

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



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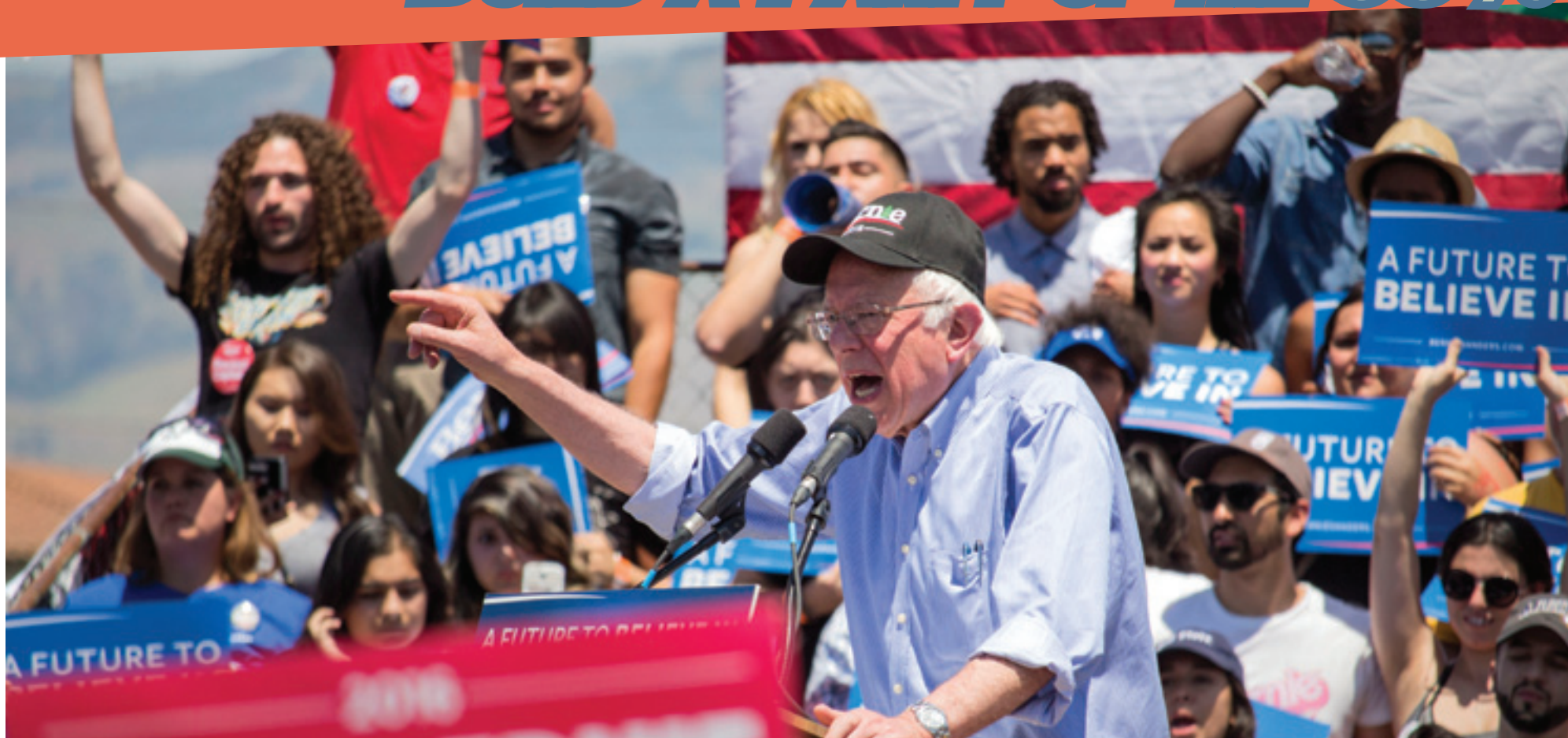


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## **BERNIE!**

# Break With the Democratic Party

## **BUILD A PARTY OF THE 99%**



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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.

## 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. ✦

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# WHY I AM A SOCIALIST

## Duaa Osman New York City, NY



I grew up in a pro-socialism household in Sudan and learned about the concept at an early age. It is a system where prosperity happens when everyone is given an opportunity to prosper. In Sudanese society, socialism was necessary for a better life and something worth fighting for, as my parents did. However, I didn't become actively socialist until I was in high school in America, when I felt inclined to protest against the many Bush-era policies. I saw things like the war in Iraq, the embracing of anti-gay bigotry, and tax cuts for the rich, and that's when I realized what my parents have told me all along: capitalism equals injustice. It was very evident at that time that this system was one that only benefited a certain group of people: the very rich and powerful. And since then, things have gotten better for those already rich and worse for the middle class and working class. Unlike in Sudan and other countries, where exploitation is a conspicuous thing, capitalism in

America disguises itself as a system where freedom is rampant and the choice for a better life lies in the hands of its working people. Unfortunately, people have believed that lie for so long that it's been nearly impossible for socialists to properly combat this system. How do you fight a disingenuous enemy that is highly regarded by society? That lack of consciousness among those being oppressed is why I will continue to be actively socialist because, without socialism, we can't have a true democracy that is representative of America. ✦

## Thousands Attend Break Free Actions in Washington State

### Sasha Somer

Over the weekend of May 13-15, 2,000 people traveled from as far as Montana, Idaho, and Oregon to participate and demand a just transition to renewable energy. It was just one part of the worldwide "Break Free" actions to demand an end to fossil fuel use. I, along with Socialist Alternative members from Seattle and Bellingham, joined the protest in Anacortes, Washington.

Break Free organized marches, conferences, and direct actions all targeting the Tesoro oil refinery, which is responsible for 47% of the gas used in the Pacific Northwest region. This refinery happens to be on land seized illegally from the Swinomish people, who led the main march and demonstration.

While there were 2,000 people marching around the refinery, there were 150 people camping on the railroad tracks, blocking oil trains from coming into the refinery. They stayed there for three days, at the end of which about 50 people were arrested. To have a march of this size, so far from a city, shows the energy and determination that there is to fight back against the domination of fossil fuels. I wanted to be at a major march, to be with the largest number of people and talk with them about what would be necessary to build this movement and win, but think of how much stronger this could have been if the two – the march and the railroad blockade – had been brought together in one action! The most dedicated, those risking arrest, could have a chance to speak to the larger crowd and explain their strategy and inspire the crowd to stay involved, and the larger march could give back its support and strength!

There was a real desire, present both in conversations we had with people and visible on the many homemade signs, to include a "just transition" in the message of the march – to say that we understand the fossil fuel workers' fears about job security and that there should be real measures to give them that in a new industry – the renewable energy industry – with offers of retraining, early retirement, etc. For too long, we have let the oil industry bosses divide our movements along the lines of "jobs vs. the environment." We say no! It is the 99% vs. the 1%! It is our livelihoods, our children's futures, vs. your profits! ✦



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Interview From the Picket Lines

# Verizon Strike: Key Battle for Labor

In the largest strike in the United States in half a decade, 40,000 Verizon workers from Massachusetts to Virginia, members of the Communication Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) have now been on the picket lines for over six weeks. The outcome of this struggle is of vital importance to the labor movement across the country. Socialist Alternative members have been out on protests and picket lines to show solidarity. Below is an interview with **Jay Harrison**, a Verizon worker and CWA activist in Philadelphia.

**Socialist Alternative:** Why are Verizon workers out on strike?

**Jay Harrison:** Verizon is making over \$1 billion a month in profits yet claims it can't "afford" decent living standards for its employees. We went out on strike after 10 months of negotiating in good faith with this ruthless corporation that is bent on destroying jobs and looting our communities. It has also refused to negotiate a contract with Verizon Wireless workers who recently voted to join the union.

**SA:** What are the main issues?

**JH:** Verizon is looking to consolidate offices, shut down call centers and work locations, and make more cuts to its workforce across the northeast. At the same time they have



refused to hire new permanent workers forcing us to work long hours of mandatory overtime.

