

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



The Fight for Immigrants Rights  
2006 to Today

p. 5

Issue #23 - May 2016

Suggested Donation: \$2



**BERNIE!**

# Time to Build a New Party



**Kshama Sawant  
Petitions Bernie  
to Run as an  
Independent**  
page 6

**Launch a Party of the 99%**  
page 6

**Verizon Strike**  
page 4

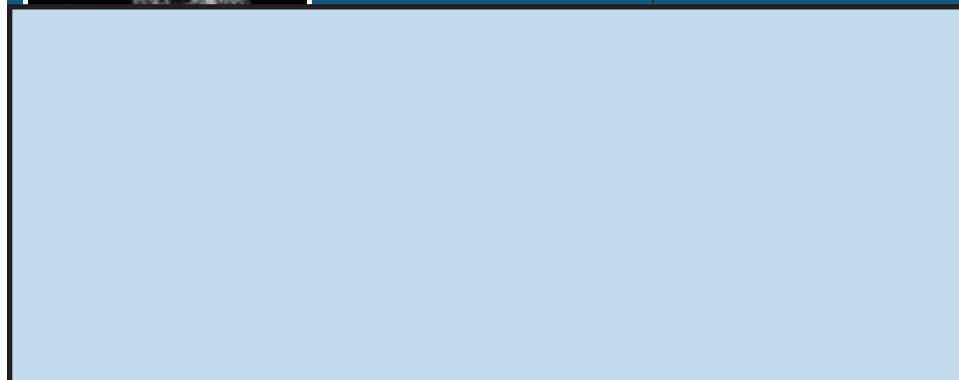
**Panama  
Papers**  
page 8

**Brazil:  
Corruption  
Scandal**  
page 9



**Eight Million Watch  
Socialist Take On  
Fox News**  
page 3

Subscription address box



# 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. ✦

# WHY I AM A SOCIALIST

## Daniel Bates Salt Lake City, UT

In 2008 I supported Barack Obama. I still get goosebumps when I watch the famous speech where he exclaimed that there is no white America or Black America or Latino or Asian America. There is only the United States of America.

Eight years later, Obama has deported more immigrants than Bush. He didn't close Guantanamo Bay. He spied on us. He dropped bombs via drones on countless fathers, mothers and children. His crowning achievement, Obamacare, is filled with concessions to insurance companies. We are poorer and working harder than ever before. If you are a millennial entering the job market, or a senior getting ready for retirement, the future has never looked bleaker.

Sure, we can't lay all the blame on Obama; he did have to deal with an obstructionist congress. Obama probably would have liked to leave a more progressive legacy. But that just underscores my point: We cannot rely on Obama or Clinton, we need to build a left political alternative to the corporate politics of the Democratic Party establishment.

Socialism offers key insights about society that corporate politicians like Obama or Clinton don't understand. Contrary to Obama's analysis, we don't all want the same America. There are people that profit from the system as is. A more fair and egalitarian world would see their privileges lost. There is a conflict between those that profit from this increasingly unequal society and those that want society to become fairer.

As socialists we understand the need to



expose that conflict. The Bernie Sanders campaign understands that the problem is money and the billionaire class that controls it. The problem is capitalism! Bernie isn't afraid to say it and any politics that has any chance of cutting through the noise and confusion that the billion dollar media machine creates needs to have that clear, socialist message.

A political revolution is needed, but one politician isn't a revolution. We need a broad socialist movement pushing a bold agenda and not afraid to say our current system is run by greed. It is run by capitalism – only socialism can save us.

Socialist Alternative is the group that elected Kshama Sawant in Seattle. She is a socialist, and completely independent of the Democratic Party and all the corporate cash that goes along with that. Socialist Alternative has started a branch here in Utah. The massive Bernie vote during the caucus shows there is a huge hunger for a more progressive politics right here in Utah. Join Socialist Alternative and help build the movement to create a fair and equal world. ✦

## Coming Soon on SocialistAlternative.org

### Democracy Spring

Thousands of people marched on Washington DC against the corporate domination of our political system. Socialist Alternative members participated in the demonstration, where over 400 people were arrested. Stay tuned for this eyewitness report of a story blacked-out by the corporate media.



### Temple Stadium Stompers

After fighting for a university-wide \$15 minimum wage, students and community members at Temple University in Philadelphia were horrified to learn that Temple would spend millions on a new stadium. We bring you an exclusive interview with those opposing this spending, calling themselves "Stadium Stompers". They are organizing for a democratic say

in university spending.

### Pennsylvania Nurses Organizing Successes

As unions start to understand the changes to National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) rules, the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals (PASNAP) is leading the way and organizing new hospitals. Read more from a prominent PASNAP nurse. ✦

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

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

Anti-Slumlord Law Expected to Pass Unanimously

# Victory for Seattle Tenants

Calvin Priest

Last fall, Seattle's socialist Councilmember Kshama Sawant and tenant activists scored an important victory in forcing notorious slumlord Carl Haglund to back down from major rent hikes at his rat and mold-infested Seattle apartment building.

Haglund was attempting to raise rents by as much as 100% in spite of extensive maintenance issues in the apartments, ultimately, 225 housing code violations were identified. The tenants, many of whom are East African immigrants, contacted Sawant, who immediately went to inspect the building, and brought local media with her, who caught the horrible conditions on camera. Organizing together with the tenants, the Tenants' Union of Washington State, and other housing activists, her office carried out a successful protest action that forced Haglund to back off.

Councilmembers Sawant and Nick Licata brought a proposal a few weeks later for a new Seattle ordinance, dubbed the "Carl Haglund Law," to outlaw rent hikes in Seattle for buildings with code violations.

At the time, Seattle elections were in full swing and the political establishment and pro-corporate councilmembers were under pressure to maintain a progressive veneer. None publicly opposed the measure initially, but it was uncertain whether it would ultimately pass once the spotlight of the elections had moved on.

This week Seattle Mayor Ed Murray signed onto the proposal, and it now appears headed to unanimous passage in May.

Wealthy developers, big property owners, and their lobbyists - who have long dominated Seattle politics - have opposed the Haglund ordinance and sought to raise concerns about its legality. "The city already, under current state and city laws, has clear and direct authority to abate problem properties without wading into any discussion of backdoor forms of rent-control," said Rental Housing Association of Washington spokesperson Sean Martin.

The outrageous state ban on rent regulations was written by the real estate lobby to oppose any restrictions - no matter how reasonable or limited - on rent increases, preferring to keep all control over rents (and profits) in their own hands. But for the lobby to legally challenge the new ordinance would be to re-focus public attention on the absurdity of the rent control ban, with a potential to provoke wider backlash in a city, where massive rent hikes (many 100% or higher) have sparked public outrage. So the ordinance will likely go forward unchallenged while registering a blow



Councilmembers Sawant and Licata along with Haglund's tenants announce the "Haglund Law."

to the state ban on rent regulations.

The broad support for reasonable tenant protections also puts the Mayor and pro-corporate councilmembers like Tim Burgess in a difficult position. As has happened with so many issues that our movement has led the way on, the establishment has ultimately come on board once outright opposition became unviable. Following the mayor's announcement, Seattle publication Crosscut noted "Murray has a bit of a reputation for bandwagoning on popular issues and this won't change that."

Similarly, last fall the establishment saw the writing on the wall with major mobilizations in favor of rent control organized by Sawant, Licata, and tenant and community activists. Council President Tim Burgess (himself up for re-election), had strongly opposed rent control. But, backed against the wall in his own re-election race by tenant advocate and former Tenants Union president Jon Grant, he was forced to go along with Sawant's proposal for a resolution to lift the Washington State ban on rent control (though attempting to take credit by bringing a separate resolution).

Councilmember Sawant plans to bring a series of tenant and affordability ordinances to the council for approval in upcoming months, including caps on move-in fees, a massive expansion of the tenant relocation assistance program, and commercial rent controls to benefit small businesses, which are also being priced out of the city.

