



SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



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SOCIALISTS

RUN FOR

CITY COUNCIL

Building a Voice for Working People

WHY I AM A SOCIALIST



Shirley Henderson
Seattle, WA

I grew up in a Catholic household that had strong social justice undercurrents. Nearly a decade of my life was dedicated to volunteering in food banks and homeless shelters. The exposure to so many stories of injustice and crippling debt fueled my desire to do more than just put a band-aid over people's suffering. I began to see the bigger picture of a system that profited from the marginalization and exploitation of whole groups of society.

As a woman and a member of the LGBT community, I was also well acquainted with the lies and false rhetoric that are used to label and marginalize various groups. Seeing this intentional disregard for humanity and

strategic fear-mongering of communities fueled my desire to do more than just offer meager temporary relief. I did not know how to make the biggest impact, or where to find other voices. My training in international studies left me very pessimistic that any large-scale change was possible.

When I encountered Socialist Alternative members at a rally for LGBT rights, I was struck by how optimistic they were about the possibility of change. There was nothing they said that I didn't already agree with. Both my religious background and my education taught me that the world is a violent, power-hungry place and there is nothing you can do but live as harmless a life as possible. Socialism is saying there is something we can all do and that is to simply place value on humanity and not on making a profit. Onward! ✪

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Socialist Alternative is a national organization fighting in our workplaces, communities, and campuses against the exploitation and injustices people face every day. We are union activists fighting for workers' rights and militant, democratic labor unions; we are a diverse organization combatting racism, students organizing against sweatshops and war, ordinary people demanding full legalization for all undocumented workers, women and men fighting sexism and homophobia.

We campaign for the building of a mass workers' party to represent the interests of workers, youth, and the environment against the two parties of big business.

We see the global capitalist system as the root cause of terrorism, war, poverty, discrimination, and environmental destruction. As capitalism moves deeper into crisis and recession, a new generation of workers and youth must join together to take the top 500 corporations into public ownership. We believe the dictatorships that existed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were perversions of what socialism is really about. We are for democratic socialism where people will have control over their daily lives.

Socialist Alternative is in political solidarity with the Committee for a Workers International, a worldwide socialist organization in 35 countries, on every continent. Join us!

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The Trial of Chelsea Manning

The final days of the trial revealed the disgusting new depths to which the US Military is sinking in an effort to persecute Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning. In 2010 this brave young military intelligence analyst released hundreds of thousands of secret documents to show the world the true face of the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Finally going to trial after more than three years behind bars where she was tormented with solitary confinement, shackling and sleep deprivation, Manning was faced last month with charges adding up to 136 years in prison.

Senior military and government figures openly admit that the final sentence of 35 years is intended to scare US soldiers into keeping their heads down and their mouths shut. Meanwhile the US military is using grotesque tactics to try to discredit Manning and demoralise those who rightly see her as a hero and icon.

See the full article by Manus Lenihan here: <http://socialistparty.net/comment/1269-the-trial-of-chelsea-manning>

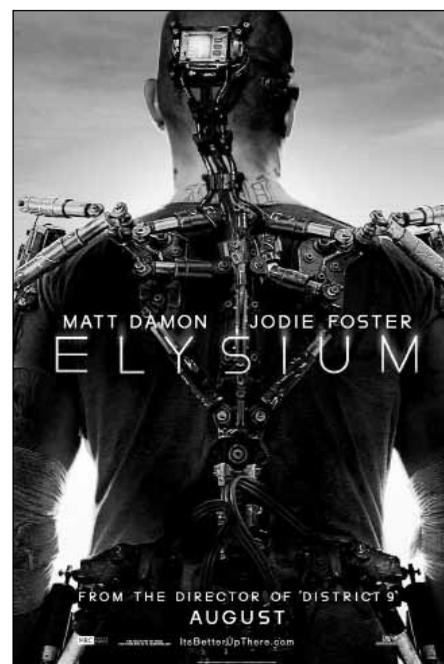


Inspiring Video from the Committee for a Workers International

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPNB6joEBGO>



Movie Review: *Elysium*



"The movie's meant to be an allegory for class warfare." - Neil Blomkamp, director

Read a socialist analysis of this film:
<http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6441>



Why We are Launching a New Paper

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



Jesse Lessinger

For over 10 years Socialist Alternative, a national organization of workers and young people, has produced the newspaper *Justice*. In that decade, we have consistently raised a critique of the capitalist system and its two big-business parties. We reported on local and national issues, international movements, and the lessons learned from the history of class struggle. We challenged the right-wing attacks from the Bush administration and were at the forefront of organizing the anti-war movement, starting immediately after 9/11 when many on the left shamefully bowed to the intense pro-war hysteria.

In the lines of *Justice*, we also warned of the dangers of supporting the Democrats as an alternative to the Republicans. We argued for the building of an independent movement and political party to fight for the interests of working people and youth. *Justice* has stood out on the left for its consistent opposition to both parties of big business – Republicans and Democrats – and its support for independent left political challenges, even when politically unpopular.

We swam against the stream of popular opinion in 2008 by our analysis of Obama as a big-business politician. We argued at that time that he would deeply disappoint the tens of millions supporting him in hopes of real progressive change and that this would inevitably lead to mass opposition and protests against him.

Global Crisis

The global crisis of capitalism beginning in 2007-2008 was a clear, but also tragic, confirmation of another key aspect of our analysis over the previous period: that capitalism was heading toward a deep crisis and the ruling elite would seek a way out by trying to place the burden of the crisis on the backs of ordinary working people.

We were also confident that these policies of the ruling parties in the U.S. and around the world would be met by resistance from below and that this would begin to expose the bankruptcy of the system and the political parties which defend it. At the end of 2010, we wrote that we were at a turning point which marked “the eve of mass movements” around the world (*Justice*



Socialist Alternative members at a table in New York.

#75) – and we were right!

The beginning of 2011 saw the incredible wave of revolution that swept Tunisia, Egypt, and much of the Arab world. In the U.S. the uprising in Wisconsin, despite its defeat, demonstrated the determination of the U.S. working class to fight back and the potential to win.

Occupy Wall Street

Finally, the fall of 2011 brought the Occupy movement, which forced into the mainstream debate a sharp critique of Wall Street, the political establishment, and the immense inequality in U.S. society. It inspired millions, who saw others like them who were just as angry and fed up. Occupy made the ideas of activism and struggle credible once again. It showed that it was possible to challenge the power structure and build social movements in the U.S.

Out of Occupy, Socialist Alternative called for organizing concrete campaigns with the fighting edge and boldness of Occupy but also with clear demands and goals. In *Justice* we called for hundreds of Occupy candidates to challenge the two parties of Wall Street in the 2012 elections.

Unfortunately, in 2012 a huge opportunity to run such campaigns was missed. In Seattle, however, Socialist Alternative candidate Kshama Sawant got an incredible 29% of the vote for the Washington State House! Kshama, who is running this year for Seattle City Council, again as a Socialist Alternative candidate, came in second in the

August primary, moving on to the general election with a shocking 35% of the vote!

For a socialist running with limited funding against corporate-backed candidates, this was a truly historic vote. While much of the more than 44,000 votes for Sawant represented a broad anti-corporate, anti-establishment mood and were not necessarily a full endorsement of socialism, it is clear beyond the shadow of a doubt that being openly socialist is not an obstacle to gaining support.

Fight for Fifteen

One of the key slogans of the campaign is a “\$15 minimum wage,” giving a clear political voice to the fast-food and other low-wage workers who have walked out and taken action for better wages and conditions. This struggle, although so far on a small scale, has many of the features of Occupy – like the willingness to take bold direct action – and it shows that working people are looking for far-reaching demands that actually speak to their needs.

There is clearly a mood for action, an opportunity for a new political voice, and an openness to socialism that did not exist even a few years ago. For instance, a Pew Research Center poll in December of 2011 showed that 18-29 year-olds preferred socialism to capitalism, a sharp change from even just one year before. It is for these reasons that we are now producing a new publication called *Socialist Alternative* that can boldly appeal to this

growing desire for something new. The launch of *Socialist Alternative* will go together with a new website and plans for a greatly improved social media presence.

More and more, there is a questioning of the society we live in and a deep disillusionment with the two-party system. The National Security Agency scandal this past summer only solidified in the minds of many the undemocratic and pro-big-business character of the Democratic Party.

Growing Alternative

Since the Occupy movement, Socialist Alternative has been growing and expanding to new cities throughout the U.S. The youth of this country, who only have a fading or secondhand memory of the Cold

War propaganda, are particularly interested in socialist ideas and in fighting for a better future.

Now is the time to raise the banner of democratic socialism as a clear alternative to a bleak capitalist future of growing poverty, gross inequality, attacks on democratic rights, environmental destruction, racism, and sexism.

We appeal to all of our readers to join the struggle for socialism today. Join us and help distribute our new newspaper, *Socialist Alternative* and reach a new audience with socialist ideas.

It's time for something new. It's time for something audacious. It's time to rise up, shake off the cobwebs of the past, and say that capitalism doesn't work for the 99%. We need an alternative, a socialist alternative! ✪

Detroit: Premeditated Pension Robbery

Dylan Seo

On July 18, Detroit became the largest ever municipality to declare Chapter 9 bankruptcy. Many of the neighborhoods in this once-vibrant city are comparable to those of a war-torn country. Houses, entire blocks: abandoned and depleted. Many streets remain dark at night. Electricity and hot water are sparse, leaving many without even a basic standard of living.

Among the 50 largest cities in the United States, Detroit has the highest property taxes. The city has a property tax of 3.3%, a commercial property tax of 4.1%, and an apartment tax of 4.2%. Residents pay as much to the city as they pay interest on their mortgages. The National Institute for Literacy estimates that 47% of the people living in the city are functionally illiterate. 60% of children live in poverty. 33% of Detroit's 140 square miles are vacant or derelict. It's no wonder the the population continually plummets – from 1.8 million in 1950 to 685,000 today.