Their goal is to move more and more work overseas where they can pay people less than \$2 a day. We understand that the workers overseas are not the enemy; they are just being used by corporations to undercut our jobs. When workers in the Philippines found out about our strike and realized that they were handling struck work they contacted the union and we sent union members to Manila to talk to workers in the Verizon facility there. When we tried to meet with those workers the company sent masked thugs armed with assault rifles chasing us through the city. That's the kind of people we are dealing with here.

Here at home they haven't hired any permanent workers in my job since 2003. They hire people for three years then lay them off, then they repeat this with a new batch of workers. What kind of future is there for our children? What hope of getting a decent job when you get out of school? This was once a job could work for 30 years, support your family, and retire with

decent pension and in good health. That kind life is a fantasy to younger workers these days.

Verizon continues to block the organizing efforts of wireless workers and spends uncounted dollars on union busting lawyers and consultants to try to divide us from each other. They have also failed to live up to their commitments to make new fiber optic services available to all our communities; they are redlining whole cities that they deem "unprofitable."

**SA:** Why is your stand also in the interests of Verizon customers?

**JH:** Union members at Verizon are on strike because of the working conditions we face but these conditions also have a huge impact on our ability to provide the kind of quality customer service we are trained to provide. Long waits for service, missed appointments and long hold times when you try call with a problem: these are some of the results of these corporate policies.

This company needs to make good on its commitments to build out the new fiber optic network for everyone. They need to hire and train permanent employees at home instead of moving work away from our communities.

**SA:** What's the mood like among your co-workers and on the picket lines?

**JH:** Going on strike is never an easy choice. There are very real financial consequences. In today's political and legal environment it may also mean losing your job. But it's also an investment in our future and the future of our children. There are no guarantees, only what we can win from the company

through struggle. So far, the strike is solid even down to the term employees that the company was really hoping to use as scabs against us. We look out for each other and we have the union.

Watching the scabs is the hardest part. We chase them down and picket them where we find them but we are restricted by the legal injunctions from any effective tactics to stop them from working. Because of that we were also holding rallies outside the hotels where Verizon was housing scabs, but the Labor Board ruled that was illegal. You can feel the anger in your stomach when they walk by, hiding behind the law and acting like it's a joke.

We have worked hard, worked in good faith, we built and maintained this network in all weather. We have sacrificed long hours away from our families working in a muddy ditch or hanging from telephone pole in the middle of the night to restore service to our community. We are angry and determined. When we go back to work, things will never be the same.

**SA:** How is the community involved and what impact has that had?

**JH:** When we are out on the street there is a tremendous amount of support from the community. People come by the strike lines and bring us water and sandwiches, we talk to people on our pickets at the wireless stores and many of them decide not to go in. We've heard about many incidents where people have kicked scabs off their property or refused them access. Other unions have come out in support and many of them are making donations to our strike fund.

**SA:** What strategy and tactics are needed to win this struggle?

**JH:** We have to ask ourselves if the "one day longer" strategy will be effective in winning a contract that has any gains in it. We may be able to beat back the worst of the company's demands, but they will just be back on the table as soon as this contract expires.

Any effective tactics like picketing the scab hotels are quickly found to be "illegal." That begs the question: how long can we stay within the bounds of the law that is enforced in the interests of the company? How can we impact their ability to conduct business as usual? I think we need to draw on the lessons and tactics of past struggles like the Civil Rights Movement and the strike waves of the 1930s and '40s that built the unions. These struggles prove winning against entrenched corporate and institutional power takes tenacity, determination and even being prepared to defy unjust laws but that it can be done! ✪



photo credit: Jay Harrison

## Frankenstein's Monster

# How Do We Stop Trump and Defeat the Right?

Kshama Sawant, Seattle City Councilmember

The racist, right-wing ideas given new life through Donald Trump's campaign represent a serious threat to social progress in America. But the mainstream liberal strategy to stop Trump by rallying behind Clinton's Wall-Street-sponsored candidacy is only throwing fuel on the right-populist fire.

Despite Trump being the most unpopular major party nominee in history, Clinton's neoliberal record has made her the second most unpopular (likely) nominee ever, and polls show her lead over Trump narrowing. Meanwhile, Sanders consistently polls extremely well against Trump. Millions are asking: Why has the Democratic establishment so fiercely and undemocratically backed Clinton if their true motivation is to defeat Trump?

All this underscores the central strategic issue anti-Trump activists need to grapple with: In this era of global capitalist crisis, rising inequality, and naked corporate corruption, undercutting right-wing populism is only possible by building solidarity through an unambiguously pro-worker, anti-establishment movement.

## What Is Right Populism?

Before treating a disease, you have to properly diagnose it. How is it possible that such an arrogant, racist, billionaire blowhard like Trump could take the Republican nomination and come within striking distance of the presidency?

There is no doubt, as most liberal commentators emphasize, that primary blame lies at the feet of Republican leaders, who have long used racist and sexist dog-whistles to misdirect the anger of conservative white middle- and working-class voters.

But especially since the economic crisis and bank bailouts in 2008, the Republican base has spiraled out of the control of the traditional big business party leadership. First the Tea Party, and now Trump, have become the GOP's Frankenstein's Monsters, raised up on the anger of working people at blatantly pro-corporate policies.

What most liberal analysis



misses, however, is the responsibility of the Democratic Party leadership for the rise of right populism. They have themselves long backed Wall-Street-driven neoliberal policies of corporate corruption; austerity; "free trade," anti-union legislation; regressive tax policies; government surveillance; and illegal wars. Decades of pro-corporate, anti-worker policies have helped lead to the worst inequality since the 1920s, historically high levels of long-term unemployment, and the collapse of the middle class. Until Sanders' rise, the Democratic Party establishment had successfully muzzled every serious attempt to give voice to a left political alternative for working people.

Central in the corporate complicity of the Democratic establishment has been Clinton herself. Not only did Hillary support the bailout of the banks, she has long been an advocate for the party's anti-worker trade deals and neoliberal policies, which working people correctly see as linked to the lowering of living standards and loss of middle-class jobs. Far from representing a pro-worker, anti-establishment alternative, Clinton is perhaps more clearly linked with Wall Street than any other Democratic leader, making her a near perfect punchline for Trump's cynical, right-populist narrative.

Even in the face of the enormous popularity of Sanders' message, rather than taking up the mantle of the 99%, Clinton and the Democratic establishment are ignoring the appeals of Sanders supporters

and doubling down on their strategy of silencing dissent. In this context, Donald Trump's campaign is looking seriously at using aspects of Sanders' platform to win over sections of his base. In an ironic twist, this could involve Trump going further in attacking Wall Street and opposing the "free trade" deals that Clinton has championed, while dishonestly positioning himself as the defender of workers' living standards against corporate greed. To continue in this vein would mean a more decisive break with long-established Republican orthodoxy, but it could lead to Trump gaining millions more votes from people angry at the corporate establishment of both parties.

## Stopping Trump Requires Political Independence

The lesson for today could not be more clear. Popular rage at both major parties and the entire political establishment has only increased, with recent polls showing widespread discrediting of all the key institutions of American capitalism. In this context, hitching our labor and social movement organizations behind the Clinton bandwagon would only strengthen the forces behind Trump.

This strategy means handing Trump a virtual monopoly over the anti-establishment vote and silencing fighting left-wing voices in the general election, exactly when millions of the most politically alienated working- and middle-class people begin paying attention.

At its worst, we see the disgraceful spectacle of labor and progressive leaders actively covering up for Clinton's corrupt corporate policies in dishonest attempts to motivate their supporters to vote. The result is to demoralize, disorganize, and alienate their own working class and progressive voting base, further opening the door for the far right. Even if Trump loses the election, collapsing the left behind Clinton will result in hardening and expanding an ongoing base for racist, sexist, and nationalist forces.

That's a central reason why tens of thousands have signed my petition calling on Bernie to continue running through November as an independent, or by appealing to the Greens to join Jill Stein on their ballot line.