As all of our victories in Seattle have shown over the past period - from the Haglund Law, to defeating 400% rent hikes at Seattle's Housing Authority, to the \$15 minimum wage - the key to winning gains for ordinary people is to build our own movements and elect our own independent political representatives who will unambiguously fight for our interests. ✪

Viral Interview:

## Fox News Gets Schooled by Socialist

Fox News hoped their interview with Socialist Alternative member Darletta Scruggs would provide another punching bag to whip up their right-wing viewers. Darletta

went live with right-wing host Neil Cavuto on April 14 to discuss the #MillionStudentMarch day of action against Trump, racism, and student debt. But the conversation quickly turned into a pitched battle over inequality, taxing the rich, Bernie Sanders, and even the merits of capitalism itself. Darletta completely turned the tables on Fox host Cavuto, forcing him to defend American capitalism's failure to provide affordable education to millions. In less than four days, the video has been viewed more than eight million times and shared over 150,000 times on Facebook.

Find the full, 18-minute interview online at SocialistAlternative.org. #MillionStudentMarch organizer and Socialist Alternative member **Elan Axelbank** interviewed Darletta.

*Darletta is a single mother from the South Side of Chicago, where she has been an active member of Socialist Alternative since 2014. She is a leading Movement4Bernie organizer and a member of the #MillionStudentMarch National Organizing Committee. Socialist Alternative launched #MillionStudentMarch last year and there have been two major national days of action since.*

**How did you get involved with #MillionStudentMarch?**

**Darletta:** Like many young people in U.S., I had been told all my life that a college education is the route I had to take in order to be successful, but growing up financially poor, and from an impoverished community, I didn't have the necessary means to pay for college. Loans were my only way to get a higher education. It's not that people don't go to college because they don't want to, but it's just financially impossible to



find the means to pay.

I helped organize both #MillionStudentMarch actions in Chicago to fight for free public college and am now on the National Organizing Committee as well.

**What work have you done around the Bernie Sanders campaign?**

**Darletta:** Socialist Alternative launched #Movement4Bernie earlier in the campaign, and in Chicago it's been a huge success. We've organized two #March4Bernie rallies, with over 5,000 people at each one, in support of a political revolution against the billionaire class, and also connecting this movement to fighting other corporate politicians like Rahm "Mayor 1%" Emanuel, who is severely attacking public education here in Chicago.

We're calling on Bernie supporters to break away from the corrupted Democratic Party, and for Bernie to run as an independent through November and build a new party of the 99%.

**Why are you a member of Socialist Alternative?**

**Darletta:** I joined Socialist Alternative (SA) two years ago because I didn't see answers to the crisis that I was seeing in my everyday life - not in school, church, or the Democratic Party. I was seeking answers to the questions that I had and I think what SA has done is to connect the dots of systemic inequality, like economic, racial and gender inequalities, to the system of capitalism that profits off of these divisions in society.

Socialist Alternative points the way toward structuring our society in a way that does not need exploitation and inequality. And that is a democratically planned socialist society. If you agree, then you should join Socialist Alternative too. ✪

## Defend Union Rights: Fight for Public Control of Utilities

## Strike at Verizon

Jay Harrison  
Member, CWA Local 13000

Communication Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) have called a strike against Verizon in the middle of the most hotly contested Democratic Party primary in decades. 40,000 Verizon workers from Virginia to Massachusetts walked off the job last Wednesday morning. The same day, Bernie Sanders was on the picket line with Verizon workers in New York. His denunciation of Verizon's "corporate greed" led to CEO Lowell McAdam calling his comments "contemptible." Sanders shot back: "I welcome their contempt."

The CWA has spent ten months bargaining fruitlessly with a company determined to force its union workers into "parity" with the labor market. The outrageous concessions that Verizon is demanding are par for the course in today's environment: destruction of job security and pensions, increased medical costs, increased use of term and temp workers, offshoring more and more work, and a whole shopping list of changes to work rules to "improve efficiency" – including the right to "loan" workers out of their home state for four months a year. Verizon is a highly profitable company – one that pays next to nothing in taxes – leveraging new technology and changes in public policy to take back the hard-fought gains in basic living standards that telecom workers won from "Ma Bell" over the past 75 years.

Verizon's economic demands are based on its agenda to separate itself from its legacy as a regulated public utility that provides universal access to an integrated telecommunications network. Verizon wants to transform itself into a home entertainment, wireless communications, and Internet data services provider. In the build-out of its new FIOS network, Verizon is redlining entire communities it deems "unprofitable." Let's not forget that Verizon Wireless and FIOS were built on the profits generated over the years from the landline network – and, without the infrastructure backbone, none of the new technologies and services would work.

## On the Picket Lines

Telecom workers have a proud history



Verizon workers walk the picket line.

of militant struggle but, more and more, all effective tactics to wage a strike are restricted and illegal. Here is the scene played out at countless work locations across the Mid-Atlantic: mass pickets of Verizon workers surround the office, standing shoulder to shoulder with linked arms, the watching scabs unable to force their way through the peaceful but determined picket line. Sheriffs walk around the line reading out the court injunction limiting pickets to six per entrance. Slowly, resentfully, the arms drop and the police begin to escort the scabs into the building. Until the labor movement rebuilds the capacity to build effective picket lines and prevent scabbing, we will be fighting with one hand tied behind our back.

The barrier to victory is not the willingness to fight or any lack of courage and tenacity on the part of Verizon workers. It is the legal and political forces aligned against us. During the 2011 strike, Verizon fired many employees for "strike misconduct," most of them on flimsy, trumped-up charges. While the union was able to return the majority of these workers to their jobs, it came at the price of a signed agreement with the company on future conduct on picket lines.

## Fight Corporate Power

The Verizon strike needs to be turned into a broader fight against the bosses' ongoing offensive against what is left of the labor movement. We need to broaden our fight beyond the traditional limitations of economic industrial struggle and challenge the corrupt corporate power

structures that are destroying the lives of millions of working-class families. We can seize this opportunity to strike back at the billionaires and go on the offensive by mounting a political challenge to the Democratic Party establishment and uniting with the grassroots working-class movement mobilizing around the Sanders campaign to begin building an independent party of the 99%.

Let's not forget that telecom deregulation began with a Clinton in the White House. Instead of "Medicare for All," the Democrats brought us the Affordable Care Act. Our so-called "Cadillac health plans" are a key target of Verizon bosses in the negotiations. Bill Clinton gave us NAFTA and Hillary gives us the TPP. The Employee Free Choice Act was left to die in Congress and no one is even whispering about repealing the tangled web of restrictive anti-union legislation that strangles all efforts to organize. Congress, the FCC, the courts, State Houses, and utility boards are flooded with corporate money and lobbyists that write and enforce the rules in favor of the huge communications corporations.

More than ever, we need a national plan for implementation of new technologies into the telecommunications network so that they benefit all of us! Socialist Alternative calls for an immediate halt to any further deregulation of telecom services. We need a national plan to upgrade the wireless, landline, and broadband networks and bring these services to all our communities by bringing them back under public control. We built it! We paid for it! For reliable and affordable universal service! ☘

## Workers' Lives

Selling Cars:  
The Multinational, the  
Dealership, and Me

photo credit: Brian Teutch

Jeremiah Strecker

I never once planned on becoming a car salesman. In fact, I probably would have listed it as one of the most unlikely jobs that I would ever do. I don't like to take advantage of people or lie. My buddy, who got me into the business, said that I was a pretty good listener but would have to learn how to talk.

My experience of overbearing management tactics included intimidation. One manager would tell me, "You walk one more customer and I'll walk you." Desperation kept most of the salesmen in line, since the managers had the last call on who even got a chance to sell a car – and, from what I could tell, about a quarter of the salesmen were making minimum wage on any given month. Tactical control, bullying salespeople, and desperation all work to maximize dealership profit.

Discrimination and profiling were common – even salespeople of color would perpetuate stereotypes and refuse to spend time trying to sell to people of color. They sometimes called me "warm butter" and told me I needed to have "wrist control" if I refused to use pushy or sexist sales techniques.

The managers banked on these systems of control, including the salesman's self-interest, as our commissions are a percentage of the dealer's profit (in theory). However, I sold a close family member a car and all the profit was moved to the "back-end" – and, in spite of assurances after appealing to top management, I was never given credit for the sale on my paycheck. Getting cut out of rightfully earned commissions was so common that the chorus of veteran salesmen saying of "let it go" would rival a *Frozen* movie marathon.

The fact is that Toyota corporate keeps the lion's share of the profit. Toyota is worth 200 billion as a company, and they have 60 billion in the bank. The dealerships makes the majority of their money not off the price of new cars, but on service and extras sold in the finance office.