The massive decision to declare bankruptcy is by no means a hasty call – but is calculated to the advantage to the rich and powerful. The pre-planned bankruptcy is a smokescreen to gut the pensions that were fought for by union workers. Of the city's \$18 billion in long-term liabilities, \$3.5 billion is now owed to city pensions, while another \$6.4 billion is owed to fund other employee benefits, largely retiree health care. The city also borrowed millions from its own pension funds while underfunding them by more than \$100 million in recent years.

Are the city's finances and future being discussed and decided by the population, by those most affected? No. Instead utilizing the “right to work” legislation, the governor has established and appointed “emergency manager” Kevin Orr, to undemocratically determine what is to be done and how it is carried out. Orr specializes in bankruptcy. It's what he does. Meanwhile, half a billion dollars were handed to one of the richest families in Detroit to build a hockey arena; meanwhile, the team's owner sits on the board of Detroit's Development Authority.

This has national implications, as we see potential attacks on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid while corporations get tax breaks. We have to get organized to defend our pensions and services against capitalism's economic and political vultures. ✪

Boston Election Campaign Helps Build Movements

Many activists say that electoral politics is merely a distraction and that the super-rich have rigged the electoral process. They argue that real change is won through protests, direct action, and strikes, not elections. It is true that Democrats co-opt social movements and funnel these energies into electing corporate-controlled politicians, but running independent working-class candidates can be a valuable aspect of a strategy to fight against big-business domination.

Candidates and electoral campaigns can shine a light on struggles, bring media attention to a fight-back, and shift the political debate in society. Electoral campaigners can be taken more seriously when knocking on doors than other activists. Seamus Whelan, a registered nurse and union activist, is running for City Council in Boston, and this campaign is helping to build the struggles organized by working people in the city.

As we go to print, the low-wage worker actions and organization that have gained headlines nationwide and shut down fast-food businesses in seven cities have only started to come to Boston. The Seamus Whelan campaign has championed the fight for \$15 an hour and a union, making this demand for nearly doubling the minimum wage the campaign's centerpiece. Thousands of leaflets have been handed out and thousands of doors knocked on, provoking conversations across the city about corporate domination and the need to fight back



Seamus Whelan at a "Fight for 15" standstill in Copley Square, Boston.

to win.

The day after George Zimmerman was found not guilty for the racist murder of teen Trayvon Martin, we knocked on hundreds of doors in the multi-racial neighborhood of Egleston Square to build the rally taking

place that night. People were encouraged and felt confident that a candidate for city council was taking up this issue.

The Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA), of which Seamus is a member, is conducting a campaign for safe staffing

legislation in Boston to improve health care and create jobs. Seamus is helping to lead the struggle against cuts and layoffs at his hospital, and our campaign is helping nurses publicize this battle.

Unfortunately, most people view politics in this country as merely elections. While ongoing movements can change this, we also have to acknowledge reality and interact with the electoral process in a meaningful way. We can use elections to publicize struggles and show in practice that the two-party system can be challenged. We can make demands that push struggles forward and unite working people, like the \$15 an hour minimum wage. Our demands push at the limits of what capitalism can provide, while we also offer a socialist alternative to the system itself.

The time is now to get organized to run viable independent left candidates; this process could push forward a debate in the labor movement and community groups about the need to break from the Democrats. This, alongside the strengthening of struggles and the ongoing betrayals of corporate politicians, can lay the basis for a new mass workers' party. A viable working-class party in this country would massively shift the political discussion, strengthen the confidence of movements, and be able to challenge the currently unbridled corporate control of politics. ✪

McDonalds' Advice to Workers: "Get a Second Job!"

Karen Green

In July, the McDonald's corporation released a budget plan for its employees that could be accessed online. This budget plan, the multi-billion dollar employer claimed, was a useful resource for its workers to show that life without a living wage was possible.

Candidly named the "Practical Money Skills Budget Journal," this guide to living clearly suggested that a second job is necessary to make ends meet. With a monthly budget of \$2,060 and 70-plus hours on the clock, McDonald's seemed all too eager to outline that

living paycheck-to-paycheck was indeed possible, so long as health insurance, heat, child care, and adequate groceries go unaccounted for.

If McDonald's poor wages and poor treatment of its employees is not a clear insult, a "budget plan" so detached from reality clearly is. But McDonald's is not the only corporate power to exploit its workers with low wages and low hours. Poverty levels have continued to rise as wages stagnate, and families are forced onto government assistance programs. The federal minimum wage at \$7.25 fails to meet basic living expenses, and it is clear that retail and

fast-food industry giants will not shift their pay scales on their own volition.

As a former employee at Walmart, I have seen firsthand the tactics used to keep employees from organizing for better wages, hours, and conditions. From day one, new workers are subjected to anti-organization propaganda and kept short-staffed and isolated in their departments. Lower-level managers are placed under immense pressure to discourage employees from registering complaints. Sick and injured workers are threatened with disciplinary measures or slashed hours if productivity is not kept up to



par. Entire stores are staffed with part-time employment. This allows the company to skirt benefits while keeping its employees on the verge of complete poverty. These conditions are not just exclusive to Walmart; they are an entire industry standard.

With the formation of worker's rights organizations such

as Our Walmart and Fast Food Forward, the latter a campaign focused on fast-food workers, employees are making a stand. Calling for \$15 an hour and the right to organize, these movements are allowing workers to fight corporate exploitation and for a living wage that can help communities thrive. ✪

Sawant Wins 35% of Vote in the Seattle Primary

Socialist Breakthrough Highlights Path for Independent Politics

Calvin Pope

In the August primary election for Seattle City Council, Socialist Alternative candidate Kshama Sawant won a stunning 35% of the vote in a three-way race against two Democratic Party candidates. Over 44,000 people voted for Sawant: more votes than the incumbent Seattle mayor or any of his opponents.

A majority of primary voters voted *against* 16-year Democratic incumbent Richard Conlin who, despite a massive fundraising advantage and name recognition, received less than 48% of the vote. Sawant defeated Brian Carver, a Democrat and Amazon manager, and she will move on to the general election facing a vulnerable Conlin in a two-way race.

With her clarion call for a citywide \$15/hour minimum wage, rent control, and a tax on millionaires to fund mass transit and education, Sawant had been written off as “too hard left for Seattle” by *The Seattle Times* and portrayed as a fringe underdog by other corporate media.

In defiance of the corporate punditry, the race has been catapulted into a serious contest between Sawant and Conlin. The flurry of media coverage following election night demonstrates the shake-up that has occurred. As Tom Barnard, a long-time Seattle political commentator, wrote, “Certainly, the facts themselves are amazing. But what happened conceptually was even more revolutionary, if you will excuse that word applied to the run of a socialist.”

“For what Kshama did was to simply overturn the common wisdom of how to succeed in local elections in general and City Council races in particular. She took what were viewed as two immutable political laws [the need for big money and Democratic Party endorsements] and essentially threw them out the window ... It’s nothing short of an earthquake ... Kshama has shown a new path for independent candidates who directly advance working people’s interests and issues,” (8/12/2013).

The significance of the primary result is even greater given the context of a low voter turnout (34%) and a primary electorate which is significantly more conservative and higher-income than in general elections – the most unfavorable terrain for left-wing and socialist candidates.

Independent Working-Class Politics

Sawant’s working-class message and bold campaign has had an electrifying effect. “A majority of workers and young people face an increasingly unaffordable city. Most are



disgusted by the endless parade of politicians who play with progressive rhetoric at election time, then pander to big corporations and the super-rich while in office,” said Sawant.

The Sawant campaign has been a constant and visible presence at Seattle area protests. “If there’s a working class protest somewhere in Seattle, Socialist Alternative council candidate Kshama Sawant always seems to be there,” was how *The Stranger*, Seattle’s second-largest circulation newspaper, summed it up.

Sawant posters were plastered throughout the city, and 25,000 leaflets were distributed. Thousands of doors were knocked on, along with street corner tabling and phone banking. Over 100 people played an active role as volunteers. Sawant refused to take any corporate money, instead relying on the support of workers and left-wing activists, raising \$26,000, a majority of which was in donations of \$25 or less.

Fight for \$15

“We don’t promise that ... one electoral campaign is going to shift everything dramatically. We’re activists, and ultimately, this space has to be occupied by mass movements and grassroots struggle, and this is something we have to do together. And that is the most empowering message that any electoral campaign can take to working people,” said Sawant.

Passing a \$15/hour minimum wage – the signature issue of Sawant’s campaign – will require massive and active support, with major protests on the streets and low-wage workers carrying out coordinated strikes in their workplaces. Sawant is using her platform

to help build just such a movement, mobilizing for the actions called by fast-food workers and putting the issue of raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour on the political agenda.

At her primary night election party, Sawant called for labor and organizations on the left to jointly build mass rallies to fight for a \$15/hour minimum wage in Seattle and pledged to hold Town Hall meetings throughout Seattle this fall to build the Fight for \$15.

Next Steps and Prospects

The Sawant campaign plans to organize over 300 volunteers and carry out a massive door-knocking campaign to popularize the \$15/hour minimum wage and to elect Kshama Sawant, along with a drive to raise \$100,000 (\$30,000 has been raised so far). If these goals are met, the campaign will have a real shot at seeing Sawant elected.

What position the labor movement and other progressive organizations take will be crucial in determining the outcome. If Seattle unions were to throw their weight behind Sawant – with endorsements, mobilizing their members, and donations – there is no doubt Sawant would win.

While Sawant picked up the endorsement of four unions in the primary, the majority of Seattle’s unions endorsed the corporate politician, Democrat Richard Conlin.

Now that the primary election has thoroughly demonstrated the popularity of Sawant’s pro-worker message, will labor leaders break new ground and mobilize behind a genuine workers’ candidate? The next few weeks will see a vigorous debate on these questions, with plans underway to establish a “Labor for

Sawant” campaign.

Another key factor in determining the general election outcome will be voter turnout. While general elections are usually more representative than primaries, they still tend to under-represent low-wage workers, youth, and people of color.