As I have explained in previous articles, there are ways that Sanders could run in spite of his expressed concern about the danger of a Trump presidency. If polls indicated Trump could be in striking distance in the general election, Bernie could choose whether or not to continue his campaign in key swing states, while running all-out in the remaining states. Bernie would not need to win the election to provide a left, anti-establishment alternative and cut into Trump's potential voting base. Even more importantly, such a run could be used to launch a new mass party of the 99%.

Unfortunately, it appears that Sanders will likely not take this step, instead pushing the utopian dream of reforming the Democratic Party, whose undemocratic leadership and structures have blocked and sabotaged his efforts at every step.

## A Movement Strategy to Fight the Right

A working-class strategy to fight Trump and the far right will be essential whether or not Bernie runs through November. The most important thing is for labor and social movements to offer a left, anti-establishment alternative political vision.

We will need to get organized to fight for this vision. The victories already won by the Fight for \$15 and Black Lives Matter show

what is possible. We can build on the protests that have already taken place nationally against Trump and present massive peaceful protests wherever he goes. These protests can unite working people, students, people of color, unions, and everyone else terrified by the rise of Trump.

Our movement can also take up the demands popularized by Sanders' campaign and organize *en masse* for free college tuition, an end to mass incarceration, Medicare for All, and a national \$15 minimum wage.

The victories won by the mass movements of the 1970s, with many of the gains being wrested from the hands of Republican Richard Nixon, show what an organized force of hundreds of thousands of people on the streets can do.

The key lesson from the past decades of bipartisan attacks on working people and the environment is the need for independence from big business and its two parties. Faced with the false choice between candidates who represent different wings of the same establishment, political monstrosities like Trump's right-wing campaign can attract votes and gain ascendancy.

There are no shortcuts. Ordinary people can defeat the right, but doing so will require ending our subservience to the Democratic Party. To fully succeed, we need to get organized and build our own party, a party of the 99%, that will fight alongside progressive movements rather than against them. ☘

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# Alabama Republicans' Sneak Attack on Women's Rights

Grace McGee

On May 12, conservative leaders in Alabama launched another sneak attack on women's reproductive rights when Governor Robert Bentley signed SB 205 into law, mandating that abortion clinics be located at least 2,000 feet from any elementary or middle public school, the same distance required for convicted sex offenders.

Not coincidentally, the law threatens to shut down two of the five abortion clinics remaining in Alabama, and the only clinic in the northern part of the state. Combined, these two clinics provided 72% of all abortions in the state in 2014. Further, black women accounted for 60% of abortion patients, a fact that prompted the state legislature's Black Caucus to sing the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome" when the bill was passed in the State House and Senate.

The very same day, Governor Bentley signed a second anti-choice bill into law banning dilation and evacuation for abortions performed in the second trimester. As dilation and evacuation is the standard procedure used for second trimester abortions, the law signifies yet another attempt by conservatives to unnecessarily limit abortion under the guise of concern for women's health.

Despite the impassioned and well-meaning

demonstration by Black Caucus legislators, Democrats in Alabama and around the nation have been unable to slow the constant onslaught of anti-choice legislation from Republican-controlled states. Since 2010, these states have adopted 288 abortion restrictions, nearly as many as were adopted in the previous 15 years. Also in recent days the Oklahoma legislature passed a bill which would make performing an abortion a felony. Only the governor's veto stopped this becoming law. While these restrictions are often challenged in court by civil rights groups, these legal battles sometimes take months to be resolved, during which time working women, disproportionately women of color, find themselves without access to safe, legal abortion or affordable reproductive health care.

The only way to effectively end this war on women's reproductive rights, and to ensure that all women in all states have access to safe, legal abortion, is for working and poor women and men across the nation to join together in mass demonstrations, like the mass occupation of the Texas Capitol Building in 2013 by thousands of vocal protesters. As the last several years have clearly



demonstrated, women cannot rely on either of the two parties of the ruling class to protect their hard won reproductive rights.

Democratic politicians are more afraid of mass movements than the Republicans' conservative agenda. The Democrats' corporate paymasters have no desire to see a return of the radical women's liberation movement of the 1960s and '70s that demanded higher taxes on millionaires to fund childcare and free abortion on demand and inspired other radical movements.

We need to build an independent party of and for working people that can help organize mass rallies and truly fight for the rights and health of working and poor women everywhere. ✪

New Pamphlet  
Announced

## *Marxism and the Fight for Black Freedom*

Socialist Alternative is producing a pamphlet entitled *Marxism and the Fight for Black Freedom* to be launched at our forthcoming National Convention. This pamphlet will include historical material tracing the role of socialists in the black freedom movement from the time of Karl Marx until today. Marx famously declared "Labor in the white skin can never free itself as long as labor in the black skin is branded." Along with Marx, we believe the fight for black freedom is a central, strategic question in the fight to liberate the entire working class from capitalism and build a socialist society.

The pamphlet will also include a selection of material from the pages of Socialist Alternative on the Black Lives Matter uprising which began in Ferguson nearly two years ago and has profoundly shaken U.S. society.

The movement won limited but significant victories. But despite these gains, the criminal justice system remains and will remain racist to the core. Meanwhile, housing segregation remains entrenched, education is becoming more segregated and the black population faces significantly higher rates of poverty, unemployment and underemployment than the population as a whole.

The most important outcome of BLM to date is the radicalization of an important section of black youth on a scale not seen in four decades. The question now is how to build a movement rooted in the broader black working class. Such a movement will play a decisive role in the tumultuous struggles that will open up in the next period in American society.

It is critical to take stock both of the recent struggles and their lessons and the lessons of the rich history of the past century to help map out the strategy that will lead the movement to victory in the years ahead. It is hoped that this material will be a contribution to that task. ✪

## Disastrous Conditions and No Pay

# Detroit Teachers Fight Back

Teachers in the Detroit Public Schools have organized a series of sickouts this school year, most recently on May 2-3. This action successfully shut down 94 of the city's 97 public schools and brought national attention to the unacceptable state of the Detroit Public Schools. In December and January, several smaller sickouts took place.

From mold and mice to overcrowded classrooms and pay cuts, DPS teachers have endured horrifying work conditions and an onslaught of austerity. Over the past few months, students and teachers have taken to social media to show the world images of their crumbling classrooms and hallways, broken equipment, and lack of books.

The most recent sickout action arose in response to the possibility that teachers wouldn't be paid for the rest of the school year due to the District's lack of funding. This would effectively punish teachers for the chronic underfunding of the Detroit Public Schools. As one teacher's sign said, "Would you work for free?" Meanwhile, charter schools

and state-appointed "emergency managers" have continuously siphoned money from the city's public schools.

In the 1980s, more than 200,000 students attended the Detroit Public Schools. With the loss of manufacturing jobs, economic devastation, and subsequent decline in population, there are now just 46,000 students, more than half of whom attend charter schools. Due to a significantly smaller tax base, the Detroit Public Schools have relied on several short-term loans to stay afloat.

For several years, dramatic cuts to funding and an increased drive toward privatization has threatened public education across the country. In Detroit, Governor Rick Snyder has promoted a plan to create a new district within the city and use the old (currently existing) one to pay off its debt prior to dissolving. Many understandably believe this plan would fast-track a charter school takeover of the remainder of the city's school system.

A recent study from Michigan State University concluded that Michigan is the 11th

most unequal state in the United States. It is unacceptable Detroit's public schools are falling apart while a handful of billionaires continue getting wealthier.

Socialist Alternative demands a tax on the billionaires to fund our schools and a serious plan to create quality public education in Detroit and in other districts across the U.S. Public education should be funded on an equal per-capita basis, regardless of community. We need to revitalize our infrastructure, ensure smaller class sizes and protect the educators who make our schools run everyday. Likewise, we need to resist the ongoing push to privatize education and impose unaccountable charter schools on our communities.