For my first three months, I made minimum wage. I once noticed hours missing and talked to my manager about it. He told me that in his 20 years in the car business no one has ever told him that their minimum wage was wrong. Most car salespeople are too afraid of losing their jobs or just plain embarrassed to even bring up that they did not sell enough cars to make commission. I learned what I could, and after six months I called it quits. ☘

# Build a Movement for Full Rights for All Immigrants

Tony Wilsdon

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the inspiring mass movement of immigrants that culminated in the mass national walk-out by immigrant workers on May 1, 2016. This movement succeeded in pushing back the racist agenda of the right. It has important lessons for today as Trump and right-wing Republicans once again call for ramping up mass deportation of immigrants and for “building a wall” on the Mexican border.

The immediate trigger for the movement ten years ago was the passing of the “Sensenbrenner Bill” by the Republican-controlled House of Representatives. This bill called for deporting all 11 million undocumented workers and made anyone who helped an undocumented worker and his family a felon. The response shocked the political system, as millions of immigrants risked coming out of the shadows in the biggest wave of protest in U.S. history.

## Lessons From 2006

The immediate gains of the movement were significant. It reversed the political momentum of the right wing in attacking immigrants and made the Sensenbrenner deportation bill “dead on arrival.”

Unfortunately, the movement was not able to win its broader goals of full legal rights for all immigrants. This was mainly because the movement was mainly isolated to the immigrant community and was unable to mobilize the broader working class into a powerful movement to force through real reforms. The Democratic Party played a role in diverting the movement away from the streets. The Bush administration unleashed a wave of repression focused on immigrants in industries like meatpacking where organizing drives were underway.

Obama was elected in 2008 promising “comprehensive immigration reform” including a “path to citizenship.” However, despite the Democrats controlling the presidency, the House of Representatives, and having a significant majority in the Senate, Obama failed to deliver. Instead, he bailed out Wall Street and then ramped up deportations – deporting more immigrants than any president in history (*Pew Research Center*, 10/2/2014). Recently, thousands of women and children have been sent back to Central America, where many face the real possibility of being killed by narco gangs.

Facing growing anger from the immigrant community, and with the Democrats once again looking to build an electoral majority in 2016, Obama signed an executive order last year lifting the threat of deportation for several millions. While this was a step forward, its legality was challenged by the right, and the order was blocked by a court in Texas. This has been appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, where a probable deadlock will result in the decision



Over one million took to the streets on May 1, 2006 “Day without an immigrant.”

of the Texas court remaining in place. This would represent a significant defeat for undocumented workers and their families, while the rise of the populist right poses a new threat to immigrants.

## Build a New Movement in the Streets

The campaign of Bernie Sanders has enthused millions of young and working people by putting forward demands that speak to their needs, such as a \$15 minimum wage, single-payer health care, and free college education, while clearly opposing racism and xenophobia. The enormous response he has received, including from many young Latinos, shows the potential to build the type of movement that could achieve full rights for immigrants. Sanders has also explicitly criticized the limitations of corporate immigration reform, which would leave immigrants as second-class citizens, and he has taken on Hillary Clinton for supporting the deportation of women and children back to Central America. But he has, unfortunately, not put forward a bold, clear position for full rights for all undocumented workers.

This May 1, we should be inspired by the extraordinary show of force and sacrifice by the immigrant community in 2006. The lessons of these events, and their aftermath, should not be forgotten. Building a successful movement today means putting forward clear demands that speak to the needs of all workers, native as well as immigrant. The unions could play a crucial role, cutting across Trump’s racist appeals with a clear call for a massive jobs program and full rights for all immigrants.

Such a movement must be independent of the Democrats, who at every step loudly proclaim their sympathy with immigrants but have presided over the massive extension of deportations and detentions and are only willing to countenance reforms acceptable to corporate America.

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

## Ten Years On: The Immigrant Rights Movement of 2006

We print below two excerpts from *Justice in 2006*. At that time, *Justice* was the name of the newspaper of *Socialist Alternative*.

### A Growing Mass Movement

In recent weeks, we have seen the rapid growth of a magnificent new movement for immigrant rights. In more than 100 cities, it has already drawn millions of protesters into the streets. It has emboldened tens of thousands of immigrant workers to go on strike and tens of thousands of high school students to walk out of classes.

The movement erupted on March 10, when 300,000 predominantly Latino immigrants flooded the streets of Chicago to protest H.R. 4437. This bill would turn all 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. into felons. Anybody offering them any type of assistance would become felons, too. Under the law, millions of hardworking immigrants could be rounded up and jailed to await deportation. School teachers, nurses, and even the children of undocumented workers would face fines and jail time.

Politicians thought they could win some votes in an election year by using immigrants as scapegoats for the severe problems in the U.S. They underestimated the willingness of the Latino and immigrant community to organize and fight back.

Some of the largest and most energetic protests in U.S. history have sprung up in dozens of cities throughout the country: one million in Los Angeles on March 25, 500,000 in Dallas on April 9, and up to two million in over 120 cities on April 10.

### Interview with May 1 Strike Organizer in Los Angeles

*Jesse Díaz is a cofounder of the Los Angeles March 25 Coalition, which organized a demonstration of over one million for immigrant rights. He explained the premise of the May 1 strike:*

“We have shaped the national debate through the mass mobilizations in Los Angeles, spearheaded by the March 25 Coalition. The premise for the boycott was that the American economy is heavily, heavily dependent on immigrants. When we were doing protests against the Minutemen, we encountered the idea that immigrants are a drain on the economy. But studies have shown over and over that immigrants contribute more to society than they take out.

“So I figured that the only way to prove that was to do it with the boycott and call on all immigrants not to go to work. When we saw the Port of L.A. truckers come aboard, we knew that it would be big in terms of labor. In many cases, the workers were threatened that they were going to lose their jobs, and they still didn’t go to work. So everywhere you looked, it was like a national holiday. It was like nothing that I had ever seen before. It was like magic.

“By the end of our campaign, we were seeing mobilizations take place among the people themselves. It was a mass, mass mobilization. The police estimated 500,000, but there was also a news station there who said it was between 1.7 and 2 million people, and that’s their estimation from the aerial photos.

“We’re pushing forward for full, immediate, unconditional amnesty – that’s basically the crux of the movement.” ✦



# Why I'm Petitioning Bernie to Run Independent

@cmKshama  
facebook.com/cmKshama

Kshama Sawant, Seattle City Councilmember

Despite all the obstacles thrown in the path of Bernie Sanders by the corrupted American electoral system, his campaign has made an enormous impact. Sanders has become a lightning rod for the enormous discontent at the billionaire class and its domination over the political system. His campaign has shown the widespread support for breaking up Wall Street, free higher education, a \$15 an hour minimum wage, single payer healthcare, major public investment in renewable energy, and reforming a broken criminal justice system.

Bernie has conclusively demonstrated that it is possible to raise the resources needed to run a strong political campaign without begging billionaires for donations. By running on an unapologetically anti-corporate, pro-worker platform, Bernie has inspired millions of working people to donate to a campaign that actually represents them.

In March alone, Bernie raised a \$44 million, his largest monthly haul yet, beating Clinton for a third straight month – all without accepting corporate donations. He has received 6.5 million individual contributions from two million donors, averaging just \$27 apiece.

## Blocked by the Democratic Party

Yet it has become increasingly clear that the Democratic Party establishment is completely opposed to this political revolution. Rather than support the candidate who is best positioned to stop Trump and the Republicans, they are hell-bent on defending the Wall Street and big business interests that bankroll them.

That's why I've launched a petition urging Bernie – if he is blocked in the rigged primary process – to run as an independent or as a Green on the ticket with Jill Stein. If you agree, sign and share my petition today at [www.Movement4Bernie.org](http://www.Movement4Bernie.org).

Under 15 percent of eligible voters will participate in the Democratic primaries, skewing the results heavily toward wealthier and older party loyalists. Most workers and young people only tune in during the general election. We can't allow this tiny minority of primary voters, the corporate media, Wall Street PACs, and the party establishment to block Bernie before the real election even begins!

## Splitting the Vote?

Unfortunately, alongside Clinton's supporters, Sanders himself has argued that an independent run risks splitting the progressive vote and allowing a Republican victory. Especially with Trump as the GOP frontrunner, this fear is understandable – though given the mass hatred of The Donald, it's far from clear he could win a three-way race with Clinton and Sanders.