But most important will be the development of struggle this fall. The “viability” of Sawant’s politics depends on workers and youth moving into mass action. An upturn in protests, strikes, and other actions would be decisive. Sawant has made clear she will use her campaign to help spur on any such movements.

Win or lose in the general election, Sawant and Socialist Alternative have already seriously shaken up the formerly sleepy political landscape in Seattle. Sawant’s campaign has already helped to build support for a series of radical demands, raising the sights and confidence of Seattle’s workers and activists.

Crucially, Sawant has succeeded in putting socialism on the map in Seattle. Her campaign has fueled a public debate on capitalism and socialism and demonstrated the growing support for socialist ideas.

Richard Conlin will face a serious run for his money and will be under intense pressure to give reforms to shore up his base. The Sawant campaign will provide a living demonstration of how workers and the left can run a serious independent election campaign which will serve as a model to spread throughout the country. It is a harbinger of the coming wave of political upheaval and challenges to the two parties of big business. ✪

Questions and Answers

We Need a \$15 an Hour Minimum Wage

Kshama Sawant

Candidate for City Council, Seattle, WA

The growing movement of fast-food workers boldly calling for a \$15/hour minimum wage marks the next stage in the struggle against economic equality in the U.S. Picking up where the Occupy movement left off, fast-food workers are demanding the right to unionize and an end to poverty wages.

Since the inability to survive on the current federal minimum wage of \$7.25/hour is undeniable, conservative economists and the corporate media are forced to rehash age-old rhetoric against minimum wage increases.

How do the arguments defending low wages square with the landscape of inequality?

Aren't most minimum-wage workers just teenagers earning pocket money?

Three-quarters of minimum-wage workers are aged 20 or older. More than 25% are parents, and a majority of them are the primary or only providers for their household.

Most low-wage workers are not able to advance to better-paying jobs. Entry-level positions in the fast-food industry offer few prospects for promotion or advancement, despite the often-advanced "mobility myth."

Shouldn't workers who want to earn more get an education and a better job?

Minimum-wage workers are better-educated today, but they are paid less than they were thirty years ago. The share of workers at or below the federal minimum wage who had some college education increased from 19.5% to 33.3% between 1979 and 2011.

Low-wage jobs comprised about 35% of jobs lost in 2008 and 2009, yet they accounted for 76% of net job growth in 2010.

Increasingly, more education results in more student debt, but not more opportunities for today's graduates.

Won't increasing the minimum wage be a "job killer"?

The economy is reeling with over 20 million people unemployed or underemployed, a low-wage and mostly non-unionized workforce, and staggering consumer and student



debt.

Paying \$15/hour to tens of millions of workers will increase the amount they and their families can spend on goods and services, giving a huge boost to the economy. Money spent by workers has a far bigger impact on economic growth rate than handouts to the top 1%, who sit on much of that money. Studies done on recent minimum wage increases show that employment was largely unaffected.

If the working class is successful in winning wage increases, corporations will try and retaliate in other ways. They may threaten to mechanize production to cut jobs, move their stores, or lay off workers. For instance, Walmart has threatened to pull out from plans to build outlet stores to punish Washington D.C. for its proposed new \$12.50/hour minimum wage.

However, most low-wage workers have jobs that cannot easily be outsourced. Fast-food cooks and servers, hotel workers, child care providers, health care workers, parking lot attendants – all do their work on site. Most jobs that can be outsourced to low-wage free trade zones already have been.

Despite that, corporations will try to cut jobs where they can. The alternative to the nationwide and global race to the bottom is for workers to fight for better conditions everywhere.

Can businesses afford to pay \$15/hour? Won't an increase in minimum wage cause inflation?

Starbucks, McDonald's, Subway, Pizza Hut, and a majority of other huge corporations are raking in mega-profits. CEO salaries and bonuses are at record highs. The CEO of YUM! Brands (KFC, Pizza Hut, Taco Bell) made \$20.5 million last year. The average worker in one of the stores made \$7.50/hour. Estimates show that Walmart's CEO is paid more per hour than the average Walmart worker is paid in a whole year.

While corporations that employ a low-wage workforce are highly profitable, small businesses that cannot afford the wage increase could be subsidized by taxing the big corporations and ending corporate welfare.

What would happen if the cost of wage increases was added to prices? When the minimum wage was first instituted, and every time it has since been revised, there have been dire predictions that it would cause an immediate and steep increase in prices. In reality, these apocalyptic predictions have never been borne out.

A 1999 study found that a \$1 increase in minimum wage to McDonald's workers would add only 2 cents to the cost of a hamburger. If Walmart passed the entire costs of the new \$12.50/hour minimum wage in Washington D.C. to consumers, the cost to the average Walmart shopper is estimated to increase by 1.1% per shopping trip.

Even if corporations pushed the entire costs of a minimum wage increase onto prices, the projected price increases are minor, especially in light of the skyrocketing living costs faced by the working class.

Fight for Socialism and Workplace Control

The deep crisis of capitalism, with stagnating low growth rates, will ensure that the capitalist class will go on the offensive against \$15/hour. Not only would a sizable wage jump threaten to cut into their massive profits or personal bonuses, but victory even in one city will embolden workers everywhere. This is also why corporations spend large sums lobbying against pro-worker legislation and on anti-union advertising. Restaurant chains and their franchisees alone spent nearly \$1 million in 2006 lobbying against minimum wage increases.

Mass movements and large labor mobilizations, including coordinated strike actions, will be needed to win \$15/hour. Winning it would be a huge step forward for the U.S. working class, both in the tangible leap in their standards of living and in the collective political experience of a successful struggle.

But workers will ultimately have to go beyond the struggle for a decent wage. As long as the reins of the economy lie in the hands of a tiny elite, the value of an increased minimum wage will be eroded over time by increases in the costs of living. The working class will need to fight for workplaces and the economy to be run democratically by workers themselves.

If, in spite of the huge increases in labor productivity and technological advancement, this economic system still cannot afford a high standard of living for all, then we cannot afford this system. The fight for a living wage is ultimately tied to the fight for socialism. ✪

A Socialist Alternative Publication

Manifesto of the Fastfood Worker

by Brent Gaspaire
and Tony Wilsdon
\$5.00



all prices include shipping and handling

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Growing Prospects for a New Movement

Cracks Opening in the Two-Party System

Bryan Koulouris

Despite official statistics of nearly three straight years of economic recovery and improving employment figures – make no mistake about it, there is a crisis in the U.S. There is a political crisis, a social crisis, and an environmental crisis. At the root of the political dysfunction is the fact that the economic “recovery” is shallow and fragile while the majority of new jobs offer low wages.

The ruling elites are trying to make working people, the poor, and youth pay for a dire situation created by casino capitalism. At the same time, they try to blame each other for the crisis because neither party can point the finger at where it really belongs – the big corporations that helped make this crisis and that fund both political parties. While the big banks got bailed out with billions of dollars, working people have seen continued mass unemployment and budget cuts.

Political leaders are distrusted, and they can't seem to get anything done. Presidential appointments to posts, once seen as routine, are now always met with substantial opposition, often from both parties. The immigration debate, tremendously important to the lives of millions, has become a game of maneuvers full of grandstanding in the halls of power. As Congress went to summer recess, the satirical newspaper *The Onion* published a headline that captured the mood toward politicians: “Congress Fiercely Divided Over Completely Blank Bill that Says and Does Nothing.”

Obama has cited his limited and pro-corporate health care legislation as a great accomplishment, and now there will be a political crisis (again!) over this issue when the policy begins to be implemented. At the end of September, there is another showdown planned over the budget with another possibility of complete government shutdown. This prospect, like the sequester before it, could do damage to the lives of working people, further discredit the politicians, and even significantly weaken the economy.

Political Disarray

The seeming non-stop dysfunction reflects real splits in the ruling class but also the shallow nature of the recovery, the relative decline in power of the U.S. empire and the dwindling social support for both parties.

As Republican primary voters, often in gerrymandered districts, become more right-wing, the country as a whole is moving left. This scenario can isolate the GOP, an important political instrument of the U.S. ruling



June 3 “Moral Monday” protest in North Carolina.

class. Republicans are divided, and political insiders estimate that House Majority leader Eric Cantor has less control over representatives in his own party than anyone in a similar position in the history of U.S. politics.

Meanwhile, the Democrats serve the interests of big business by co-opting social movements and continuing to direct them into “safe” channels that don’t challenge corporations. Increasingly, this will be difficult for them to do as the crisis deepens and their true colors are shown further.

Obama and the Democrats will be further exposed this fall when he pushes for more corporate tax breaks and attacks on popular social programs.

The discrediting of both parties can lead to opportunities to build the left. People support what are in essence socialist positions on increasing the minimum wage, providing quality health care for all, and stopping sexism, homophobia, and government spying. Socialism itself is now viewed more favorably than capitalism among youth and people of color, (Pew Research, December 2011).

Social Movements

Low-wage workers have stood up across the country with bold strike action and audacious demands. This reflects the mood that exists after Occupy. While the Occupy movement itself won’t re-emerge in the same form, its determined spirit and anger at the 1% can be re-ignited in the form of movements to fight against the injustices of

capitalist society.

In North Carolina, led by the NAACP, there have been weekly actions including mass civil disobedience resulting in hundreds of arrests against anti-union laws and other right-wing legislation. Women staged a full-scale occupation of the State House in Texas against sexist legislation. Rallies demanding “Justice for Trayvon” reached every corner of the country immediately after the Zimmerman verdict. Environmental campaigns against coal terminals and pipelines are giving birth to new organization in many parts of the country. These movements and protests are currently not generalized or prominent in the way that Occupy was, but they are the initial tremors of a coming social earthquake.

Looming Political Deadlock

Expect multi-faceted government dysfunction in the coming months. There will be a fight in Congress over immigration and a fight in Congress over the budget this fall. Also, we can expect Republicans to perform more grandstanding on Obamacare in an attempt to mobilize their base for the next election.