Nationally and internationally, winning universal public education was an enormous victory for working people. If we want to protect, improve, and expand public education, we need to build a new independent movement of parents, teachers, and students inspired by the fighting example of teachers who have stood up in Detroit, Chicago and Seattle. ✪

# Can the Democratic P

## How Corporate Interests Maintain Control

Tom Crean

Corporate interests have a range of powerful tool for maintaining their control over the Democratic Party:

First and foremost there is the billions they pour into the electoral process which ensures that elected officials will heed their demands. No party which receives the bulk of its income from corporate America can ever serve the interests

of the 99%. Bernie Sanders campaign' is on course to raise \$250 million from ordinary people and has demonstrated once and for all that viable national campaigns can be built independent of corporate cash. But where is the mechanism to take the corporate money out of the Democratic Party as a whole? This is a "reform" which will never be acceptable to the bulk of the party's elected officials.

Secondly there is the undemocratic primary process. Millions have had a rapid fire education over the past few months in how the party establishment uses closed primaries, unelected super-delegates, the primary schedule and the corporate media to bear down on insurgent candidates like Sanders.

Sanders is now proposing to fight to change the party platform at the party convention. Yes, Bernie can probably achieve some shifts in the party's platform. The problem is, the platform has never mattered to either party. It's there purely for window dressing to appease supporters. There is no mechanism in the Democratic Party to force candidates to comply with the platform. Instead it's a wish list that is buried immediately after the convention.

How about Sanders call to change the rules in the Democratic Party? As is shown by repeated maneuvering by the DNC against Sanders, and recent violations at the Nevada Democratic Party convention,



where last-minute rules changes were pushed through that excluded Sanders delegates, democracy is a sham in the Democratic party. Rules are ignored, and or rewritten as necessary.

The Democratic Party not a vessel that can be filled with new progressive content. It is a brutal instrument that has been honed by the corporate elite to deliver its policies. The corporate elite, alongside the entrenched Democratic Party leadership, are not about to give up control of a corporate party that served it so well, and if they need to break a few rules that will not deter them. The power given to the unelected super delegates is a clear example of the lengths the leadership will go to when necessary to defend the interests of their corporate sponsors.

If Sanders won the nomination despite all the undemocratic obstacles thrown in his way – which now seems impossible – the question would be sharply posed: to continue the political revolution to the general election and beyond based on his program and without corporate cash would mean all out war with the Democratic Party establishment. While being the Democratic candidate he and his supporters would effectively have had to set out to build the infrastructure of a new party. Since Sanders has been blocked in the Democratic Party primaries, building a new party of the 99% remains the key task for those fighting for a political revolution not a long detour to try to "reform" the Democratic Party. ☛

Tony Wilsdon

In recent weeks, Bernie Sanders has spoken more and more sharply about the state of the Democratic Party. In responding to allegations of violence by his supporters at the Nevada Democratic State Convention, Sanders said, "The Democratic Party has a choice. It can open its doors and welcome into the party people who are prepared to fight for real economic and social change – people who are willing to take on Wall Street, corporate greed and a fossil fuel industry which is destroying this planet. Or the party can choose to maintain its status quo structure, remain dependent on big-money campaign contributions and be a party with limited participation and limited energy."

We agree with Bernie's description of the Democratic establishment but he appears to believe that it is possible to reform the party and make it serve the interests of the 99%. Is this a viable strategy? Can the Democratic Party really be a vehicle for the political revolution against the billionaire class?

Before Bernie decided to run, Socialist Alternative had called on Sanders to run as an independent. We warned that while running in the Democratic Party primary might seem a simpler way forward, the Democratic Party is a corporate party. Despite its progressive appearance, it has consistently betrayed every major social movement by first, attracting them, and then sanitizing them to the needs of its corporate agenda. That is why it has been nicknamed "the graveyard of social movements."

Its historical roots are as a party of the oppressing class. First, as the party of the slave-owning class, then, after the abolition of

slavery, as a political party funded and dominated by big business. Beginning in the 1930s it came to be seen as the party most tied to the interests of organized labor, black people, and women. But all the way through the '60s it still had a "Dixiecrat" wing that fiercely defended Jim Crow segregation in the South. At every point in its history, on every essential issue whenever the class interests of the corporate elite was at stake, it has taken the side of that class against the interests of the 99%.

In the crucial area of U.S. foreign policy, the Democrats have been loyal spokespersons of corporate interests overseas. The Democrats initiated the U.S. imperialist wars in Vietnam and Korea. They supported Bush's invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Obama has continued U.S. involvement in these wars. On May 15, 2016, The New York Times wrote, "President Obama, who ran as an antiwar candidate, has now been at war longer than any other American president."

At present, Hillary Clinton is relying on fear of Trump to secure the nomination. Sanders and most liberals will argue that the Republicans are the key obstacle to progress. It is absolutely true that the Republican Party since the '70s has consistently championed policies to undermine the public sector, make the rich even richer and attack the gains of workers, black people, women and LGBTQ people. However, what is left out of the narrative is that during the bulk of the past forty years there has been division of power in Washington D.C. between the Democrats and Republicans. For most legislation to pass, it needed to be supported by sections of both parties. In other words, Democratic Party votes were needed to



Franklin Delano Roosevelt was not the progressive he is made out to be.

# Party Be Reformed?

pass so-called Republican policies during the last four decades.

## How Progressive Was Roosevelt?

It is a widespread view on the liberal left that what is needed is to get the Democratic Party “back to its roots” as an allegedly progressive party. Central to this narrative are the Roosevelt administrations in the ‘30s and ‘40s and the Kennedy/Johnson administrations in the ‘60s.

The liberal view of Roosevelt rests on a whole series of reforms called the “New Deal,” which were enacted during his first administration. These included unemployment benefits, a sizeable jobs program, Social Security, 40-hour-week legislation, and some controls on financial capital including the Glass Steagall Act – subsequently repealed by another Democratic President, Bill Clinton. However, what is missing from this narrative is why these policies were enacted,

Roosevelt was elected in November 1932, four years into the Great Depression – which was caused by the collapse of the financial speculation of the 1920s – as a fiscal conservative. Unrest was growing across the country as tens of millions of unemployed and impoverished workers were close to starvation. Determined demonstrations and strikes – including local general strikes – began to multiply, and growing numbers of workers were starting to criticize the capitalist system that had so wantonly cast them aside.

Roosevelt saw the radicalizing labor movement and the growing influence of socialists as a potential threat to the capitalist system. He abandoned fiscal conservatism, which was only making the conditions of ordinary people worse and preventing economic recovery, and instead adopted policies based on pumping money into the economy to support demand. This approach was most famously advocated by the British economist John Maynard Keynes and such policies are often described as “Keynesian.” Sections of the ruling class opposed Roosevelt’s policies as “socialism” but, as he explained, his intent was to save the system, not undermine it.

While the New Deal policies did manage to give a temporary boost to the U.S. economy and gave hope to tens of millions of workers, Roosevelt was not a friend to working people. As soon as the economy began to show signs of limited recovery, Roosevelt began dismantling the jobs programs, triggering a new slump. Under Roosevelt, the National Guard was used more times against the labor movement than under any other president. The first engagement of U.S. troops in the 1940s was against

union members in California – not against Japanese or German troops. Meanwhile, Japanese Americans were rounded up and put in detention camps.

Roosevelt repressed strike action by workers throughout War II, and, before his death, attempted to repress a wave of successful powerful strikes in 1945-1946. Once it was clear the new industrial unions could not be defeated by force alone, Harry Truman, Roosevelt’s Democrat Party successor as president, signed the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act, passed with the support a majority of Democratic Party senators and representatives in Congress. The infamous Taft-Hartley Act made many of the most successful picketing tactics by labor illegal, and further tied labor’s hands with legal restrictions. The leadership of the unions accepted the situation based on other concessions made in the postwar period, including the GI Bill, but also because they were promised “a seat at the table” with big business. The latter, however, was also conditional on the labor movement not forming its own party and remaining in the orbit of the Democratic Party, a fatal mistake.

## The Kennedy and Johnson Era

The Democratic Party also claims credit for liberal legislation passed by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the 1960s. However, John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson were no friends of labor, the Civil Rights Movement, or ordinary people around the world. Kennedy began the U.S. military intervention in the Vietnam War, and he organized the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. Johnson then escalated the Vietnam War into a full-blown conflict.