If electing a Republican is really Bernie's main concern, there is no reason he could not at least run in the 40+ states where it's absolutely clear the Democratic or Republican candidate will win, while not putting his name on the 5-10 closely contested "swing states." This could still allow for an historic campaign if linked to building a new party for the 99%, laying the foundation for an ongoing mass political movement to run hundreds of left candidates for all levels of government, independent of corporate cash.

## Defeating the Far-Right Agenda

There is another danger if Bernie drops out to back Hillary. It would leave Trump, Cruz, or other right-wing Republicans a free hand to monopolize the growing anti-establishment anger, while most of the left is trapped behind Clinton, the crowning symbol of establishment, dynastic, Wall Street politics. Could the far right even dream up a better scenario to build their forces? While Trump might not win the election, support for hard-right populist politics will grow if there no fighting left alternative offered.

Meanwhile, the confidence and energy of our youthful working-class political revolution will turn into demoralization and disorganization if the movement is corralled into Clinton's Wall-Street-funded campaign – the exact opposite of a political revolution!

The stakes are too high to let this moment slip through our fingers. Capitalism is plunging humanity into a social and ecological catastrophe. Bernie's campaign shows a viable fight-back is possible. What's missing is a strategy to sustain and grow our movement. Now is the time for bold action to build a fighting, working-class political alternative – a party for the millions, not the millionaires. ✪

# TIME FOR B PAR

## We Have a Historic Opportunity to Build a Left Alternative - If We Seize It!

Following Sanders' defeat in the delegate-rich but "closed" New York primary, hope for securing the nomination is dimming. But despite nearly clinching the nomination, in many respects Hillary Clinton emerges from the New York primary more damaged, her party more divided, than she entered it.

What came to be called the Battle of New York has served to further expose what millions of people in the U.S. are becoming painfully aware of: the Democratic Party primary is rigged in favor of the establishment.

"I believe that we need to think very seriously, particularly as folks of color and progressives, about building either a new party or a new movement." Those were the words of Michelle Alexander, esteemed author of *The New Jim Crow*, speaking with Chris Hayes on MSNBC on April 1.

Three days later, writing in the *New York Daily News*, the nation's fourth-largest circulation paper, Shaun King's column begins with the above quote, adding:

"I not only agree with Alexander, but I want to take it a step further — I think it's already happening right before our very eyes. Political progressives across this country, in supporting the candidacy of Bernie Sanders, are completely rejecting the Democratic Party. ... We should form our own political party in which we are firmly and boldly against the death penalty, where we are for a living wage all across this country, where we are for a complete overhaul



of the criminal justice system, where we are for radical reforms to protect the environment and curb global warming, where we are for the eradication of big money in politics, where we are willing to truly consider healthcare and education for all as a right and not a privilege."

Approaching the same question from the opposite political standpoint, Paul Krugman's April 8 *New York Times* column echoed Shaun King's insight that a new party is emerging "right before our very eyes." Krugman warns Bernie to tone down his attacks on Clinton or risk a deeper rupture from the Democratic Party, arrogantly asking: "Is Mr. Sanders

## The System Is Rigged

A discussion that started with the top-down superdelegate system and the enormous influence of corporate money in politics has gone on to raise awareness about the generally undemocratic nature of the Democratic primary and party itself. With a spotlight on the myriad of anti-democratic voting rules, front-loading of conservative states, and the antagonistic role of the DNC leadership, millions are seeing for the first time just how rigged the system is.

The anger was most visible around the "closed" New York primary. More than 27% of New Yorkers – 3 million people – were excluded by restrictive voting laws. In a little-known rule, independent voters needed to register as Democrats by last October 9 to participate in a primary six months later, tilting the electorate even further toward older, wealthier party loyalists. As if that wasn't enough, in Brooklyn alone, 120,000 registered Democrats were purged from the lists. In one precinct, 10% of those who showed up to vote found their names had been removed!

The power of the media establishment has also been on full display. Even "progressive" papers like the *New York Daily News* went all-out, repeatedly running sensationalized, libelous front-page attacks on Sanders.

While Clinton's 15-point margin of victory in New York was probably greater than the sum of irregularities, it is equally clear that, if independents and others wrongly excluded could have voted, the outcome would have been far closer and Sanders might even have won. ✪

# BERNIE TO LAUNCH A NEW PARTY FOR THE 99%

## Successful Labor For Bernie Meetup at Labor Notes

Joshua Koritz

On April 1, over 100 people packed a Labor For Bernie meetup near O'Hare Airport in Chicago in advance of the biennial Labor Notes conference. Veterans of the labor movement expressed astonishment at how quickly Labor for Bernie has grown and gathered endorsements.

Labor for Bernie has had enormous success: it has nearly 30,000 likes on Facebook and five major national unions have endorsed Sanders, as well as nearly 100 other union locals. Most recently, Sanders won the endorsement of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU). This groundswell of support, unfortunately, stands in sharp contrast to the role of a number of union leaders, who rushed to back Hillary Clinton and, in many cases, gave their own membership no opportunity to express their views democratically.

Speakers and participants arrived from around the country, including Seattle socialist councilmember Kshama Sawant. Many raised the importance of continuing the network that Labor for Bernie has started after the Democratic primary. There was talk of independent electoral politics and building a lasting alternative; however, it was guarded and speculative. An important element of the forces that could be gathered to form a workers' party was visibly represented in the room.

Bernie Sanders' campaign is creating political dialogue within unions, between unions, and between rank-and-file union members, as well as a bottom-up pressure on labor leadership. This pressure will continue to push for greater democracy and help redevelop activist networks in locals, cities, and local areas.

In the panel, and in open discussion, this question of building a new party to

represent the interests of working people was also discussed. Kshama Sawant argued forcefully for unions to run their own candidates independently of the two corporate parties. Kshama explained that in Seattle, "We railed against the Democratic Party and got a real echo. People are fed up with the status quo. We won because we have Socialist Alternative, an independent organization, free from corporate influence or the strings of the Democratic Party."

From the floor, Socialist Alternative speakers raised the idea of calling a national conference to discuss how to keep Labor For Bernie together after 2016: such a conference could be a step to a new party of the 99% run by, and for, working people, with the vital leadership of organized labor. Concretely, unions should look to run independent candidates in local areas to build on Bernie's success. ☺



Bernie speaks to a massive rally at Penn State.

positioning himself to join the 'Bernie or bust' crowd...? If not, what does he think he's doing?"

Both Krugman and King are right. The stronger Bernie's "political revolution against the billionaire class" becomes, the more it threatens to break out of the straitjacket imposed by the Democratic Party which, in the end, is completely dominated by big business.

That's why Socialist Alternative is calling on Bernie to continue running through November as an independent if he is blocked in the rigged primary process. Win or lose in the general election, an independent Sanders campaign could win millions of votes and lay the foundations for a new party of the 99%.

On the other hand, if despite all their dirty tricks against him, Sanders remains loyal to the Democratic Party and backs Clinton in the general election, it would mean the demoralization and disorganization of our movement.

Yes, we need a strategy to push back right-wing Republicans and not allow them to take the White House. As Kshama Sawant explains in the accompanying piece, an independent

Sanders campaign could choose to avoid running in the 5-10 "swing states" while still aggressively campaigning to build a new party everywhere. The central point, though, is that collapsing the anti-establishment movement behind Bernie into the Clinton campaign - a false unity with the candidate of Wall Street and the political establishment - would leave the field wide open for right populists like Trump or Cruz to expand their base.

If Sanders chooses to drop out and back Clinton, continuing the political revolution will mean Sandernistas moving beyond Bernie.

### Unprecedented Opportunity

We are entering what is possibly the most favorable moment in U.S. history to launch a

new left party. Public trust is collapsing in both major parties, the establishment media, and all the key institutions propping up American capitalism. Eight years since the Great Recession, with most workers still suffering despite the recovery on Wall Street, all the built-up anger and discontent is expressing itself in a bitter revolt against establishment Democratic

and Republican leaders.

This is the context for the dramatic rise of Bernie Sanders who has run, by any measure, the strongest distinctly left-wing presidential campaign in American history since Eugene Debs. Though Debs avoided the fundamental mistake Sanders is making by running within the corporate-controlled Democratic Party, Debs' strongest run on the Socialist Party ticket won 6% of the popular vote in 1912.

Bernie began his campaign with no name recognition, polling 3%, and without any elected figures of national significance backing him - and already he has won more votes and more state primaries, raised more money, and mobilized more volunteers than any comparable left challenge in 100 years.