On immigration, the divisions in the Republican Party will be on display for everyone to see. People like Marco Rubio and possibly John McCain will tout their pro-immigrant credentials while Tea Partiers will propose mass deportations of millions. Obama, who has deported more immigrants than any other President in history, is putting

forward a “compromise” of further militarization of the border and a guest worker program friendly to corporate profits, sweetened with a flawed legalization process full of hurdles, delays, and arduous requirements.

While Obama’s plan would provide breathing space to some immigrants facing the threat of deportation, we don’t need a more militarized border or a guest worker program that helps drive down wages and living conditions. We need full legalization and citizenship rights for all who want them in order to foster united working-class struggle to improve all our lives. Many Latinos and pro-immigrant activists will be disappointed with how this debate plays out.

At the same time, there will be a further battle over the budget and debt. This will see proposals to cut Medicare, Medicaid and, Social Security: three of the most popular government programs in the country. This will be accompanied by further political posturing from both parties, and Obama is already proposing corporate tax breaks that will anger progressive workers and youth.

The election campaigns of Socialist Alternative in Seattle, Boston, and Minneapolis show that the support for Democrats is shallow when a left-wing working-class option is presented. The pressure from these campaigns has strained many of the ties of local community activists with the Democratic Party machine. The coming months and years will provide massive opportunities for working-class struggle and a political fight against the corporate-dominated two-party system. The actions taken need to start to lay the basis for what is really needed: a working-class party with deep roots among the millions in this country looking for an alternative. ✪

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by Tony Wilsdon
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Liberal Feminism vs. Socialist Feminism

Kelly Bellin
Minneapolis

The following is an edited version of a speech given at Socialist Alternative's National Summer Camp.

Violence against women is at the forefront of the discussion on fighting for women's rights internationally and the center of growing awareness and outrage in society about sexism. This outrage comes in the midst of this decades-long slew of right-wing attacks on women, which have played a significant role in giving room for the reassertion of sexist ideas in popular culture.

The examples of scandals featured in media seem endless, from high-profile cases of sexual violence in India along with the fight-back in communities, to the Steubenville attacks, to systemic sexual assault within the military.

To successfully fight back, we need a successful strategy. Central to this is understanding the core differences between liberal feminism – the dominant ideology of mainstream women's organizations – and socialist feminism, which we adopt.

Fundamental Differences

According to Wikipedia, "Liberal Feminism seeks individualistic equality of men and women through political and legal reform, without altering the structure of society." Essentially, what's necessary is to change the currently existing laws and attitudes which prevent equality.

What defines socialist feminism is a class analysis of how women's oppression has emerged historically through the development of class society and how it is still perpetuated by the capitalist system, which we recognize as necessary to overthrow in order to truly achieve equality.

The lack of a class analysis is absolutely fatal for building movements. It reduces liberal feminist movements to fighting for policies that are underwhelming compared to the mood and consciousness driving forward these movements. It boils down to effectively defining attitudes as the problem, individual laws as the problem, or even men as



Abortion rights were won in the streets.

the problem. What follows, then, is the implication that anti-sexist education and rewriting law is the solution. It implies that women simply have to take power back from men.

Fighting for reforms, however, is not what differentiates liberal feminism from socialist feminism. Marxists fight for and support any and all positive reforms that benefit the lives of women and all working-class people. And it's true that reforms have played an important, sometimes lifesaving, role in women's lives.

There's a serious contradiction that exists right now: widespread recognition and outrage that violence against women is a problem, yet no movement to adequately fight back.

But through fighting only for reforms, liberal feminism does not adequately draw broader

conclusions about the system or what's necessary to truly achieve equality. In a practical sense, it becomes a superficial approach with shallow solutions, primarily surrounding mainstream women's organizations which represent mostly middle-class white women.

Liberal feminism hinges on examples such as high-power politicians like Hilary Clinton, or the hiring of Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer, a then-pregnant white woman who was first hailed as a brilliant example of breaking through the glass ceiling. Yet months after taking her new position, Mayer canceled the work-from-home program for all employees, which is particularly crucial for mothers, just before installing a private nursery in her office.

Without a class analysis, and resting on the idea that equality can be achieved within capitalism, liberal feminism reduces down to promoting a few women into a few positions of power and educating men not to be sexist. By extension, it accepts the idea that there are always going to be poor women, or that role models - more CEOs - are all women need to be empowered.

For socialists, it's a question

of changing the balance of power in society – and that's why mass movements are so crucial. The key value of mass movements is raising the consciousness, confidence, and organization of women and the broader working class.

Violence Against Women and Rape Culture

In recent years, the term "rape culture" has been developed and used to describe the violent sexism that women face in many areas of life. The term itself encapsulates the idea that the problem isn't just the act of sexual violence itself, but that the constant threat of sexual violence against women permeates throughout our culture to oppress women. Rape isn't just a crime that happens because a bad man was in the alley; it's taught, it's excused, and it must be fought on a wider basis. This analysis represents a step forward in the fight against women's oppression.

There's a serious contradiction that exists right now: widespread recognition and outrage that violence against women is a problem, yet no movement to adequately

fight back. Just in the last couple of years, there have been a few powerful examples of the limits of movements directed by liberal feminist ideas, but also of the tremendous potential that exists for explosive movements around the historic attacks on women.

The Slutwalk movement was an important attempt to confront and fight violence against women. As a direct response to the Toronto officer's offensive comment, the Slutwalk rallies captured the widespread anger of women around victim-blaming. Yet its tactic represented a serious shortcoming, as many women rejected the idea of claiming the term "slut" as a positive descriptor for sexuality when it has such deep roots in oppression and violence against women.

By framing the problem as the attitudes of men or a lack of education, the Slutwalks took the logic of liberal feminism to the extreme, exposing its ridiculousness by having demands that didn't go nearly far enough. Without directly linking victim-blaming to the sea of oppression that women face, the Slutwalks couldn't maintain momentum or build a serious challenge to sexism or the system which has created it.

Building Movements That Can Adequately Fight for Women

Programmatic failures result in the paralysis of liberal feminism and its inability to really answer the issue of sexual violence. This is an absolute and dire obstacle preventing it connecting with all of the problems facing working-class women, which is necessary to build a real movement for women's rights.

For movements to build and maintain serious momentum, we must put forward a class appeal to women, to men, and to society at large. Socialist feminism is defined – and strengthened – by its ability to explain how sexism functions as a tool of the ruling elite to maintain the oppression of the vast majority of working people. By identifying sexism as a function of divide-and-rule under capitalism, it points to a way forward to liberation – not only of women, but humanity as a whole – from the oppression of capitalism. ✪

Obama: Guilty by Omission

The War on Black America Continues

Anh Tran & Steven Swenson

The gut-wrenching statistics on the poverty, foreclosures, incarceration, unemployment, and stunted graduation rates deluging black and brown communities cannot begin to illustrate just how little things have changed under Obama.

But most revealing of the administration's de-prioritization of racial justice has been its diffident passivity toward reforming the criminal justice system, the most sinister appendage of a new Jim Crow. Black and brown people are disenfranchised, dehumanized, and dumped into overflowing prisons under the pretext of making communities "safer."

But safer for whom? Evidently not people of color. Recently, for example, a black woman by the name of Marissa Alexander was sentenced to 20 years for firing a warning shot at a wall in fear of her abusive husband, while an overzealous vigilante walked free after murdering Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teen.

In the age of Obama, we are witnessing the decimation of a generation. Black Americans are incarcerated at rates nearly six times more than whites. Blacks and Latinos, who account for a quarter of the general population, make up 58% of the prison population. Black Americans are only 12% of drug users, yet are 38% of those arrested and 58% of those incarcerated in state prisons for drug offenses. The government spends \$70 billion per year on corrections, while schools are collapsing and jobs have disappeared from communities of color (NAACP.org).

War on Drugs or War on Black America?

Racial disparities in the justice system are most overt in drug legislation, such as cocaine sentencing. Poor black Americans tend to buy cheaper crack cocaine, for which possession of trace amounts results in a five- or ten-year mandatory minimum, a sentence 100 times greater than for the powdered cocaine more often used by whites. Under the 100:1 ratio, black Americans served similar prison sentences for non-violent drug crimes as white Americans did for violent crimes (aclu.org). Nearly half the Congressional Black Caucus found it justifiable to support this drug law in 1986, (*Black Agenda Report*, 8/7/13). Today, 15% of federal inmates are crack cocaine offenders, over 80% of whom are black, (*Slate*, 7/29/13).

Problems still exist in the flabby solutions forwarded by both political parties. The bipartisan Fair Sentencing Act passed by Congress in 2010 reduced the cocaine



Protests in every major city demanded justice for Trayvon Martin following the Zimmerman verdict.

sentencing disparity to an 18:1 ratio. But since crack and powder cocaine are the same drug, the only racially unbiased sentencing ratio would be 1:1. Attorney General Eric Holder's recent ultimatum also grants reprieve from mandatory minimums for low-level drug offenders, as long as they can prove no significant criminal history or association with a gang or cartel. Again, it's a step forward, but not without inflexible stipulations, nor is it a law that is binding upon subsequent administrations.

Obama hasn't taken any political risks to advance these attempts at solutions. Every year, he pleads for more funding for federal prisons. He hasn't even endorsed the End Racial Profiling Act, a no-brainer for our first black president. And he has the audacity to speak about "fatherhood" and "responsibility" in front of black audiences, while enabling the very policies that lock up the fathers of 1 out of every 15 black children and crucify these men with criminal records, ensuring their perpetual unemployment and poverty, (sentencing.typepad.com, 12/1/12).

It took the slaughter of a black teen, the acquittal of his murderer, and protests across dozens of cities before Obama broke his long silence about race with some heart-warming remarks, but still no deed. Cornel West decried, "Five years in office and can't say a word about a new Jim Crow," (*Democracy Now*, 7/22/13).

The Democrats Get Three Strikes

To be clear, Obama is a powerful figure-head for a party that receives 96% of black

support, and yet is out of touch with ordinary black people. During the Reagan era, it was the majority Democrats in Congress who really led the War on Drugs to vaingloriously prove to Republicans that they were tough on crime.

