was actually set up late last year, but its activities remained secret. In recent months, the FBI has clarified that the intent is to alert the public and American businesses to disinformation campaigns and social media manipulation by Russia or other nations. It will focus on disinformation related to the upcoming elections. For many people, correctly eager to see Trump driven out of office, this may seem to be a positive development. But it is nothing of the sort.

The FBI serves the interests of America's corporate elite - not abstract "democracy" and historically has targeted socialists, trade unions, and civil rights activists. But it has also come into increasingly sharp conflict with the Trump administration over the Russia investigation. This has allowed the FBI to be portrayed as a part of "the resistance."

The promotion of Russiagate by figures in the Democratic Party establishment has been mainly a way to distract attention from their abject failure to stop Trump's rise to power. The \$100,000 apparently spent by Russian troll operations on Facebook ads pales in comparison to the \$9.8 billion spent on both parties throughout the 2016 election, most of which was from homegrown American capitalists. With the new focus on social media,



J. Edgar Hoover got his start with the 1919 Palmer Raids targeting people inspired by the Russian Revolution.

the anti-Russia hysteria has developed a widening list of targets including left-wing critics of the Democratic Party establishment such as Bernie Sanders supporters and the Jill Stein campaign. The not-so-subtle intent is to smear any left opposition to corporate politics as somehow linked to Russia. Attempts have even been made to link Black Lives Matter to Russia.

Under capitalism, the state fundamentally serves to protect the ruling class and private property. Institutions like the FBI play the most naked role of political policing. From the Palmer Raids in 1919 - the roundup and deportation of hundreds of foreign born radicals in the wake of the Russian Revolution to the FBI's pivotal role in the McCarthyite witch-hunts during the Cold War, to the COINTELPRO attacks on the civil rights and black power movements.

The FBI today is still fundamentally in the service of capitalism, regardless of what

spats it may be having with the Trump administration. It targeted the Occupy Wall Street movement for investigation. More recently, it responded to the Black Lives Matter movement by putting together a report on "Black Identity Extremism," and it responded to the rise of the far right with an investigation of anti-fascist activism.

There are of course legitimate fears about the role of Putin's Russia and other notoriously authoritarian regimes like China. The Russian state, for example has cracked down on independent journalists, such as Ali Feruz. But the FBI's social media taskforce, and the Russiagate hysteria, can and is being used to attack our own independent journalism or prominent figures that may be sympathetic to Black Lives Matter, independent politics, and socialism. Entrusting the United States' own repressive state apparatus with determining what journalism is and isn't acceptable is precisely the wrong way to protect democratic rights. ☘

## Letter to the DSA

continued from p. 4

of Socialist Alternative and the Richmond Progressive Alliance in California - would help activists gain experience, build the profile of socialist ideas, and counterpose our approach to the corporate Democratic Party leadership.

Socialist Alternative's successful electoral campaigns, movement organizing, and union work flows from our understanding of Marxism, our class-struggle tactics and strategy, and our recognition of the urgent need to end capitalism internationally and replace it with a socialist society. The recent bitter experience of the SYRIZA government in Greece has once again illustrated that without a clear break with capitalism, "left" governments either fail or end up carrying out the capitalists' bidding.

We argue that the working class is the key force that can end capitalism. Socialists must use concrete demands to connect the day-to-day struggles of working people to the need to fundamentally transform society by taking the top 500 corporations into public ownership to be democratically run by working people. Flowing from this, we see the need for a cohesive group with clear ideas working in solidarity with revolutionary socialists internationally with whom we can share lessons and develop a common analysis and plan of action.

Our electoral campaigns came from an assessment of the strength of the movement, the key demands to bring forward, the electoral races where we could make the biggest impact, and the personnel and roles needed to best build the socialist movement in the elections. This required a discipline and concentration of resources "at the point of attack" to make the biggest possible impact for socialist ideas. While we see the need for broader more federal organizations and movements and participated in these formations, a cohesive organization with clear ideas like Socialist Alternative is often necessary in heated battles with the billionaire class.