He has done all that with a distinctly left-wing platform, refusing corporate donations,

embracing the socialist label, and making the call for "a political revolution against the billionaire class" his central slogan.

Even by the standards of mainstream politics, the strength of Sanders' campaign is breathtaking. Clinton began the election with what, on paper, appeared set to be among the most formidable corporate election machines ever assembled. Yet, in the last three months, with an average donation of \$27, Sanders has tapped his expanding base of small donors - now over two million strong - to raise dramatically more than Clinton. In March alone, Sanders raised \$44 million to Clinton's \$29.5 million.

Just a year ago, every self-respecting mainstream pundit was still peddling the myth that

continued on p. 10



**"I believe that we need to think very seriously, particularly as folks of color and progressives, about building either a new party or a new movement."**  
-Michelle Alexander, esteemed author of *The New Jim Crow*, on MSNBC, 4/1/2016.



photo credit: Javier Soriano

# The Panama Papers – The 1% as Thieves

Tom Barnard

In what can fairly be called the “biggest leak in history”: 2.6 terabytes of information, the entire client database of Mossack Fonseca, a shady Panamanian law firm, was given to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). The ICIJ leak of several parts of the more than 11.5 million financial and legal records exposes a system that enables crime, corruption and wrongdoing, hidden by secretive offshore companies. The leaked papers cover nearly 215,000 companies and 14,153 clients of Mossack Fonseca.

What companies like Mossack Fonseca do is allow the global rich to hide their money. Whether generated by fraud, theft, illegal trafficking of people and weapons, misappropriation of public funds, corruption in public office, or tax avoidance and tax evasion, it's all the same to firms like this. Indeed company co-founder Jürgen Mossack said in a *Wall Street Journal* article that the firm would continue forward. “We're not going to stop the services and go plant bananas or something,” he said.

Nonetheless the idea of hidden wealth maintained by politicians and powerful figures across the globe has produced a powerful public backlash. The documents name names, including close associates of some of the world's most powerful people, including, so far, over 140 political leaders.

Thus far, the leaks have resulted in criminal investigations on at least two continents and have forced leaders from Europe to Asia to beat back calls for their removal. Officials in France, Germany, Austria, and South Korea said they were beginning investigations into possible malfeasance, from money laundering to tax evasion. But there are literally dozens of leaders and their associates named in the papers, according to the main website. These include President Putin of Russia, Prime Minister Gunnlaugsson of Iceland who was then forced to resign, British Prime Minister Cameron, eight Chinese leaders, including the families of three of the seven current Politburo Standing Committee, as well as key figures linked to France's extreme right National Front. In Brazil, the Panama Papers further rocked the establishment, already in the middle of an enormous political crisis [see page 9].

Gabriel Zucman, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and the author of *The Hidden Wealth of Nations*, said in an interview with National Public Radio that the Panamanian law firm represents a fraction of the total in riches obscured from public scrutiny, calculating that about eight percent of the world's financial wealth is held in tax havens, or about \$7.6 trillion. Oxfam has also



Demonstrations in Malta call for the resignation of the prime minister.

recently reported that that the 50 biggest U.S. companies have \$1.3 trillion stashed offshore.

## American Hypocrisy

There has been some surprise that more Americans have not been named. But it turns out that wealthy Americans looking to veil their assets and shield some of their income from taxation don't need to go to Panama or any other offshore tax haven. It's easy to establish a shell corporation right here at home. “In Wyoming, Nevada, and Delaware, it's possible to create these shell corporations with virtually no questions asked,” said Matthew Gardner, executive director of the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, a nonprofit research organization in Washington.

A recent report by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy called “Delaware: An Onshore Tax Haven” noted that the state's lack of transparency combined with an enticing loophole in its tax code “makes it a magnet for people looking to create anonymous shell companies, which individuals and corporations can use to evade an inestimable amount in federal and foreign taxes.”

John A. Cassara, a former special agent for the Treasury Department, said “If somebody is conducting an investigation and it comes back to a Delaware company and you want to find who or what is behind that company, you basically strike out,” he said. “It doesn't matter if it's the F.B.I., at the federal level, state or local. Even the Department of Justice can't get the information. There is nothing you can do,” (*NY Times*, 4/7/2016).

After revelations came to light about

Americans using Swiss bank accounts to evade taxes, the United States in 2010 passed the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act, which requires financial firms in other countries to disclose details about American clients with offshore accounts. Yet the United States is one of the few countries that has refused to sign new international standards for exchanging similar financial information.

## Panama Free Trade Agreement

Panama's “competitive advantage” as a tax haven was always intentionally designed with corporate and tax laws that shield information on actual owners of assets, such as paper bearer share corporations, strict banking secrecy and a dual tax system that provides tax-free status for foreign firms. Over 400,000 corporations, including many U.S. firms, are incorporated in Panama, avoiding their obligations at home. In 2008, the Government Accountability Office said that 17 of the 100 largest American companies were operating a total of 42 subsidiaries in Panama. The Panama Free Trade Agreement (PFTA), passed in 2012, has helped to enable all this activity.

## Sanders vs. Hillary Clinton

Clinton had opposed PFTA in 2008 when she was running for president against then Sen. Barack Obama. But in an about face, she helped push the agreement and two other parallel agreements with Colombia and Korea through Congress when she was Secretary of State. “The Free Trade Agreements passed

by Congress tonight will make it easier for American companies to sell their products to South Korea, Colombia and Panama, which will create jobs here at home.”

Bernie Sanders cited the former Secretary of State's support of the trade deal as one reason she should not be the Democratic party's nominee for president. “I don't think you are qualified if you supported the Panama free trade agreement, something I very strongly opposed, which has made it easier for wealthy people and corporations all over the world to avoid paying taxes owed to their countries.”

Five years ago, Sanders led opposition to the Panama trade deal, predicting in the Senate the pact would make it easier for the wealthy and the powerful to stash their cash in Panama to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.

“Why would we be considering a stand-alone free trade agreement with this country? Well, it turns out that Panama is a world leader when it comes to allowing wealthy Americans and large corporations to evade U.S. taxes by stashing their cash in off-shore tax havens. And, the Panama Free Trade Agreement would make this bad situation much worse.”

Coming at a time when global inequality has never been more rife – just 62 top capitalists own as much as the poorest half of humanity, according to an Oxfam study – the release of the Panama Papers has further exposed capitalism as a system of legalized robbery. This theft begins with the exploitation of workers in the workplace which creates corporate super-profits. But this is not enough to satisfy the capitalists' greed. They then seek to hide this wealth from the taxman, minimizing what is available for social services and benefits. We should fight to raise the level of taxes on the rich and to shut down tax havens, but the truth is that the robbery will not end until we get rid of the capitalist system. This is precisely the importance of the Panama Papers. It is ripping the veil off this vast, systemic corruption and giving the world's rich and powerful sleepless nights. ☹

### Subscribe to *Socialist Alternative Today!*

[SocialistAlternative.org/shop/sa-newspaper-subscription/](http://SocialistAlternative.org/shop/sa-newspaper-subscription/)

*Socialist Alternative* comes out 10 times a year. Your \$50 solidarity subscription supports our ongoing efforts to improve our publications and broaden the struggle for socialism.

**Two Pricing Options:**

- ☉ \$50 annual solidarity subscription
- ☉ \$25 annual subscription

Subscriptions available in paper or digitally.

Dilma's Government Brought to Brink of Collapse

# Brazil Rocked by Deep Crisis

On April 17, Brazil's lower house voted to start impeachment proceedings against President Dilma Rousseff over charges of manipulating government accounts. This comes on the heels of increasing social and economic crisis as Dilma's social democratic government has failed to meet workers' expectations while drawing ire from the right. The following article by Marcus Kolbrunner of *Liberdade, Socialismo e Revolução* (Socialist Alternative's Brazilian sister organization) was written during the lead-up to the impeachment proceedings.

Brazil is being rocked by a deep political and economic crisis that has brought Dilma's government to the brink of collapse. In a desperate measure, Dilma brought back the former president, Lula, as a "super minister" in her government to attempt to shield him from corruption allegations. The investigations, under the name "Operation Car Wash," have led to the imprisonment of dozens of politicians and the top executives of the biggest construction companies.