Then Democratic President Bill Clinton passed a crime bill – written by Joe Biden – with statutes that disproportionately razed communities of color. This included the "three strikes" rule, 60 additional death penalty offenses, adult prosecution of minors charged with certain violent crimes, harsher penalties against undocumented immigrants, and eliminating Pell Grants to prisoners seeking higher education, (National Criminal Justice Reference Service, 10/24/94).

And it was Democratic Mayor Michael Bloomberg who oversaw New York City's heinous "Stop and Frisk" policy. Even after a federal judge ruled the practice racially discriminatory and unlawful, Bloomberg continues to speak in support of Stop and Frisk, appealed the ruling, and accused the judge of not understanding policing (*ABC News*, 8/12/13). Police Commissioner Ray Kelly, the other man behind stop-and-frisk, has been publically adorned with Obama's praises and could be appointed Secretary of Homeland Security unless we raise hell on the streets.

A Generation Sheds Its Extra Baggage

Glen Ford of *Black Agenda Report* explains that the campaign to criminalize and terrorize black and brown people has been so successful "precisely because there

Justice for Trayvon Martin

A Program to End Police Violence, Extrajudicial Violence, and Racism:

- ✪ End the racist war on drugs. Release from prison all those convicted of minor drug offenses.
- ✪ End police violence, racial profiling, and other racist practices such as "Stop and Frisk."
- ✪ Create democratically elected community review boards with full power to oversee law enforcement and public safety, with the right to recall officials.
- ✪ Invest in rehabilitation, recreational centers, job training, and living-wage jobs, not prisons or detention centers!
- ✪ End mass unemployment, poverty, and inequality, which are the basis of most crime, by creating decent, living-wage jobs for all through a massive public works program and fully funding education, health care, and social services.

Read more at: <http://www.socialistalternative.org/news/article15.php?id=2164>



is no such [black mass movement] – that the forces of white supremacy have been emboldened by Black passivity," (*Black Agenda Report*, 8/7/13). He encourages challenges to specific policies like "Stand Your Ground" and Stop and Frisk as just one fragment of a wholesale confrontation against the entire illegitimate criminal justice system.

The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement urges the black community to *proactively* defend itself with a civil rights movement reborn: "We must end our reliance on the model of protest mobilizations that occur *after* the police have executed one of our loved ones. This must cease being our primary means of securing justice," (mxgm.org, 7/12).

No matter the president's skin tone, people of color and their allies must shed their loyalty to the Democratic Party and instead place confidence in their own dynamic organization and mobilization within their unions, workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods. We have been unequivocally shown that a party with a black President, a black attorney general, and a Congressional Black Caucus can still preserve policies of black oppression for the benefit of a mainly-white elite. In this criminal justice system where people of color suffer the fiercest blows, we must end our fearful refusal to censure Obama and the whole establishment for unapologetically failing a whole generation of black and brown people. ✪

Obama's Support Falling

We Need a New Party



Alan Jones
New York

There seems to be hardly a week going by without another crisis or scandal breaking out for the Obama administration. It started after Edward Snowden and Glenn Greenwald detailed the NSA's unconstitutional spying programs with the revelation that the administration is complicit in what is, in effect, the most extensive surveillance program in history. The crisis became international after Obama cancelled his summit with the Russian President after Putin offered asylum to Snowden. Despite lame efforts to discredit Snowden and do damage control, a majority of 59% of Americans disapprove of the spying.

It should be remembered that President Obama had promised in one of the first memos after his inauguration a new era of "transparency" and "openness in government." But according to *Bloomberg News*, the Obama administration is not only less transparent than the Bush administration but also has persecuted more whistleblowers under the Espionage Act than all previous administrations combined and censored more FOIA (freedom of information) than any other year. Hunger strikes continue at Guantanamo, which remains open almost six years after Obama promised to shut it down.

Detroit and the "Recovery"

Exposing the real character of the so-called economic recovery, Detroit, once the fourth-largest U.S. city and the manufacturing powerhouse of the world, declared bankruptcy. Obama stepped in to explain that there would be no "bailout" for Detroit – only harsh measures against working people there. Bailouts, it should be understood, are only for banks and Wall Street firms "too big to fail."

The statistics about new "jobs" and the state of affairs for working people are exposed as cruel publicity stunts to create the impression of economic improvement. The vast majority of new jobs are part-time and low-paid. Real

unemployment is disguised by changing the way of counting the unemployed and excluding the 8.2 million workers who are "involuntary part-time workers." A year ago, Obama referred to the issue of "good, middle class jobs, so people can have confidence if they work hard, they can get ahead" as the "defining issue of our time." The real growth area has been in temporary agencies – the very definition of low-paid, insecure work. Over 17 million people, 12% of the U.S. workforce, are now in this category of uncertain contingency work, without benefits, at the mercy of the various contractors.

Among voters, there were some hopes that in his second term Obama would pursue a different agenda. Instead, he is increasingly seen overseeing a system that is mired in a serious political, economic, and social crisis.

This disappointment is reflected in the sharp decline in support for Obama among the three key groups of supporters: young voters, Latinos, and African Americans. This includes many who had high expectations but feel he has not delivered the results he promised in his re-election campaign. According to the Zogby poll, young people are angered by the higher interest rates for college loans and the cost of education, and by the NSA revelations. Among those who voted for Obama, support has declined sharply from 61% to 46%.

Robert Reich, Labor Secretary in the first Clinton administration and an astute observer, recently commented in his blog that "by almost every measure, Americans are angrier today. They're more contemptuous of almost every major institution – government, business, the media. They are more convinced the nation is on the wrong track." "Income, wealth and power have become more concentrated at the top than they have been in 90 years" and that can lead to "political divisiveness," he warned.

Only the Beginning

This anger and discontent has been fueling the revolts we saw in Wisconsin and the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011, the

historic strike and movement of the teachers in Chicago, the XL pipeline and growing environmental protests, the spreading fast-food workers' protests across the country and the strike of BART transit workers in California. We've also seen the tremendous movement of resistance that has started in North Carolina with the "Moral Mondays," demonstrations and civil disobedience where over 700 people have been arrested protesting against the "vicious war on the poor" and democratic rights.

These struggles are only the beginning. As reality continues to expose the real character of the Obama administration and the Democrats, there is a historic opportunity for the left to build a serious movement in the streets. The political discontent against both Democrats and Republicans can pave the way for the left and social movements to run candidates across the country, using the campaigns as a platform to spread the movement.

Socialist Alternative argued for "200 Occupy candidates" during the 2012 elections on the basis of a radical program that would challenge the political establishment and the two-party system. Unless the left takes the initiative to challenge Wall Street and the 1% in 2014, there is the danger of another right-wing populist, libertarian, anti-Obama backlash whipping up racism, sexism, and new attacks on immigrants and working people along the lines of what we have seen with the Tea Party.

Urgent Steps Forward

It is urgent that potential anti-corporate, anti-capitalist, and socialist candidates and campaigns begin to organize for 2014, especially where there is the potential to field credible candidates. The Kshama Sawant and the Ty Moore socialist electoral campaigns (see articles in this newspaper) as well as independent campaigns by Howie Hawkins in New York, the Cindy Sheehan campaigns in California, and Dan LaBotz's campaign in Ohio have shown the real potential that exists out there to popularize socialist ideas and to organize a serious fight-back.

The radical step of using eminent domain as a weapon against housing foreclosures by Green Party Mayor Gayle McLaughlin has provoked the fury of Wall Street and much publicity, showing the limited but urgent steps that can be taken to build a movement against foreclosures.

This can start by organizing to bring together all those fighting against Wall Street and the 1%: anti-cuts campaigns, teachers, fast-food and low-paid workers, public sector unionists, socialists, community campaigns, immigrant rights campaigns, campaigns against racism and police violence, the radical environmental movement, as well as radicalized young people who are looking for a vehicle to express their anger against the system.

Socialist Alternative advocates the creation of a new political party, a party based on social movements and the working class, a party that rejects corporate money, opposes all cuts to jobs and services, and campaigns for taxing the rich, a mass jobs program, a \$15/hour minimum wage, nationalizing energy and the banking system, ending wars and cutting the Pentagon budget, and for single payer health care.

There is a historic opportunity to build a serious left-wing challenge against the Democrats and Republicans in 2014 which can prepare the way for a mass party of working people and for democratic socialist policies to challenge the sick system of capitalism. We have to prepare now.

No to War on

As we go to press, politicians in the West are pushing for bombing Syria. There can be no doubt that such a move can bring relief to the populations of the Middle East. In fact it is guaranteed that it will bring increased suffering to the masses. This must be opposed." Read the full article at <http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6>



y for Working People

Why We Run Socialist Candidates

Tom Crean

Socialist Alternative members are running for elected office in three cities this fall: Seattle, Minneapolis, and Boston. They are running to use the platform afforded by the elections to give voice to working-class anger against what the 1% are doing to this country, and to popularize socialist ideas and especially the idea of a real left challenge to corporate politics.

If elected to office, they will use their positions to assist every genuine struggle involving workers, young people, immigrants, people of color, or any other oppressed group and to fight for every possible reform that will improve the lives of ordinary people.

However, Socialist Alternative does not believe for a minute that one socialist city councillor, or even several independent left councillors, in a given city would be able to fundamentally change the balance of power. Even enacting basic reforms will require real mass campaigns and social struggles that bring enormous pressure to bear on the ruling elite and the city council as a whole. A genuine socialist councillor would be the voice of those campaigns and struggles inside the council chamber, making that pressure that much harder for the capitalist political establishment to ignore.

In Minneapolis, Ty Moore, a Socialist Alternative candidate and prominent Occupy Homes activist, is running for city council in a ward with an ongoing and very effective Occupy Homes campaign. As a councillor, Ty has pledged to do everything possible to use his influence to help extend the campaign even further, to push for a moratorium on further foreclosures in Minneapolis, and to push for a ban on using the Minneapolis police to carry out banks' evictions.