It was not the Democrats, but the heroic civil rights movement, and subsequently the anti-war movement, that transformed politics in the 1960s and 1970s as wave after wave of radical struggles swept the country. This transformed the political climate and forced politicians from both parties to enact important reforms, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, like the New Deal, this and other reforms in the ‘60s and ‘70s were meant in part to cut across a deeper radicalization and demands for more profound change.

If ever there was a time for the Democrats to pass the progressive agenda called for by Sanders, it was during the 1960s. The U.S. economy was booming. But, the so-called “war on poverty” and civil rights agenda were very limited. Instead of enacting a powerful jobs program and dismantling structural racism, they were a temporary patchwork of policies designed to placate growing social movements, which were then steadily dismantled in subsequent decades.



President Lyndon B. Johnson meets with Martin Luther King Jr.

Instead, the justly hated Johnson prioritized escalating the Vietnam War, and was forced out of power by the mass antiwar movement. Ironically, it was under the Republican Nixon administration that the pressure from below led to the largest legislative gains including anti-discrimination measures, workplace safety, and basic environmental protection.

## Move to Neoliberalism

The huge economic expansion of U.S.

capitalism after World War II came to a halt in the deep recession of 1974-75. This ushered in the beginning of a new crisis of capitalism. The economic policies from 1940 to 1974 had been based on a Keynesian approach with a significant government role in creating infrastructure and basic social benefits. The adoption of Keynesian spending policies was directly related to the desire of capitalist elite to prevent the economy from falling into

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## What Workers’ Parties Achieved

Why does every other advanced capitalist nation besides the U.S. have some form of universal health care? In debates with Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders repeatedly asked this question. Part of the answer is that almost all these other countries had some form of independent working-class party. Most famously the National Health Service in Britain was brought in under a Labour government after World War II. It was the Cooperative Commonwealth Party, a social democratic party that brought in the first single-payer universal health care system in North America in the province of Saskatchewan. Many countries also achieved a proper national pension system, fully free higher education, and other reforms as a result of the strength of the workers movement and having parties that at least partly represented their interests. French workers and youth are currently fighting to prevent the scrapping of gains made over the past century which protected workers from arbitrary firing.

The powerful labor movement in this country did force through a number of important reforms in the ‘30s and ‘40s and in many industries won impressive wages and benefits in the ‘50s and ‘60s. But there is little doubt that far more could have been achieved at the federal level if we had our own party. While Bernie is focused on reforming the Democrats, the irony of the question he asks is that it points precisely to the need for independent working class politics.

In the past period, neoliberal policies have been adopted across the world and almost all workers parties – particularly social democratic parties which had pro-capitalist leaderships over a long historical period – have been transformed into out and out pro-capitalist parties.

Winning and holding the types of gains made in the postwar boom will be far more difficult in the current conditions of capitalist decline but working class political independence is more necessary than ever. ✪

## Socialists and the Bernie Sanders Campaign

# Fighting for Independent Working-Class Politics

*Socialist Alternative (SA) and the International Socialist Organization (ISO) are publishing an exchange on how socialists should relate to Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign. This follows on from a written exchange earlier this year. We hope that this will help clarify issues which are of vital importance for the development of the socialist movement and independent working class politics in the U.S.*

For both sides of the debate, visit [SocialistAlternative.org](http://SocialistAlternative.org).

**Philip Locker and  
Stephan Kimmerle**

"We need a new party of the 99%, and we need candidates everywhere fighting for what Bernie calls for: \$15 an hour, Medicare for all, and free education," stated Kshama Sawant, Seattle's Socialist Alternative city councilmember, to the applause of the huge crowd at the Bernie Sanders rally at Safeco Field on March 25.

Making the biggest possible impact among Sanders supporters for fundamental socialist change and to break free from the Democratic Party – that has been the goal of Socialist Alternative (SA) throughout the Sanders campaign. And we have received a big echo for these ideas among the people fighting for Bernie's political revolution, at rallies, debates, and within labor.

Millions are rebelling against the political establishment, inspired by Bernie's bold pro-worker demands. Over two million people donated, breaking all previous records. Hundreds of thousands have attended rallies and volunteered for the campaign of a self-described socialist.

This represents an earthquake in U.S. politics. In such a situation, socialists have a responsibility to engage with and be part of this movement. To stand aside from a historic mobilization of this scale – as, unfortunately, most of the far left, including the International Socialist Organization (ISO), has done – is a serious mistake.

That does not in any way mean that we should ignore the political weaknesses of Sanders' campaign. While Sanders is running on a broadly left-wing basis, we have criticized important deficiencies in his program. But most important is Sanders' mistaken decision to run within the Democratic Party, a party controlled by the same billionaire class Sanders wants to carry out a revolution against.

Despite huge support, it is increasingly clear that Sanders will not be able to win the Democratic nomination. This underlines that the Democratic Party is a key political pillar of U.S. capitalism. Sanders has said he will respect the outcome of the Democratic



primaries and support Clinton if she is the nominee. This would transform the dominant character of his campaign from a rebellion against corporate America into a left-wing prop for an establishment candidate.

Yet a significant section of Sanders supporters – 20 to 35% in polls – say they will refuse to support Clinton in the general election. This represents the biggest opportunity in decades for socialists to build support for independent politics and a new socialist movement, but only if we have the tactical flexibility to connect with them.

New workers' parties will not develop in a clean or linear fashion, and we have to be prepared for all sorts of half-steps as part of a developing process. The formation of new workers' parties rarely takes place in a pure form. Often, elements from capitalist parties can be affected by the class struggle and play a contradictory role. In Greece, the former workers' party, PASOK, found a part of its origins in the liberal capitalist Center Union. In Britain, some elements from the Liberal Party were involved in the eventual formation of the Labour Party at the start of the 20th century.

## Fighting for Leadership

Todd Chretien writes for the ISO that the Democratic Party cannot be reformed into a tool for working people. We agree. Therefore, Chretien proposes not to join Sanders' campaign but "to work in unity with Sanders supporters around initiatives and actions outside the electoral arena" in movements (*Socialist-Worker.org*, 4/7/2016).

SA has been involved in a whole range of movements over the past period. However, in all these movements the issue of how to relate to the presidential election has been a central question. Further, given the scale of the Sanders revolt, the ISO's approach is seriously

insufficient. The reality is that the Sanders campaign, at this stage, has been by far the largest expression of the growing rebellion of working people and youth.

But leading elements in the Sanders campaign want to win this fresh audience to their political strategy of reforming the Democratic Party and a "socialism" that limits itself to reforming capitalism. In contrast, SA entered this battlefield to win support for building an alternative to the Democrats and for fundamental socialist change.

Unfortunately, the ISO and the majority of the radical left have not been able to help the radicalizing Sandernistas resolve the contradictions of the Sanders campaign in favor of independent politics and genuine socialism. Out of fear of coming too close to the Democratic Party, they have had a negligible presence at Sanders events. In practice, this has been to the benefit of the pro-Democratic-Party leaders in the Sanders campaign, making it easier for them to corral newly politicized layers behind their strategy.

For example, at the 40,000-person Bernie Sanders rally in Manhattan just before the NY primary, Socialist Alternative collected hundreds of signatures for Sanders to run as an independent, sold hundreds of copies of our newspaper that explained genuine socialist politics, and built for public meetings titled "How Can We Continue the Political Revolution?" In contrast, all that we saw of the ISO was a table with the slogan "Join the Socialists!" Besides appealing for people to join the ISO, there was no offer to the thousands of radicalizing Sanders supporters for how to take their struggle forward. Nor was this isolated to the NY rally.

This is indicative, in our view, of an important difference in method between SA and the ISO. While openly fighting for our politics and

seeking to build our distinct organization, we also think socialists must fight for proposals and demands that can help a broader movement advance beyond simply saying they need to join our socialist organization or only uncritically promoting the existing movement. While they have kind words for Kshama now and endorsed Kshama's 2015 re-election campaign, the ISO didn't endorse her first campaign and didn't build her victorious 2013 campaign. We feel that this narrow approach is also reflected – in a different way – in their intervention with Sanders supporters.