These events came just a few days before a planned "day of action" organized by right-wing groups calling for impeachment against Dilma on Sunday, March 13. The composition of the demonstrations was mainly middle-class: white people with high wages, university degrees, and a high average age. The



International corporate media downplayed or ignored massive pro-Dilma rallies in Brazil.

leadership of the demos was clearly right-wing and neoliberal. The participants shared a very strong stand against the PT [Dilma's party], Dilma, Lula, and "corruption" in general, but few knew what alternative they supported.

The loss of support for Dilma's government from the ruling class is not due to supposed left-wing positions. To the contrary, Dilma has tried to find a way out of the crisis by moving to the right, launching more attacks in the last period. The government launched, and got through congress, an anti-terrorist law that criminalizes social movements. It also negotiated with the right wing a proposal

that increases private investment in the vast deep-sea oil reserves. The government also announced plans for a new pension reform that increases the retirement age, as well as a neoliberal cap on public expenditure that automatically triggers cuts in wages for public servants and minimum wages.

Brazil is going through a process of social polarization. In 2013, we saw an explosion of protests from the youth that led a new generation of fighters into the arena of struggle. There was an upsurge of strikes, occupations, and protests, which still can be seen. At the end of last year, over 200 schools were

For more in-depth coverage, see [SocialistWorld.net](http://SocialistWorld.net), website of the Committee for a Workers International.

**SocialistWorld.net**



occupied in São Paulo, in a movement that managed to stop school closures. In Rio de Janeiro, there is a strong strike of teachers and school staff against the attacks of the state governor.

But those struggles have not led to the development of a big left alternative. A strong left alternative could win support, but the left is still small and fragmented. Some on the left think that the main task now is to support the government against the threat of a "coup" or "conservative tide wave." Others raise slogans like "down with all" and are satisfied with making a stand, but without trying to open a dialogue with a wider layer of workers.

*Liberdade, Socialismo e Revolução* argues that the solution to this crisis must be sought from outside the rotten institutions of the state, in the struggles and in the streets. We reject all solutions of the right wing, like an impeachment that hands over the presidency to Dilma's vice president or a government reshuffling that has the objective of restoring the capacity of the government to implement austerity measures. We have no illusions in the right-wing opposition or state institutions. Left parties must – together with combative trade unions and social movements – build a left front that can create a left alternative in the struggles and coming elections. ✪

## Full-Scale Struggle With "Socialist" Government Erupting

# France: Workers and Youth on the Streets

Clare Doyle, CWI

A new period of struggle has opened up in France. Until recently, the smoldering discontent among workers was finding expression in isolated but numerous workplace battles over threatened workplace closings, layoffs, and the growing repression against workers' representatives. Secondary school students had been holding walk-outs, especially on the issue of racism. Now, everything is coming together, but bold organization is vitally needed to mobilize and put forward a strategy for winning.

Workers have been taking strike action and joining demonstrations together across the country against changes in the labor law. The "socialist" government of François Hollande is trying to introduce legislation which does away with limitations on working hours and makes firing and tightening the screw on workers easier. The last day of action on March 31 saw at least 1.4 million marching in cities across France (despite appalling weather!). Along with the workers on the streets were angry Lycée (high school) students, fearing there will be no jobs for them even if they get to university and

acquire qualifications.

On Saturday, April 9, workers and young people demonstrated again in their hundreds of thousands at the call of their trade union and student organizations. In Paris, many workers and students decided to join those who have been staying overnight in the Place de la République. The idea of "Nuits Debouts" (Nights Standing Up) – voicing discontents, discussing ideas and what to do – has caught on and spread to other cities, including across the border in Brussels, Belgium.

Although, on occasions, there have been quite serious attacks by the police, as well as attempts to close down the occupations, there have been regular general assemblies and "open mics" for any of the "enraged" to have their say.

The movement, while not as large, has been compared to the "indignados" in Spain and the "Occupy" movement in the U.S. While revolution cannot simply be "detonated," France has in its history the experience of 1968, that showed student protests sparking a movement of workers which threatened the very survival of capitalism. There is a clear rejection of a society run by the rich and contemptuous elite. In France, there is even more anger and feeling of betrayal that pro-business policies are being driven through by a so-called

socialist government.

## Situation Rapidly Developing

Hollande's popularity ratings are "already the lowest of any serving president in modern French history" (*Reuters*, 4/9/2016). The government's tiny concessions on the labor law reform and an offer of money to students are unlikely to assuage the protesters. On the contrary, they can even act as a spur for taking more and bigger action. The situation is rapidly developing in which many workers feel that a renewable (indefinite) general strike must be engaged.

The trade union federations have named the day – April 28 – for a new day of strike action, and battle is being joined by almost every sector of society. The wind may be blowing the tops of the trees first – those who are prepared to spend their nights on the street. But the major force for change is the still-powerful working class of France. Linked to real socialist ideas, and not the neoliberalism of Hollande and Valls, they can force a political struggle that can have huge repercussions throughout Europe. ✪

# Bernie: Launch a New Party

continued from p. 7

no candidate refusing corporate contributions could be electorally viable – much less a candidate calling themselves a socialist! That idea is now dead.

No one can deny the potential for building a nationally viable left political party, completely independent of corporate cash, putting forward unapologetically left, working-class policies. The only remaining question is one of leadership: Will Sanders take the initiative and, if not, will the forces behind him pull it together?

One simple fact reveals the rigged character of the primary system: National polls consistently show Bernie Sanders enjoys, by far, the highest favorability rating of all the presidential candidates, and he beats out all of them in head-to-head match-ups. Yet he will almost certainly be eliminated before the general election if he plays by the rules of the two-party system.

## Our Movements Need Independent Politics

It's time to break the rules. An aggressive independent campaign for president by Bernie Sanders, linked to building a new mass party for the 99%, could dramatically transform American politics. Bernie would not need to win the election to force a decisive leftward shift in U.S. society. Even registering a vote of 10 or 15 million for a new party – and the potential exists to win a far larger vote – could strike a crippling blow to the political monopoly of the two parties of American capitalism.

A general election campaign would reach a far larger audience. Most workers and young people won't start paying close attention to politics until the general election. Dropping out after the primaries would allow Clinton to shift rightward again, but if Sanders runs through November it will force an expanded national debate on a \$15 an hour minimum wage, free college, stopping job-killing free trade agreements, taxing the rich and Wall Street, and on the corrupting role of money in politics. Clinton and the Democratic Party as a whole would be forced further to the left to try and cut across Sanders and the development of a new party.

We have seen the impact of just one socialist city council member in Seattle: Kshama Sawant, who, leaning on mass support, has forced the entire Council to embrace \$15 and a series of other reforms to cut across the threat of other left challenges.

Around the world, where workers have won far-reaching reforms like single-payer health care, free education, or paid parental leave, it's been through forming mass workers' parties. In Canada, trade unions launched the New Democratic Party with socialized medicine as their central demand. They won less than 15% of the national vote



Transport Workers Union Local 100 in New York City endorsed Bernie Sanders.

and were blamed for tipping the vote to the conservatives. But to cut across the growth of the New Democratic Party, that same conservative government granted Canadian workers their central demand - and Canada's system of socialized medicine was born.

In fact, history is rich with examples that demonstrate that, in the words of the late Howard Zinn, "What matters most is not who is sitting in the White House, but who is 'sitting in' – and who is marching outside the White House, pushing for change."

In late 2000, as Bill Clinton's presidency was coming to an end, *The New York Times* ran an article comparing his legacy of centrist, pro-business policies to those of the justly reviled conservative Richard Nixon. Under Nixon, some of the most far-reaching reforms of the last century were passed, including the dramatic expansion of welfare, the integration of public schools, state-funded abortion rights, the creation of federal agencies ensuring workplace safety, consumer and environmental protection, the end of the Vietnam War, and other progressive reforms. Virtually all those gains were rolled back under Clinton's neoliberal regime.

The policy difference between Clinton and Nixon had nothing to do with the personal outlook of either president. Instead, it reflected that Nixon faced a mass social upheaval, movements that refused to be contained within the limits of the two capitalist parties. On the other hand, by the '90s the labor movement, domestically and internationally, had suffered massive defeats, and the elite were pushing their advantage to reverse even more of the gains working people had made in previous decades. Under these conditions, Clinton's "New Democrats" led the neoliberal charge, rolling back many of the social gains won through struggle a generation before. The process was reinforced by labor and social movement leaders, co-opted into the Democratic Party,

who refused to organize any serious resistance to Clinton's attacks.