But while having a socialist councillor will clearly be a very real victory for the Occupy Homes movement, at the end of the day the strength of the campaign on the ground is the key factor.

How to Win Real Change

As socialists, we understand that the real power in society is held by giant corporations who are in no way accountable to ordinary people. City councils, state legislatures, and Congress are political institutions that operate within the framework of the capitalist system, where working people's interests are subordinated to corporate profits.

That does not mean that real reforms are unachievable. For example, in the past the labor movement through mass struggle achieved the eight-hour day, Social Security, as well as health benefits and pensions for tens of millions of workers.

Yet all of these gains are now under ferocious attack today from both Republicans and Democrats. This shows that no reforms are permanent under this system. We can – and must – fight for every possible reform under this system, but these reforms will only be established on a secure basis if the undemocratic power of the capitalist class is broken and a new socialist society is established.

Nevertheless, faced with sufficiently well-organized resistance, for example by workers

prepared to use mass demonstrations, civil disobedience, and strike action to back up their demands, it is possible to force the bosses and their politicians to (temporarily) back down. This was demonstrated in the strike last fall by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), which forced that city's odious Democratic mayor, Rahm Emmanuel, to back off on some aspects of his attacks on public education and the union. The CTU is now correctly discussing how to take its challenge to Rahm into the political arena. It would be a tremendous step forward if they stood candidates, independent of the Democrats, on an anti-austerity, pro-working people program.

A Proud Tradition

Socialist Alternative is in political solidarity with the Committee for a Workers International, which has a proud history of participating in and leading workers' struggles and has stood genuine socialist candidates in countries from Sweden to Sri Lanka.

Our candidates take only the average workers' wage because to do otherwise would be to lose connection with the realities facing the people they represent. Our councillors and members of parliament do not decide on policy on their own. Rather, they represent the positions democratically decided by the members of our party and consult with the movements and campaigns in their areas.

We do not agree with those who say that leftists who enter capitalist elected bodies will inevitably be corrupted, but that is only because we make absolutely sure that our public representatives are accountable to the working people and the party that sent them to these bodies, as well as having a crystal clear understanding of the realities of capitalism and the necessity of a socialist transformation of society.

In Liverpool, England in the mid-1980s,

our sister organization played the leading role in the establishment of a socialist majority on the city council. At the time, there were huge class battles culminating in the heroic British miners' strike where the workers faced a ferocious onslaught from the hated Thatcher government. The Liverpool socialist council, backed up by mass demonstrations and strikes of the city's workers, refused to impose cuts as dictated by the Thatcher government and in fact brought in a range of reforms for ordinary people despite Thatcher's best efforts to shut the council down.

In Ireland a decade later, our organization in Dublin led a mass campaign of non-payment of a hated water tax that was double taxation on ordinary people. The campaign chose to take its struggle into the political arena and run candidates against the establishment parties. The key public spokesperson of the campaign, Joe Higgins of the Socialist Party, was elected to the Irish parliament in 1997. This was in reality the culmination of the campaign and the water tax was repealed.

If Ty Moore, Kshama Sawant, or Seamus Whelan is elected this November, it will be a very significant political event. Of course, in and of itself socialists winning one or two council seats will in no way change the fundamental political balance of forces in U.S. society or even in the local area.

But Kshama Sawant's tremendous 44,000 votes in the primary and the results in November, win or lose, will demonstrate that socialists can credibly take on pro-corporate politicians at a local level. If this leads to more groups and individuals following our path in 2014, it will be a real contribution to rebuilding a credible left in the U.S. And in Seattle, Minneapolis, and Boston, it will help raise the sights of tens of thousands of working people that a new type of politics that truly represents them is possible.



Syria!

U.S. and Britain are making the case that any military action on the part of Syria or the Middle East increased bombing will... And this is why it... through the link



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Obama's Flawed Health Care Plan For Single-Payer Health Care

Tony Wilsdon

For better or worse, Obama's health plan will start to roll out this fall. While it's hard to predict many factors about how this will ultimately work out in practice, the details that are now emerging confirm the warning Socialist Alternative gave back in 2009. We said then how this Obama Affordable Care Act (ACA) will disappoint most workers and young people as a solution to the horrible health care crisis facing workers in the U.S.

Corporate Interests Favored

The main flaw in Obama's plan is his reliance on corporate America and market forces, with a nudge from the federal government, to deliver quality affordable health care for all. Having first signed up the giant insurance companies, hospitals, and drug companies into his plan, the Obama administration is once again bowing to corporate concerns.

The (Obama) administration believes that most businesses want to do right by their employees and will continue to use tax breaks to provide quality coverage to their workers.

- White House senior communications advisor Tara McGuinness

Obama delayed the requirement that corporations provide a package of health care plans to their workers or suffer fines for one year, until January 2015 or later. He also delayed the requirement that insurance companies accept a cap on the total co-payment that workers need to make. These allow employers and insurance companies to continue to gouge workers and patients.

This is in sharp contrast to his refusal to take into account the concerns of labor unions that tens of millions of workers covered by union-negotiated multi-employer plans will be discriminated against under his health care act.

Health Care at the Workplace Under Threat

Obama's plan relies on employers to "do right by their employees" and continue to provide existing health care plans to workers. The refusal of employers to offer affordable health care to their employees can result in a really insignificant fine of \$2,000 per employee. (It is enforcement of this fine that has been delayed till 2015 or later.)

This policy is fraught with problems. First, employers can simply drop their employees



or refuse to offer "affordable" health care and take the fine. Second, they can increase the cost of their plan, making it too costly for employees, and yet still fall under definition of "affordable" under Obama's plan, forcing workers to drop out. Third, they can trim down existing plans to comply with the barebones of what is acceptable under the law. Finally, since the penalties under the act only apply to employees working 30 hours a week or more, we can expect employers to start cutting employees' workweeks to less than 30 hours to avoid having to comply with the act.

Attacks on Quality Union-Based Plans

Unscrupulous employers have essentially been given the green light to start to dismantle the quality health care plans won over decades of struggle by labor unions. There is no requirement that employers maintain the quality of existing plans. Obama's plan declared that employers who provide 60% of the health cost of employee's health care plans are in compliance with the act. Considering that most union-backed plans force employers to pay closer to 80%, this will give a massive incentive to employers to demand that unions also adopt this lower threshold.

Despite repeated protests by labor unions such as UFCW, UNITE, and the Teamsters, Obama has already decided that 20 million workers covered by multi-employer health care funds affecting part-timers, retirees, and workers between jobs, in the construction trades, trucking, hotels, and grocery stores, do not comply with this plan. This is because the act allows employers with fewer than 50 employees and with employees working under 30 hours a week to pull out of these plans and send their workers to the "exchanges." This will result in these plans starting to unravel. In a joint statement from union leaders to

Democratic congressional leaders, they stated: "Taken together these restrictions will make non-profit plans like ours unsustainable."

High Cost of Health Care for Workers

Under the pretense of cutting costs, the law has provisions that would tax employers 40% of the amount that so-called Cadillac plans exceed spending limits (that is, a quality plan that costs over \$10,200 for an individual and \$27,500 for families), starting in the year 2018. But employers are already starting to slash those plans. Yet these same corporations have told the Obama administration they couldn't provide necessary cost information by 2014 in order to comply with the act, thus winning a delay until 2015. Many industry analysts foresee employers starting to cancel existing plans once union contracts elapse.

But employers in the non-union workforce only began providing health care to their employees to prevent union organizing drives attracting their employees. So, as corporate pressure mounts to trim union-backed plans, then non-union employers will feel free to trim theirs.

High Cost of Exchanges

Those unable to get affordable health care at work are expected to sign up for insurance "exchange" health programs to be rolled out by insurance companies. To comply with the law, these "exchange" programs will have to cover 10 broad categories of health care.

While these plans have not appeared yet, they will not be cheap. To comply with the law, the premiums cannot exceed 9.5% of a worker's income. Those making less than 400% of the poverty level will receive government subsidies but would still pay 9.5% of the cost. But who has an extra 9.5% of their income lying

around to pay for health care? Even worse, there are no limits on premiums for health care policies for families.

There is a limit on out-of-pocket expenses (deductibles and co-pays) of \$6,350 for an individual and \$12,700 for a family. For most workers, especially low-paid workers, paying this amount is inconceivable. In return for providing these "exchange" plans, insurance companies cannot impose caps on annual or lifetime benefits; neither can they continue their outrageous policy of discrimination based on pre-existing conditions or gender.

We're concerned that employers will be increasingly tempted to drop coverage through our plans and let our members fend for themselves on the health exchanges.

-David Treanor, Director of Health Care Initiatives at the Operating Engineers union.

Workers are being hit from all sides. For example, an employee who cannot afford a so-called "affordable" health care plan which their employers offer will not be able to qualify for tax credits in the "exchange" system, since they have rejected their employer's "affordable" plan. Yet if they fail to sign up for an "exchange" plan, they will get fined, since the individual mandate comes into effect in 2014.

Step Up the Fight for a Real Universal Health Care System

The biggest failure of the act is that fails to guarantee a really affordable price for health care. Obama is relying on market forces and competition between insurance companies to set a price that workers can afford. However, it's not like there are lots of small insurance companies competing with each other. Instead, there are monolithic insurance companies that dominate the market and can be expected to act in a monopolistic pricing fashion to guarantee their profits.

As this reality starts to become known, many workers will be scratching their heads wondering what happened to the promises of Obama and the Democrats. A number of labor unions have recently come out in sharp opposition to Obama's plan. The electrical workers (IBEW) passed a resolution in favor of "single-payer" at their most recent convention, as did the San Francisco building trades. Further details will emerge as this process unfolds over the next few years, but what is clear is that the task to fight for a "single payer" universal health care system needs to be stepped up to provide an alternative to even more free-market, right-wing alternatives to Obama's Affordable Care Act. ✪

Socialist Alternative to Capitalism's Sick System

Tony Wilsdon

That a country with the wealth of the U.S. has failed to provide free, quality health care for its citizens is a travesty. This is despite the U.S. health care industry costing more per person than any other in the world. Obama's policy, while extending health care to tens of millions of Americans, is flawed since it preserves all the structural problems of the present system and allows corporate interests to deliver it.