This relates to a strategic question for U.S. socialists: Do we advocate for the idea of working people forming their own mass party – even if, in the first instance, it does not adopt a socialist program? SA believes such a step would be a historic advance for the U.S. working class and would provide an arena for socialists to demonstrate concretely the need for a socialist program to a mass audience. In our experience, this has not been the approach of the ISO.

## Bernie Should Run as an Independent in November

Confronted with a defeat in this rigged primary, the struggle to liberate this movement from the Democrats becomes more and more urgent for Sanders supporters. That's why the socialist left should build momentum behind Kshama Sawant's call for Sanders to run outside the Democratic Party (see *Movement4Bernie.org*) in the general election – for example on the Green ticket with Jill Stein – and lay the basis for a new party of the 99%. So far, 30,000 people have signed this petition! Is the ISO prepared to take up and fight for this demand among Sanders supporters?

The ISO focuses on debating the "safe state" issue that SA members raised as a potential option to cut across the fear of Trump and against Sanders' own declaration that he would refuse to be a "spoiler." While this isn't a central issue, we think it can be useful as a potential tactic to arm Sanders supporters who are gravitating toward independent left politics to cut across the coming "lesser evil" tidal wave.

The ISO's Todd Chretien writes that SA "has made a tactical decision to follow Sanders into the [Democratic] party" (*Socialist-Worker.org*, 4/7/2016). This is not true. We argued for Sanders to run as an independent, criticized him for choosing to run in the Democratic primaries, and have urged Sanders to run as an independent in the general election.

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# Over 30,000 Petition Bernie to Launch New Party for the 99%

**Bryan Watson, Organizer**  
*Movement4Bernie.org*

In mid-April, Kshama Sawant launched a petition with *Movement4Bernie.org* calling on Bernie Sanders to keep running through November “independently of the Democratic Party rather than endorse Hillary Clinton.” In the month since, over 30,000 people have joined our call on Bernie to break free from the Democratic Party straitjacket and to start “building a new political party for the 99%.”

In the highly charged atmosphere surrounding the final stages of the Democratic primaries, the petition has made impressive waves. And the media is taking notice. Kshama Sawant’s interview with *NowThis News* promoting the petition was viewed over 1.5 million times, her *DemocracyNow!* debate over 160,000 times, among other media coverage. Kshama Sawant and our petition are increasingly a point of reference in the growing news coverage around the “Bernie or Bust” phenomenon.

## Democratic Party in Turmoil

The Democratic Party establishment is desperate to put the primaries behind them. Clinton is limping into the Democratic National Convention. While hanging on to a narrow lead, Hillary has lost a majority of pledged delegates to Bernie since March 1.

Sanders has been relentless in exposing Clinton’s ties to Wall Street and the establishment. She is second only to Trump as the most disliked major presidential candidate in modern history. While recent polls show Trump close to or beating Clinton, every poll shows Sanders trouncing Trump. Anger at the Democratic Party has given birth to the widely discussed “Bernie or Bust” mood.

Some polls indicate an impressive 25 - 30% of Bernie supporters say they won’t

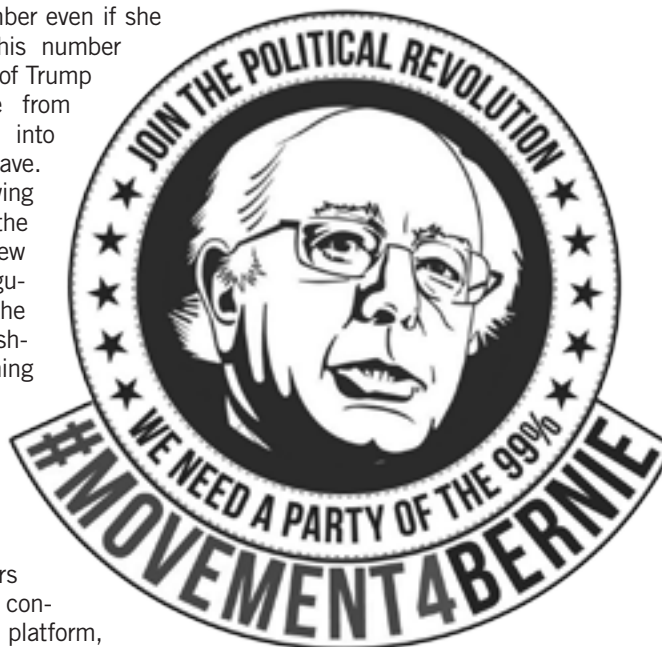
vote for Clinton in November even if she wins the nomination. This number will be cut across as fear of Trump and relentless pressure from Clinton apologists feed into a powerful lesser-evil wave. At the same time, following the debacle in Nevada, the purging of voters in New York, and voting irregularities in other states, the Democratic Party establishment can expect a hardening left opposition among a die-hard section of his supporters.

With the focus now shifting to the Democratic Party’s convention, where Sanders is aiming to force major concessions on the party platform, tensions are set to sharpen further as the Democratic National Committee continues to shut out Sanders supporters from any positions of influence.

A bold call from Sanders could be a pole of attraction bringing together hundreds of thousands of workers and young people supporting Bernie – many of them already independents – as well as a coalition of the Green Party, socialists, left unions, the environmental movement, Black Lives Matter, the Fight for \$15, the immigrant rights movement, women’s groups, and others. A new political movement, freed from the prison of the Democratic Party and refusing any ties to big business, could give a powerful impetus to protests and social movements involving millions of working people and youth.

## Plan B

Unfortunately, despite the enormous support for his campaign and growing



rage at Democratic Party leaders, Sanders has repeatedly said he will bow out and back Clinton if he loses the nomination.

If Sanders doesn’t run as an independent or appeal to the Green Party to join their ballot line, the left and progressives should support the Green Party’s Jill Stein, who is running a dynamic campaign, while preparing the ground for the construction of a unified, mass political alternative for the 99%.

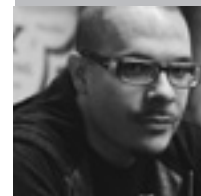
On June 17-19 in Chicago, a People’s Summit has been called to bring together Sanders supporters to discuss the way forward for the political revolution. The intent of the summit, organized by National Nurses United, People for Bernie, and others, is to launch a new organization focused on winning aspects of Sanders’ program, like free college or single-payer health care. If we emerge from the summit with a such an organization, that would be a strong step forward.

However, if the summit avoids the question of a new left political formation independent of the Democratic Party, the whole political logic points toward a concerted attempt to change the Democrats into a party representing the interests of the 99%, but that effort faces fundamental structural obstacles.

The success of the petition calling on Sanders to run as an independent, as well as the wider “Bernie or Bust” mood, shows enormous potential exists to build a political alternative to the two parties of war and Wall Street. The only thing missing is strong enough political leadership from within the unions, social movement groups, and the wider left prepared to organize the prison break from the Democratic Party. ✪

## Growing Support for a New Left Party

The Sanders campaign has brought the class tensions within the Democratic Party to a fever pitch. Socialists have long called for working people to build our own party. Now, a growing number of prominent left liberals are supporting the call to build a political alternative to the Democratic Party.



“Whatever happens between now and the Democratic Convention - what’s next is that we form a brand new progressive political party from scratch. It has never been more clear to me that millions and millions

of us do not belong in the Democratic Party. Their values are not our values. ... [Sanders] has created a blueprint for us on how we build a political movement without the money from the billionaire class and their special interests.”

- Shaun King, prominent *New York Daily News* columnist



“The biggest problem with Bernie, in the end, is that he’s running as a Democrat – as a member of a political party that not only capitulated to right-wing demagoguery but is now owned and

controlled by a relatively small number of millionaires and billionaires. ... I hold little hope that a political revolution will occur within the Democratic Party without a sustained outside movement forcing truly transformational change. I am inclined to believe that it would be easier to build a new party than to save the Democratic Party from itself.”