## Toward a New Party

We also see the need to lay the basis for a broad independent left party. DSA can play a role in popularizing this in viable 2018 campaigns and by linking up with other forces like RPA in California, Movement for a People's Party, the People's Party in Seattle, and Cooperation Jackson in Mississippi. A campaign for a new broad-left party should also include an orientation toward left-led unions like nurses, teachers, and transit locals as well as toward Our Revolution. Socialist Alternative wants to participate in any developing broad left formation and contribute to the debates that would emerge within such a force. ☘

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# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



## STUDENT REVOLT SHAKES AMERICA STRUGGLE PUTS NRA ON THE RUN

**Patrick Ayers**

Over a million students from 3,000 schools participated in the historic March 14 student walkout, organized to mark one month since the horrific shooting of 17 students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. As we go to press, hundreds of thousands are set to take to the streets again on March 24.

This massive and historic movement is first and foremost a fight to end gun violence in schools. But it is also a major formative experience for a new generation who stands to inherit a world deeply mired in crisis. Although not yet old enough to vote, the students are already gaining valuable experience fighting back in massive numbers.

Students are enraged by the political muscle of the National Rifle Association (NRA) – and are calling out politicians for taking NRA money. Against that, the key demands of the protests are for limited gun control measures, like banning the sale of assault rifles and expanding background checks but also for more funding for school counselors. It is widely understood that gun control measures on their own will not address the roots of the epidemic of violence. The proposal to arm school personnel has been widely rejected by students and teachers. The harshest scorn is rightfully directed at the reactionary NRA and the Republicans in their pockets for decades.

A very important feature of March 14 was

the widespread solidarity demonstrated by young people across racial lines. Large numbers of black and brown youth from inner city areas participated in the walkout. But they made clear that the issue they face is not so much mass shootings but the constant threat of violence including police violence. In this way, the movement is reigniting the struggle against racism begun by Black Lives Matter.

### Fast Tracking Change

The protests, which developed because of the the bold initiative of students in Parkland, Florida, have already dramatically transformed the debate on gun control in the U.S.

The NRA is on the defensive in a way they have not been in a long time. The Republican-dominated government of Florida, nicknamed the “gunshine state” for its loose gun laws, was forced by the pressure of protest to approve new regulations on guns including raising the minimum purchase age to 21 and mandating a three-day waiting period on all firearms transactions. Unfortunately, the bill also contains some measures which would further militarize schools.

Up until now -- despite massive support for many basic gun control measures following a seemingly endless streak of horrific mass shootings -- the Republicans and the NRA had successfully held off any meaningful reform.

The game changer has proven to be the

emergence a mass protest movement. Meanwhile, a wildcat strike of teachers in West Virginia also scored a major victory against a Republican led state government this month. Both these developments show that mass movements can win change in spite of a right-wing government.

### Why We Should Not “Wait Until November”

In a key midterm election year and given that the Republicans and Trump are so tied to the NRA, it is completely understandable why many people would link this movement to the need to vote the Republicans out in November. We sympathize with this. But we need to be clear that a key reason for why mass protest became necessary, and also widely supported, was because the Democrats have been unable to effect any serious change on gun control. This is connected to their utter failure to fight for the interests of working class people which opens the door to the right to use gun rights as a wedge issue.

For the past year, the Democrats have refused to build mass resistance to Trump on health care, after his support for the fascists in Charlottesville, or on any other issue. They paid lip service to Dreamers, immigrant youth who have never known another country, but then abandoned them and dropped DACA from budget negotiations. The Democratic Party leadership wants to be associated with

the student protests, but they also fear that a growing movement could start making bolder demands which would alienate their real base of support - big business.

The movement would be wise to remain independent of the Democratic Party establishment’s influence and to stick to what has worked so far - mass action. The walkouts and protests planned for April 20, the anniversary of the Columbine shooting, are an opportunity to build even more momentum behind this movement, and if the Republicans still don’t cave, protests should be escalated during the elections. This movement should link up with the emerging women’s movement and with public sectors workers, especially teachers resisting attacks on their unions, to fight together against the whole agenda of the right and to drive Trump out.

For many who participated in this protest, the demand for gun control is just a start. It’s clear that a large section of students see the problem of gun violence in the context of a broader social crisis in the U.S. Moreover, capitalism is a horrifically violent system and many students we met on March 14 were already describing themselves as socialists.

Undoubtedly, this historic walkout is a product of deeper processes in U.S. society that are paving the way for even bigger struggles in the years ahead. With a world in desperate need of change, the so-called “mass shooting” generation is likely to become the mass movement generation. ☺