While criticizing Obama's plan, we have no common interest with Republicans who are guided by crass corporate interests. They refused to set up statewide health exchanges in an attempt to sabotage the bill. Their refusal to expand Medicaid into states they control is a direct attack on the poorest workers and young people in their districts. It fits into their overall policy of slavishly serving the corporate elite and attacking workers and the poor at every opportunity.

As socialists, we support all positive improvements in health care for the 99%. We support the expansion of Medicaid as proposed by Obama. We support the law ending denial of coverage due to preexisting condition, and we support the extension of parental coverage to children up to the age of 26. While these are positive steps forward, Obama's plan is flawed because he hitched the delivery of health care to private insurance companies and medical companies, whose whole purpose of existence is to maximize profit, not deliver services to the poor and needy. This is incompatible with providing quality health for all.

For a Genuine Universal Health Care System

To solve the health care problem, we don't need to reinvent the wheel. A number of countries in the world, including most European countries and Canada, have a far superior system – a genuine universal health care system. Under such a system, insurance companies and corporate America would be kicked out of the driving seat. Instead of corporate CEOs deciding who get thrown off health plans or denied health care, elected officials and doctors would oversee a health care plan available to all, irrespective of employment or health condition.

A real universal health care system would guarantee all Americans quality health care, which would be free at point of use. By removing the insurance companies and the massive level of hospital and health plan bureaucracy created to comply with the crazy rules of the competing insurance companies, it would massively reduce unnecessary medical costs. According to a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, cutting down



People protest to make health care a human right in Vermont.

on administrative waste would save around \$380 billion per year. Also by putting doctors, and not corporate executives of insurance companies, in charge of delivering health care, it would vastly improve the quality of

health care.

There is growing anger and concern at Obama's policies. The increased mobilization of the labor movement against this plan is a welcome development, since the unions can

bring important new forces to the fight for a genuine universal health care system usually referred to as "single-payer" or "Medicare for all."

The Need to Break from the Democrats

However, our movement also needs to learn the lessons from this most recent sell-out by Democrats. The Democrats are a corporate party, through and through. They only look for support from labor and other progressives at election time. Obama's health care policy was corporate-based from the start. It is just that many progressives refused to check the fine print and took Democrats' promises as an indication of their future actions.

A real universal health care system can only be created by a powerful movement of working people and the poor, independent of both corporate parties. It took the formation of independent political parties representing the millions against the millionaires (the 99% against the 1%) for a powerful enough movement to be built to push back corporate interests and establish universal health care systems in both Europe and Canada. Now is the time to follow that example in the U.S. ☘

Using Eminent Domain to Protect Homes and Fight Banks

Charles Cannon

Cities and municipalities across California and the country are fighting back against foreclosures by using the legal practice of eminent domain to seize mortgages from big banks and refinance homes at current market value. Typically, the practice of eminent domain is used by the state to seize personal property and homes to make way for projects that benefit big business interests like developers. In Richmond, CA, the people have decided to instead use this practice to benefit ordinary working people whose homes are being stolen by Wall Street.

The town is buying underwater mortgages – ones that are worth more than the house is worth for their actual market value – and working out reasonable repayment plans for homeowners. Instead of Wall Street, the homeowners pay the city of Richmond. The city buys them for 80%

of market value, with the 20% difference going to the city and to a private investment firm. While the profiting of a private investment firm through this practice makes the deal bittersweet, the forces of capitalism have overwhelmingly allied on the other side.

Predictably, the banks have begun a counteroffensive, which includes filing lawsuits against the city of Richmond and threatening to redline entire cities if they initiate this practice. Redlining is a practice banks use to discriminate against non-white communities in lending. Now, the banks plan to use this practice on entire cities, effectively cutting them off from all private lines of credit if they follow through with their plan to seize mortgages. The severity of reactions by the banks demonstrates how great a threat they perceive eminent domain to be. In doing this, the bankers have asked local politicians to make a choice between their constituents and the

banks.

While some cities have backed down under pressure, for others like Richmond, the pressure from the banks has been outweighed by pressure from below. Left-wing Greens have been elected to many offices in Richmond, and they are supporting the fight against the banks. This shows how social movements and independent working-class electoral initiatives can support each other to wage effective struggles. With more pressure from the working class, other cities could follow the route of Richmond and defend their citizens against the banks. To take this to the next level, all the assets of the major financial institutions should be taken under public ownership, with small investors to be paid back on the basis of proven need and workers in big banks to be retrained with union rights and wages. This policy could help provide guaranteed, quality housing for all through forgiving the debts of ordinary homeowners. ☘

SEIU Endorses Socialist for Minneapolis City Council



Philip Locker

At the end of August, the 30,000-strong Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Minnesota State Council endorsed Socialist Alternative candidate Ty Moore for Minneapolis City Council. Moore is running against five Democratic Party candidates for the open Ward 9 seat in a ranked choice election on November 5.

SEIU's endorsement is unprecedented in recent U.S. history. No significant statewide labor union has endorsed an independent socialist candidate for decades, as far as we are aware. SEIU's support underscores the momentum the Moore campaign is developing, now seen as a serious contender for the council seat.

"Ty Moore may have been the most impressive candidate we screened [in any of the city council races]," said Harrison Bullard, security officer and Vice President of SEIU Local 26. "Ty has long been a partner of SEIU, through his work with Occupy Homes and in collaboration with Minnesotans for a Fair Economy. He has marched with us in subzero temperatures and stood on the picket line in support of low-wage workers. He clearly doesn't just talk the talk; instead, Ty takes action whenever he encounters injustice. Ty is for real – he's about the people."

Moore is calling for a moratorium on foreclosures, a \$15/hour minimum wage, and an end to deportations and workplace repression of undocumented immigrants. Many of SEIU's members are immigrants fighting low wages and racist abuses by employers, and the union has supported community campaigns against foreclosures, including Occupy Homes MN, which Moore helped lead.

SEIU is one of the largest unions in the country, with over two million members. Their endorsement stands out given the prevailing policy of labor leaders to support the Democratic Party and shun the idea of supporting or running independent working-class candidates against the Republicans and Democrats.

Despite labor donating hundreds of millions of dollars and mobilizing tens of thousands of union members to campaign for the Democrats, once in power the Democratic Party has defended the interests of the richest 1% and attacked the interests and rights of working people.

Minneapolis, like most big urban centers, is completely controlled by the Democratic Party, yet social services are being cut, big corporations receive welfare and handouts, and the police are used to repress social movements and poor people. At the same time, the union movement faces an

unprecedented crisis and wave after wave of attacks from big business.

This experience, along with the deepening anger and opposition to the Democrats and the entire political establishment, is beginning to open up cracks within the labor movement over its political strategy. A growing number of unions are coming out against Obamacare, with the Nevada state AFL-CIO officially doing so in August.

The decision of the SEIU Minnesota state council to support an independent working-class candidate, Ty Moore, against his Democratic opponents is a very welcome development that needs to be built on. Why isn't the labor movement supporting – and running its own – independent working-class candidates for political office? If union resources – financial and human – were put behind such candidates instead of big-business politicians, there is no doubt that many could be elected across the country – most easily for local office, but also for state and federal positions. Some on the left, including many union

leaders, argue that such a strategy is impractical. Many argue such an approach would mean losing influence over Democratic politicians and lead to an even more hostile climate for unions and workers generally. This could not be further from the truth. In reality, the current strategy of supporting the Democratic Party has been tried and tested and found to be impractical. The results have been a massive fall in union membership, declining living standards, and encroachments on our democratic rights.

We can only defend our interests and win concessions through determined struggle. Alongside building mass movements and workplace actions, we need to also organize and campaign for our interests in the electoral arena. Strong working-class challenges to corporate politicians will be far more effective in forcing the political establishment to provide reforms, as both corporate parties attempt to protect their electoral base. We are already seeing this play out, in a small way, through Ty Moore's campaign, where his main Democratic opponent has



increasingly tried to play up her pro-worker and left-wing credentials due to the pressure of the Moore campaign.

Win or lose, the Socialist Alternative campaign in Minneapolis – alongside our success in Seattle and campaign in Boston – have already demonstrated the massive new opening for socialist ideas to gain support in U.S. society, and for building a broader working-class challenge to the two parties of big business. ✪

Socialist Alternative City Council Campaign Helps Build Anti-Eviction Struggle

Ginger Jentzen
Occupy Homes Organizer

The fight against foreclosures and evictions has become a key issue in Minneapolis city elections, largely due to the work of Occupy Homes MN and the Ty Moore for City Council campaign initiated by Socialist Alternative.

Calling for a moratorium on foreclosures, Moore, a leading activist in Occupy Homes, is running a competitive race in the 9th Ward, where Occupy Homes established an "Eviction Free Zone" in two hard-hit neighborhoods. The organized community pressure against the eviction of EFZ residents Jaymie Kelly and Sergio Ceballos is focusing the demand that JP Morgan Chase and the big banks renegotiate their mortgages, with payments to reflect the market value of the homes.

In July, the Ceballos family and community supporters were evicted by sheriffs, but quickly reclaimed their home. They continue to strengthen neighborhood defense in anticipation of a second

eviction by Minneapolis police. Jaymie Kelly, a lifetime resident of Ward 9 and staunch supporter of Socialist Alternative candidate Ty Moore, is preparing her own community defense against the imminent threat of an eviction.

These events unfold a year after the Minneapolis police department forcibly evicted the Cruz family home at 4044 Cedar Avenue, garnering national media attention. Over \$40,000 of taxpayer money was spent and 35 arrests were made. Building on this activity of combined home defense and direct action, the Kelly and Ceballos campaigns have pressured local politicians to take a stand on evictions. They demand that city officials not use taxpayer-funded police resources as bank security.