- Michelle Alexander, renowned legal scholar and author of *The New Jim Crow*



“Never, ever give up fighting against the increasing concentration of wealth and power at the top, which is undermining our democracy and distorting our economy. That means, if Hill-

ary Clinton is elected, I urge you to turn Bernie’s campaign into a movement — even a third party — to influence elections at the state level in 2018 and the presidency in 2020.”

- Robert Reich, former Secretary of Labor in Bill Clinton’s administration ✪

## Protest the Republican and Democratic National Conventions

This July 15-18, major protests are planned outside the RNC in Cleveland to demonstrate the mass opposition to Trump’s racism, sexism, and nationalist bigotry. The following weekend in Philadelphia, tens of thousands will rally at the DNC in opposition to the corporate corruption of politics. Socialist Alternative will be at both protests, bringing together supporters we reached through #Movement4Bernie and raising the call for building a new party for the 99%!



France

# New Stage in Battle Over Labor Law

Clare Doyle, Committee for a Workers International

*The following is a shortened version of an article which appeared on SocialistWorld.net.*

France's "socialist" president François Hollande has taken the fight over the country's labor law to a new level. After months of protests and demonstrations, the bill was heading for defeat in the National Assembly. Nearly 5,000 amendments had been submitted and at least 40 parliamentarians were going to vote against it, including 20 from the governing Socialist Party. Hollande, goaded on by the fanatically business-friendly prime minister, Manuel Valls, has invoked a clause in the country's constitution – the infamous 49-3 – to overrule parliament and make the bill legally enforceable.

Spontaneous protests broke out across the country, and workers and young people have responded to a call by the main trade union leaders for demonstrations on Thursday, May 12. Widespread strike action went ahead in mid-May. The government is not over the crisis. It faces votes of no confidence in parliament and has stirred up deeper hostility in the already hostile electorate. 70% of the population is against the labor law changes and, in polls, Hollande is still just over 12% – the worst score of any president in history.

## Trial of Strength

Hundreds of thousands of workers have taken to the streets across France, angered by this attack on their hard-won gains in terms of hours and security of employment. They have been joined by students and young people fearful for their futures.

The use of state forces to confront protesters is radicalizing a new generation on the streets and undermining the authority of the state. Across the country, hundreds of arrests have been made and demonstrators have been badly injured. But police have also found themselves not only injured, but humiliated by being put in to do a job against the *casseurs* ("vandals") without any advice or instructions.

The El Khomri bill, named after the labor minister, has been an attempt, similar to that taken in other European



*A demonstration in Paris against the new labor laws.*

countries like Italy, to wipe out basic rights that have been fought for and won by generations past. In France, many of them date back more than a century to 1910 – the fruits of bitter struggles, including a general strike in 1906.

The situation had become extremely tense and volatile. In the space of two months – March and April – the leaders of the trade union federations called four days of strikes and demonstrations, but they stopped short of all-out action. Other local and national strikes in various sectors had been gathering place, and the trade union leaders were under pressure to call a new day of action in mid-May when the labor bill was to be voted on in parliament.

## A New Stage

Hollande has decided to continue on the road of protecting the big bourgeois in France and provoking the wrath of the French working class. Beneath appearances, capitalism in Europe's second-biggest economy is weak. Company profits continue to soar, but growth in the economy is sluggish at 0.5% in the first quarter of this year. The budget deficit is greater than the 3% "limit" set by the European Commission. The bosses continue to award themselves huge pay raises, like that of Renault's Carlos Ghosn, who will have a personal income of no less than €7.2 million this year.

Although there has been an

announcement of a fall of 60,000 in the jobless figures, the French economy is beset by stubborn levels of unemployment, including 25% among young people. Such is the tension in society that 8 out of 10 believe that France is "on the verge of a social explosion."

All those who feel dissatisfied with this need to come together to form a new mass party of workers and young people. The movement needs to find a political voice to challenge the government. To get rid of it, not only is general strike action needed, but also a clear idea of how to achieve an alternative – a government of working and young people. Those who agree with this idea and want to make it a reality need to come together in assemblies and conferences with the idea of creating a political force that really represents those in struggle. The "left" members of parliament in the Socialist Party are not even prepared to kill the El Khomri bill by voting no confidence in the government and preventing it from implementing clause 49-3! They have no conception of building a political alternative.

No such force exists at the present; it will have to be built on the basis of a program of demands for a shorter working week, minimum salaries, and housing for all. It would have to argue the need for real socialist policies of public ownership, planning, and democratic control. This is what the forces of the CWI in France and internationally are continually fighting for. The struggle continues. ✪

## International News In Brief



### Irish Government Wages War on the Left

The Irish working class scored a major victory in May as a mass movement forced the government to suspend its planned water charges. This was the result of a mass non-payment campaign in which Socialist Alternative's sister organization in Ireland, the Socialist Party, played a leading role. But, in retaliation, the government has waged war on the left. Twenty protestors, including Socialist Party TD (Irish Member of Parliament) Paul Murphy and Councilors Mick Murphy and Kieran Mahon, have been charged with false imprisonment (kidnapping) of the Deputy Prime Minister, Joan Burton. The charges stem from a protest in the working-class Jobstown community in Dublin that blocked Burton's car for three hours. If found guilty, protestors could face life in prison. Short of that, Paul Murphy could be removed as a TD. The trials begin in April 2017, and the #JobstownNotGuilty campaign is planning international solidarity actions over the coming year.

### General Strike in Nigeria

Faced with the government going onto an offensive to further unload the burden of the economy onto working people and the poor, the Nigerian trade unions and allies defied a court ban and initiated an indefinite general strike to begin on May 18 (suspended as we went to press). This was immediately provoked by last week's sudden government decree raising fuel prices by 67% at a time when widespread fuel shortages have been bringing life to a halt. President Muhammadu Buhari, a former military dictator, was elected last year as a populist democrat and friend of the poor. But he has now been exposed as little different from the previous neoliberal president, Goodluck Jonathan, who provoked a general strike in 2012 over his own fuel deregulation.

### Canadian Wildfires Provoke Climate Change Debate

On the evening of May 3, the entire population of the northern Alberta city of Fort McMurray was ordered to leave as a wildfire swept toward it. An estimated 94,000 people fled their homes. Many of the workers displaced by the fire were economic refugees, forced to move as the jobs had left their previous communities, as well as newly arrived refugees from Syria. Fort McMurray's main industry is extracting the bitumen from the tar sands to produce crude oil. The tragic irony of the fire threatening the center of Canada's fossil fuel industry has provoked both silence and debate. Until now, most Canadians thought Canada was a relatively safe place, with climate change disasters happening somewhere else. The Fort McMurray fire should be a wake-up call: global warming is real, and it is happening here. ✪

*For more in-depth coverage, see SocialistWorld.net, website of the Committee for a Workers International.*

# Can the Democrats Be Reformed?

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recession and to keep factories producing goods for export during a period of U.S. world domination.

The ending of the powerful world economic upswing of 1950 to 1974 ushered in the beginning of a new crisis of capitalism. Increased Keynesian spending at a time of a slowing economy resulted in a massive spike in inflation. This forced the corporate ruling elite to change tack and move towards neoliberalism.

Neoliberal policies aim to drive down the share of wealth going to the working class in order to boost the profit rates of big business and help the U.S. corporations compete better against their international rivals. However, with every other country adopting neoliberal policies, this became a race to see who could drive down the living standards of their workers the fastest.

Neo-liberal policies in the U.S. resulted in an all-sided assault on wages, health benefits, work rules, safety standards, pensions, and the sanctity of the eight-hour day. To back up these policies, social programs were cut and spending on public housing was reduced. The increase in the unemployed and the homeless was then used as a warning to those workers who were considering going out on strike or standing up to this offensive of big business. Big business revived the policy of immediately hiring scabs to break strikes, and employers, using legislation already on the books, began to permanently replace workers who went out on strike. This was accompanied by a systematic attack on gains won by African-Americans and other oppressed minorities, with the corporate media whipping up racist propaganda to create divisions among workers.