## Bernie Should Call a Conference

There is still time for Sanders to run as an independent or to appeal to Jill Stein and the Green Party to join their ticket. While the Greens have generally remained aloof from Sanders' campaign, Stein has repeatedly indicated that she is open to collaborating with Bernie if breaks from the Democrats. And, as *The Wall Street Journal* points out, "most states' deadlines are months away. Nine fall in July, 32 in August, and five in September. Four deadlines – Illinois, Indiana, New Mexico and North Carolina – are in June, and precedent suggests that the deadlines would be struck down if challenged. ... A well-organized and funded effort could get the job done in a matter of weeks" (3/22/16).

Socialist Alternative has urged Bernie to call a mass conference of his supporters to democratically debate whether to endorse Clinton or continue as an independent. A mass democratic conference could lay the groundwork and provide a mandate for Bernie to run through November. But even if such a conference voted against an independent run, it would still be a step forward if it agreed to launch an ongoing membership organization to continue building movements, run independent working-class candidates at the local level in 2017 and for Congress in 2018, and lay the basis for an even stronger presidential challenge in 2020.

Already, People for Bernie, National Nurses United, and other prominent backers of Sanders are calling for a national People's Assembly in June in Chicago to bring together Bernie's base to launch an ongoing issue-based organization. Similarly, a widely circulated petition titled "A Love Letter to Bernie" calls on Bernie to turn his two-million-strong

donor base into a democratic membership organization that runs "democratic socialist candidates" at all levels of government.

Both of these could be a huge step forward, but neither initiative has put the central question of political independence from the Democratic Party squarely on the table for debate. In the long run, avoiding a clear debate on this core question defaults to the status quo that is social movements reduced to pressure campaigns on corporate Democrats, without our own distinct political force. The proposals in the "love letter" can also point to the idea of a "party within a party," half inside the Democrats like New York's Working Families Party. This may appeal to many, appearing at first to be an easier path than a full break, but it is only delaying the final reckoning.

Similarly, there is a real danger that, if the amorphous base of support behind Bernie is first corralled and contained behind Clinton's Wall-Street-backed campaign through November, the confidence and energy of the movement behind Sanders could not be easily recaptured in the aftermath.

Real movements of working people cannot simply be turned off and on, like a water spigot, to fit the tactical maneuvers of political leaders. The political and class consciousness of millions has been raised through the experience of the primary fight between Sanders and Clinton, but that process can be temporarily reversed.

If Sanders backs Clinton in the general election, alongside most prominent labor and progressive leaders, it will feed into the dangerously mistaken idea that the Democratic Party can serve two masters – both big business and its working-class voting base. As Sanders himself put it in the New York debate: "I disagree ... that you can get money from Wall Street, that you can get money for a super PAC from powerful special interests, and then at the end of the day do what has to be done for the working families of this country."

The whole dynamic will also serve to lower workers expectations, to reinforce the idea that big business is invincible and that political activism and voting are a waste of time.

Movement reliance on the Democratic Party remains the Achilles' heel of the U.S. left. Especially in this era of global capitalist crisis and austerity, there is no basis to build a sustainable mass movement against big business while, in every election, attempting to funnel that movement behind a corporate-controlled party.

As American capitalism plunges our society into deepening economic, environmental, and social crisis, Bernie's campaign has opened an unprecedented opportunity for building a working-class political challenge. Let's seize the time. ☪

Book Review: *The Rise and Fall of American Growth: the U.S. Standard of Living Since the Civil War*

# Capitalism: a Failing System

An important new book analyzes the downward course of the U.S. economy – and the limits of the whole capitalist system. The following are extracts from a longer review by Peter Taaffe, General Secretary of the Socialist Party England & Wales, part of the Committee for a Workers International with which Socialist Alternative is in political solidarity. The full review can be read at [SocialistWorld.net](http://SocialistWorld.net).

The title of Robert J Gordon's impressive book, *The Rise and Fall of American Growth*, explains everything he wants to say about the past and future prospects for capitalism. If he is right – and we believe he is – then prospects for the U.S., and thereby the world, because it is still the biggest economy, are indeed bleak. This and other [recently published] critical works have been prompted by the clear failure of capitalism to deliver jobs, wealth and a sense of well-being and optimism for the future, not just in the U.S. but internationally. The clear implication [about the current economic conjuncture] is that the world is looking at a prolonged period of stagnation at best. Facing a repeat of the 2007-08 crisis – already indicated by the tremors in China and on the world's stock exchanges – capitalist institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are desperately searching for measures to avoid this. The IMF has characterised economic prospects as the “new mediocre” of persistent low growth, with the attendant economic social and political consequences that flow from that. This is also a theme of Gordon's book. If global growth falls back to 2%, the world will be technically in recession.

## Searing Inequality

Moreover, with the release of the

unprecedented Panama papers [see article on p. 8] there a rising clamour against the searing inequality which has been revealed... As the American comedian, Chris Rock, once said: “If poor people knew how rich rich people are, there would be riots in the street.”

A new crisis will compound the anger of the masses at this colossal inequality and put socialism back on the agenda. The figures [Gordon] gives are absolutely stunning. In contrast to the post-1945 period of the so-called “great compression” – when the differences between the top and bottom in society were large but nowhere near as great as they are today – we are now confronted with a “wealth gap” of Grand Canyon proportions.

Gordon comments: “Even within the top 1%, income gains are much faster the higher one rises into the stratosphere of the top 0.1% and the top 0.01%.” This 0.01% is probably the 62 rich individuals – who could get into a London bus – who have an income equivalent to 50% of the world's population, or 3.5 billion people! ...

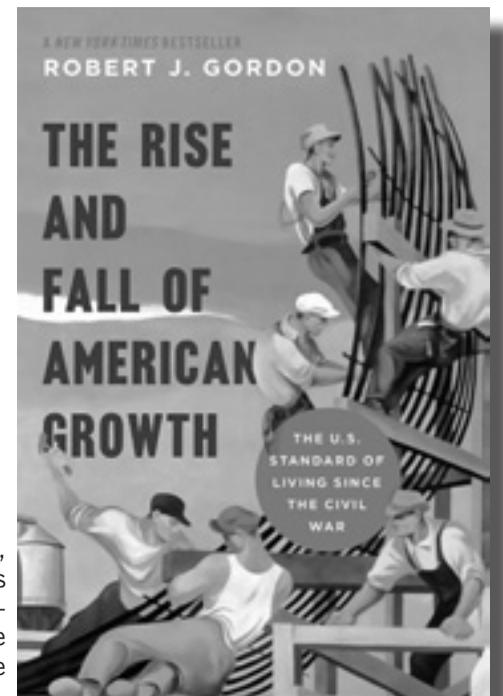
However, the central theme of Gordon's book – an analysis specifically of the U.S. – is that latter-day capitalism no longer has at hand the technological means of revolutionising the means of production compared to the past. What Gordon and others call the “special century” – 1870 to 1970 – represents the high point for US growth, powered by truly revolutionary inventions arising from the first and second industrial revolutions – approximately, 1760-1840, and 1870-1914. What followed was meagre growth, at best, accompanied by persistently low productivity (output per worker), which continues today and will remain so in the foreseeable future.

The shocking drop in productivity growth, which forms an important part of Gordon's analysis, indicates a deep crisis for capitalism. “All economy comes down in the last analysis to an economy of time,” wrote Karl Marx. The only justification for capitalism – its “mission” – is that it did perform this task by raising productivity in the past, leading to the development of the productive forces. But, as the author shows, it is no longer capable of doing so. ... Gordon concedes that, since the end of the “great leap forward,” which he maintains came to an end in the 1970s, there have been bursts of growth and increased productivity – for instance, during the dotcom bubble which burst in the early 2000s. As Gordon persuasively argues, however, these have been short-term, confined to a few industries and unsustainable.

## New Technology

Undoubtedly, there is a real possibility that the application of new technology – which, through the introduction of robotics, already significantly affects workers, not only in “lights-out” production – can lead to growing unemployment in what were formerly “middle-class” jobs. This is a factor in provoking mass opposition to capitalism, indicated by the rise of the Occupy movement and now by the deepening anti-capitalist mood. The argument of the “optimists”, that jobs will be created to fill the gap for those lost through the introduction of new technology, is overly optimistic. ...