## Democrats and Republicans – Both to Blame for the Crisis

Liberals try to blame these neoliberal

economic policies on Republicans, and especially Ronald Reagan who was elected president in 1980. However, neo-liberalism has been a bipartisan project from the start. Neoliberal measures were first introduced by President Carter, a Democrat, institutionalized by Reagan and have been continued by all presidents from both parties ever since.

The full-blown consequences of these policies were felt like a sledgehammer during the great recession of 2008. The huge spike in income inequality, the dismantling of social programs, weakening of labor unions, job-cutting free trade agreements and increased policies of repression are all part of the legacy of neoliberalism and the deepening crisis of capitalism.

While both parties have continued to deepen these policies, the main difference between the two parties is that while Republicans have embraced this agenda openly, Democrats conceal their support. Successive Democratic Party presidential candidates have made public promises to change these policies. Despite promises to end “Reaganomics,” Bill Clinton delivered NAFTA, the WTO, repealed welfare programs, escalated the policies of mass incarceration and based his economic policies on boosting profits on Wall Street and the financial sector.

This does not mean that both major parties are the same. Each party rests on support from different constituencies, and make statements that seek to keep their base intact. For example, the “Dixiecrat” wing of the Democrats in the South moved over almost entirely to the Republican Party in the ‘70s and ‘80s. This means that the Democrats now rest more heavily on more progressive-minded workers and young people in the rest of the country. The Democratic Party, while in no way a real defender of the interests of women, black people, immigrants or LGBTQ people, still manages to look progressive on a range of

issues because of the out and out reactionary policies advocated by the Republicans.

## Democrats - Party of the 1%

However, the sometimes sharp contrast with the Republicans on social issues does not change the fact that the Democratic Party is a political party of the 1%. President Obama is only the most recent example. Despite the enthusiasm he built up when promising a break from Bush’s policies, his first move was a trillion dollar bailout of Wall Street banks. The main thrust of his policies have been aimed at reviving U.S. capitalism – not providing for the needs of the 99% who are still suffering the effects of 30 year of neoliberal policies. His failure to enact a serious jobs program, provide real relief to homeowners and renters hit by the housing crash, or to dismantle mass incarceration and the drug laws, are telling. As are the record numbers of deportations and drone bombings on his watch.

In the present period of capitalist crisis, the ruling elite and the Democratic Party establishment are determined to reject Sanders’ progressive agenda. The type of structural Keynesian reforms conceded by capitalism during the massive postwar expansion are no longer possible. This is why the elite is determinedly standing by Hillary Clinton who has a long history of serving their interests. The politics of the Democratic Party are deeply wedded to corporate America, not the 99%. Sanders himself points out that real change comes from below. But it will take massive movements centered on the social power of the working class, building a new party of the 99% and ultimately being prepared to go beyond the boundaries of capitalism towards a socialist transformation of society in order to achieve the political revolution. ✪

# Socialists Debate About Bernie

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SA members have not joined the Democrats or registered as Democrats, and we have made clear to activists in the Sanders campaign that we wouldn’t sign people up to register as Democrats.

Chretien also writes, “The problem with the SA approach is that when you tell people to vote for Sanders and organize a ‘movement’ in support of him, almost everyone you reach will naturally conclude that you’re doing so because you support Sanders’ stated strategy of reforming the Democratic Party.”

When people heard us speak or read our material, this was not their “natural conclusion,” as we explicitly argued that we need to build a new party as an alternative to the Democratic Party. Furthermore, is this not a danger socialists face in many struggles? Is there a danger that the fight for \$15 promotes illusions that we can make capitalism “fair”? Or that people would “naturally conclude” that, if socialists supported Occupy, they were supporting the semi-anarchist and populist ideas that predominated in that movement?

Finding our way toward a new radicalizing generation supporting Sanders while putting forward a principled position is critical to rebuilding a socialist left. Future developments will often be similarly “impure,” like the Sanders campaign. Socialists will need to be actively involved in the movements of working people – even if these movements or their leaders have serious limitations – while fighting for an independent socialist position. ✪

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# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Issue #24 - June 2016

## Build the Movement to Beat Back Big Business



### Support Grows for \$15 in Minneapolis

#### Ginger Jentzen, 15 Now

In under four weeks, the grassroots campaign for a \$15 minimum wage in Minneapolis has captured tremendous community and labor support. One hundred volunteers have gathered nearly half of the 20,000-signature target to get \$15 on the November ballot. Through discussions on the street, over 250 people have donated over \$5,000, at an average donation of \$15. While presidential candidates raise the \$15 demand in national debates, after victories in California and New York many supporters are confident that Minneapolis will be the first Midwestern city to win a \$15 minimum wage.

To win, we must mobilize thousands of workers in Minneapolis. Only 7,000 valid signatures are necessary to qualify, but Socialist Alternative and supporting organizations aim to demonstrate overwhelming support before the movement takes a decision in late June whether to turn in signatures and trigger the ballot process. By speaking to 20,000 people in Minneapolis, we're laying the groundwork for a mass mobilization strategy against big business lobbying City Hall to push the \$15 decision into safer channels or trying to defeat our ballot measure at the polls.

#### Labor and Community Support

15 Now organizes weekly hubs for

signature gathering and political discussion on strategy to turn the broad 82% support for a phased-in \$15 into an active household discussion. Several key neighborhood associations, representing predominantly East African and Latino communities, are taking up the ballot initiative as an organizing tool, hosting events to discuss how getting active for \$15 relates to housing and other struggles facing low-income residents.

The Communications Workers of America (CWA) have played a leading role in mobilizing rank-and-file union members, hosting "Labor for \$15" outreach efforts and asking shop stewards to circulate petitions at work. Forty community members and unionized workers, representing bus drivers, university workers, nurses, teachers, laborers, and airport workers, participated in the first labor event on May 14. The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and Minnesota Nurses Association, two unions that have thrown their weight behind the ballot initiative, are linking up the \$15 fight with actions against attacks on teacher tenure and health care.

#### Corporate Media, the Voice of Big Business

The City Council can pass the \$15 proposal as an ordinance at any time, but the Mayor and others in City Hall hide behind

a "regional approach," an argument echoed by Minneapolis' main corporate newspaper, the *Star Tribune*.

Recently, the *Star Tribune* Editorial Board (EB) parroted the worst doomsday arguments used by big business to defeat pro-worker policies on two hotly debated workers' rights initiatives: earned safe and sick time (ESST) and paid parental leave. The EB argued that business should be allowed a "voluntary approach" on ESST and encouraged state lawmakers to pursue a "grand bargain" joining paid parental leave with a statewide preemption law to prevent Minneapolis from passing laws like \$15 an hour.

A key strategy to combat the resources of big business and the corporate media has been mobilizing working people to fight for these proposals. Hundreds of workers, and even supportive small business owners, packed City Hall to speak in favor of ESST. Winning \$15 an hour will be no different. Big business will spend millions to defeat a proposal like \$15 an hour, and it will truly take a well-organized movement of low-wage workers, backed by unions and flanked by community allies, to win a living wage in Minneapolis. 15 Now Minnesota's rapid success gathering petition signatures, mobilizing fresh activists, and being financially viable based on small donations from working people points to the immense support

this proposal has among ordinary people in Minneapolis.

As in other cities, big business will raise questions on the legality of the proposal in order to undermine workers taking the independent initiative outside business' influence in City Hall. Big business has filed lawsuits in many other cities after \$15 an hour has been passed, and will undoubtedly do so again, but the key element to prevent them from repealing \$15 an hour is the power of working people who recognize the threat these big-business lawsuits mean to their livelihoods and who are prepared to organize to defend their gains.

#### Mass Meeting Needed

To win in November, 15 Now Minnesota needs to build an army prepared to win a city-wide vote while under constant attack from big business. Before triggering the ballot initiative, we're proposing a mass meeting, welcoming anyone who wants to win \$15 an hour to discuss our ballot strategy and commit fully to what will be a historic campaign in Minneapolis. ☺

**Battle Over Labor Law Continues in France**

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