True, some new jobs will be created in robotics, and in building and maintaining new technology. But these are unlikely to be enough to prevent rising unemployment.



Other trends within capitalism will reinforce this, as Gordon recognises, particularly because of the cuts in living standards which, in turn, will cut “demand.” This means there is no real productive outlet for the capitalists to invest in, their growing profits leading to a spiral of decline. This stagnation of capitalism is manifested in the more than \$7 trillion which presently lies fallow in the “savings” – idle profits – of the big banks and monopolies worldwide.

On the other hand, however, Gordon is mistaken when he concludes that, because there are no “big inventions” immediately to hand that can perform the economic revolutions of the past, we cannot fundamentally alter the situation. There is sufficient new technology – through robotics, in health, gene and green technology, and to secure a shorter working week, etc – to free humankind from poverty, war, disease and environmental disaster.

But this can only be properly achieved on the basis of liberating the productive forces through the socialist revolution. There is every reason to believe that, on the basis of a socialist reorganization of society, the results would equal – indeed, significantly exceed – the most spectacular deeds of capitalism in driving industry and society forward. Democratic socialism worldwide is the real answer to the issues posed in Gordon's important book on how to harness technology for the good of all. ☺

## SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE In Your Area

### NATIONAL

PO Box 150457  
Brooklyn, NY 11215  
[info@SocialistAlternative.org](mailto:info@SocialistAlternative.org)  
[facebook.com/SocialistAlternativeUSA](https://www.facebook.com/SocialistAlternativeUSA)  
Twitter: @SocialistAlt

### NEW ENGLAND

BOSTON, MA  
(910) 639-3948  
PORTLAND, ME  
(207) 415-8792  
WORCESTER, MA  
(617) 285-9346  
RHODE ISLAND  
[SocialistAlternativeRI@gmail.com](mailto:SocialistAlternativeRI@gmail.com)

LOWELL, MA and NEW HAVEN, CT contact our national office

### MID-ATLANTIC

NEW YORK CITY  
(347) 749-1236  
PHILADELPHIA, PA  
(267) 368-4564  
PITTSBURGH, PA  
(615) 310-5555  
WASHINGTON, DC, NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ, and RICHMOND, VA contact our national office

### SOUTHEAST

JOHNSON CITY, TN  
(617) 721-8915

MOBILE, AL  
(251) 654-5275  
NASHVILLE, TN  
(931) 220-0427  
TAMPA BAY, FL  
(727) 641-0252  
MONTGOMERY & BIRMINGHAM, AL, CHARLOTTE, NC, NEW ORLEANS, LA, and LOUISVILLE, KY contact our national office

### MIDWEST

CHICAGO, IL  
(773) 771-4617  
MADISON, WI  
(608) 620-3901  
MINNEAPOLIS, MN  
(612) 760-1980

ST. LOUIS/FERGUSON, MO  
(952) 270-7676  
BLOOMINGTON, IN, COLUMBUS, OH, GRAND RAPIDS, MI, MILWAUKEE, WI, and TOPEKA, KS contact our national office

### SOUTHWEST

AUSTIN, TX  
(440) 339-9793  
For DALLAS, TX, DENVER, CO, FORT COLLINS, CO, HOUSTON, TX, OKLAHOMA CITY, OK, PHOENIX, AZ, and SALT LAKE CITY, UT contact our national office

### PACIFIC

BELLINGHAM, WA  
(360) 510-7797  
OLYMPIA, WA  
(360) 250-0943.  
PORTLAND, OR  
(503) 284-6036  
OAKLAND/ SAN FRANCISCO, CA  
(510) 220-3047  
SEATTLE, WA  
(206) 639-9559  
SPOKANE, WA  
(509) 703-9915  
TACOMA, WA  
(253) 355-4211

For HAWAII, LOS ANGELES, CA, SAN DIEGO, CA and YAKIMA, WA contact our national office

### 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](mailto:contact@socialistalternative.ca)  
[www.socialistalternative.ca](http://www.socialistalternative.ca)  
QUÉBEC  
[info@AlternativeSocialiste.org](mailto:info@AlternativeSocialiste.org)  
[www.AlternativeSocialiste.org](http://www.AlternativeSocialiste.org)

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Issue #23 - May 2016



## North Carolina Bathroom Bill

# Mobilize Against Anti-LGBTQ Attacks

### Kelly Bellin

After bills targeting trans people failed to pass in seven states since the beginning of 2016, North Carolina's legislators held a special session and, in 12 hours, pushed through the first statewide bathroom bill in the country. House Bill 2 (HB2) mandates that people use the bathroom that corresponds with the sex on their birth certificate in government buildings and schools.

Bathroom bills are based on lies about the danger of women being attacked in bathrooms by trans women. However, in reality they have a devastating impact on the lives of trans people, reinforcing the already widespread violence that they face.

### “People Like Me Die There”

Equating trans people to sexual predators has no basis in reality. Already, 17 states and over 250 cities protect the right of people to use the bathroom based on their gender identity. And yet the American Civil Liberties Union reports that not a single instance of a trans person harassing people in a bathroom has been recorded. But what's well-established is the violence that trans people face constantly, in particular in bathrooms and locker rooms. This danger is particularly severe for trans women. The highest recorded number of reported murders of trans women in the United States

in a single year was in 2015. Madeleine Gauss, a transgender woman living in Raleigh who testified at the North Carolina hearing, explained, “I can't use the men's room. I won't go back to the men's room. It is unsafe for me there. People like me die there” (*NCCapitolConnection.com*, 3/23/2016).

Despite making up less than 1% of the population, a trans woman is murdered every 29 hours. Trans bathroom bills reinforce this horrendous violence.

### Does the GOP Suddenly Want to Protect Women?

The Republican Party is not on a crusade to protect women. In reality, the same forces attacking LGBTQ rights are simultaneously waging an unrelenting campaign against women, in particular on reproductive rights.

Since 2011, more than 280 laws have been passed across 31 states to limit or restrict access to abortion. There are now whole sections of the South where access to abortion, particularly for poor women, has been essentially eliminated. Through making quality reproductive health care more expensive, more grueling, more time-consuming, and more shaming, the right has ravaged reproductive rights.

It's not trans people who threaten women's safety. It's the ongoing right-wing attacks on our rights and our standards of living at

the national, state, and local levels. And it's the systemic sexism that capitalism foments, holding all working-class people back.

### Cover for Attack on Equal Rights

North Carolina's bathroom bill is not only devastating for trans safety, it was used as cover for a broad attack on LGBTQ people. HB2 is a sweeping statewide law that repeals nondiscrimination ordinances protecting LGBTQ people. It was quickly called the most anti-gay law in the country.

Polling shows that Americans overwhelmingly support laws protecting LGBTQ people from discrimination. But the bathroom aspect of HB2, which is laced with confusion due to the right-wing offensive, was used as a scare tactic to repeal these protections.

This legislative session has seen 44 anti-trans bills introduced in 16 states, double the number that were filed in the previous legislative session. The North Carolina legislation even further shows how attacking transgender people has become the sharp end of attacking all LGBTQ people in the wake of the victory on marriage equality.

### Fighting the Right

Growing out of the radicalization of the Moral Mondays movement, the NAACP has said that, unless HB2 is repealed, they will carry out mass civil disobedience protests.

This is an excellent example of how the outrage from North Carolina's bathroom bill can help to galvanize a serious struggle against the right. The growing political polarization in U.S. society, brought even more to life by the Sanders campaign, has emboldened more and more people to fight back.

This stands in contrast to the halfhearted role of Democratic politicians on this issue – in fact, one third of the Democratic caucus in North Carolina voted with the right to pass HB2. If the Democratic Party was serious about civil rights and LGBTQ rights, they would expel these people. The Democrats are opposed to any serious struggle and, therefore, can in no way be relied on to fight for the rights of LGBTQ people. Nor can any reliance be placed on corporate entities who oppose this bill because they see it as bad for business.

Socialist Alternative unapologetically stands for LGBTQ rights, including the right to use facilities based on gender identity. We must fight all discrimination, including the disproportionate poverty, incarceration, inadequate health care, and unemployment that so many LGBTQ people face. This struggle must be linked to building a mass movement centered on the social power of working people to defeat the entire right-wing offensive against the LGBTQ community, women, immigrants, people of color, and other oppressed groups.✊