The strong grassroots campaign of Ty Moore has knocked on over 5,700 doors in Ward 9 and kept the public spotlight on this issue. It has challenged city councilors to enact a moratorium on foreclosures and halt the use of police resources to evict working families in the name of bank

profits. If achieved, these two initiatives would have a big impact in South Minneapolis, and confirm what's possible when movements connect with an independent political voice against Wall Street dictates.

Cities like Richmond, CA, where officials threaten to invoke purchase by eminent domain if investors resist selling the loans on 624 foreclosed properties, offer a glimpse of the bold steps cities could take to protect their residents from Wall Street's greed. With the highest percentage of latino residents in Minneapolis – a community targeted by predatory lending – Ward 9 communities view recovery from the economic crisis as a distant goal, inconceivable while their neighborhoods are littered with vacant homes. Occupy Homes MN, Socialist Alternative, and the EFZ residents have forced housing instability to the forefront of the local elections, and the Ty Moore for City Council campaign highlights the need to combine direct action with a political challenge to the two big-business parties. ✪

Capitalism is Unsustainable

Why We Need a Socialist Approach to the Environmental Crisis

Dennis Prater

While our world has been experiencing record temperatures, big oil has been raking in record profits: in 2011, the big five oil giants netted \$137 billion, (“Big 5 Oil Companies Going for the Gold,” www.thinkprogress.org, 7/31/2012). Meanwhile, every new study seems to show ways that the problem is worse than had been previously thought.

Arctic ice is melting at an alarming rate, threatening to unleash a “methane bomb” as disappearing permafrost releases the powerful greenhouse gas into the atmosphere, (www.theguardian.com, 7/24/2013). Moreover, a recent study claims that a significant increase in heat waves is already inevitable, (“Hot Century Ahead,” www.commondreams.org, 8/17/2013).

These are further reminders that something has to change. One way or another, things cannot stay the way they are. This is the reality of climate change: In the first part of this century, either economies around the world will give up fossil fuels and make the transition to sustainable energy, or the warming globe will hit a “tipping point” that will alter the face of our world forever.

The first possibility - shifting to sustainable energy - means, among other things, that investors will have to write off an estimated \$20 trillion of assets (40% of global GDP): the current value of known but untapped fossil fuel reserves already being traded on the market and held as “futures” assets by corporations (www.capitalinstitute.org, 7/19/2011). In the U.S., shifting to sustainable energy will mean that the fossil fuel industry - hugely powerful, profitable, able to command tens of billions of dollars per year in taxpayer subsidies - will have to be removed from its position of power.

What force is capable of making this change? Clearly, we cannot outspend some of the most profitable corporations on the planet. And we cannot rely on the politicians of the two main parties, who are awash with corporate money. We need the power of a mass movement to challenge the power of big oil.



In the U.S. and elsewhere, the environmental movement has been growing. The biggest environmental demonstration in U.S. history - a Washington, D.C. protest of tens of thousands against the proposed Keystone XL pipeline - took place this past February. The movement's ideas are also becoming stronger, with important environmental organizations like 350.org recognizing that disproportionate responsibility for climate change rests with the vested interests of the fossil fuel corporations. Developing a more systemic understanding of the problem is a big step forward from suggesting that isolated individuals should “vote with our dollars” and somehow consume our way out of this mess.

Whether it is the economic crisis or the ecological crisis, capitalism is a system that undermines its own foundations. Driving down the wages and living standards of the working class means increased profits for big business, but when a lot of us can't pay our mortgages or our loans, an economic crisis

results. Likewise, it is “good business” to treat the needs of the environment as an “externality” - a cost to be avoided and ignored, where possible. Yet the growing ecological crisis reminds us that, ultimately, “externalities” are merely convenient fictions for rapacious corporations. For capitalism, both workers and nature - the two sources of all wealth - are nothing more than a means to an end: profit.

Corporations work hard to keep wages and benefits down and profits high, and the economic crisis has meant that good jobs are ever more scarce. At the same time, there is much work to be done: The transition to sustainable energy - wind, water, and solar power - means rebuilding our entire energy infrastructure. In this situation, it is more important than ever for the environmental movement to popularize the call for a massive green jobs program.

Demanding a green jobs program at union wages and benefits, with guaranteed rehire and retraining for workers in polluting industries, is a key tool in building a mass

environmental movement actually capable of challenging the most powerful corporations on Earth. Corporate politicians often present us with two bad choices. If we accepted what they say, we would have to believe that the only way to put food on our tables is by building the Keystone XL pipeline or supporting fracking.

The Obama administration's “all of the above” energy policy leaves open the door for fossil fuel interests to pursue their agenda - and they have been aggressively doing so - but where are the initiatives for the kind of massive green energy alternative that we need? The private sector has proven incapable of taking on large infrastructural projects. Nationally coordinated policies under direction of the federal government were needed to develop the national railway and freeway systems, as well as the space program. What we need is a “stop global warming” energy policy, and this would entail a massive green public works program.

Never before in history have human societies experienced an

ecological crisis on the scale of global warming - and global warming is only part of an ecological crisis that includes species and habitat destruction, air pollution, chemical contamination, and radiation poisoning, as in the case of the ongoing disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power plant.

To adequately address these problems and begin healing our planet requires cooperation on a global scale. Socialists have always argued that we need a democratically planned economy designed to meet the needs of humanity. The corporations see cash and aren't concerned about what we want to happen to our world. The key decisions about what is produced and how it is produced are made based on what is perceived to be best for a handful of rich people. No one wants to pour chemicals into their own water or store nuclear waste under their own ground, which is why democratic planning, where we all have a say, will be good for the environment.

Building a harmonious relationship between society and nature cannot be separated from building a harmonious relationship between people. But capitalism is designed to enrich a tiny class of rich investors, while exploiting the majority of the people. From their point of view, it makes sense for corporations to treat the needs of workers and the environment as “externalities.” That's why we say capitalism cannot solve the environmental crisis in the interests of the vast majority of people, and the planet. It is only the ordinary working people and the poor on a global level who have a common interest in doing that.

In an economy based on democratic planning, a socialist economy, the corporate approach will make no sense. Socialism acknowledges a key truth taught by ecology: Everything is interconnected. If we take this view, we must realize that there is nowhere to externalize *to*. It is still possible to avoid ecological catastrophe and build a sustainable future for all of us, but we will have to move beyond the dog-eat-dog nature of capitalism in order to do it. ✪

South Africa

One Year After the Marikana Massacre

Both Capitalists and Working Class Prepare for Unforeseen Turmoil

Liv Shange
DSM (CWI South Africa)

On August 16, 2012, at Marikana, a bloody line was drawn in South Africa's political sand when police in cold blood shot dead 34 workers and wounded 78. The few seconds of the massacre that were shown on TV tore down decades of carefully nurtured illusions about the African National Congress (ANC) government and the capitalist state. The state's resort to the most brutal form of reaction against the striking Lonmin workers set in motion a new period of revolution and counterrevolution in South Africa. A year later, a mining bosses' offensive against jobs and worker rights is gathering pace. With the lessons of Marikana imprinted on the consciousness of millions of workers and youth, the scene it set for further mighty upheavals centered on the mining industry.

Remembering Marikana

The massacre on August 16, 2012, was a carefully orchestrated operation calculated to crush the Lonmin workers' deadly challenge to the government and the capitalist order. Provoked by days (and years) of repression, the thousands of workers gathered on the hill, "the mountain," outside Marikana were fenced in with razor wire and attacked from behind and from the air with water bombs and automatic gunfire. Chased toward the five-meter opening in the fence, in front of TV cameras, a first group was shot down. The majority of those killed and wounded were hunted down, out of sight of the cameras, among the rocks and bushes at another small hill. Many were shot at close range, in the back or with their arms stretched up to surrender. Police deliberately destroyed the faces of the dead by running over their skulls with armored vehicles. Less well-planned, perhaps, was the police

"investigation" of the scene which has been revealed as a clumsy cover-up attempt.

The true story of Marikana was forced out in the open by the Lonmin workers' defiant continuation of the struggle after the massacre and the industry-wide strike that followed. In the days immediately before and after the massacre, the public was washed over by a virtual flood of vicious propaganda against the Lonmin workers and their struggle. While the state and its appendices continue to hammer the refrain of police "self-defense" at the Farlam Commission, this just shows how detached from reality this farcical show trial is since in the rest of society, these initial "truths" were long overturned by the workers' struggle.

Bloody repression of working-class struggles in general, and mineworkers' struggles in particular, of course did not begin at Marikana. Just two weeks earlier, on August 1, 2012, for example, five protesting workers were shot dead by police at the Aquarius K5 shaft outside Rustenburg. Their murders warranted no more than a paragraph on the business pages. The scale and publicity of the violence meted out on the Lonmin workers, which shook SA and the world, were no accidents. This was the calculated response to the, up until then, most serious challenge to the foundations of the African National Congress' (ANC's) rule – a workers' uprising in the mining sector, the backbone of the South African economy.

"This is Not Our Government"

The attempt to drown the worker-led strike in blood, instead of shoring up these relationships, exposed them to millions with blinding and instant clarity. One of the key lessons of Marxism – that any state at its core consists of "armed bodies of men and women" defending the ruling class, while also relying on "softer" institutions (such as parliament as a means to reinforce illusions in the system on regular basis) and extended arms



A mass meeting held in Marikana to commemorate one year since police massacred union workers.

such as the trade unions, political parties, and the media to justify the oppression of the many by the few – was suddenly understood way beyond the reach of committed socialists. Marikana spelled out that the ANC government is a party that exists to defend the interests of the capitalist bosses, that the NUM is the main tool to carry out this task, and that the supposedly neutral police, courts, and media are in fact little more than the private securities and praise singers of big business.

Flowing immediately from these conclusions is the search for a working-class alternative. Mineworkers, first in the Rustenburg platinum belt and then throughout the country's mines, immediately followed the Lonmin workers' example of setting up independent strike committees. Through the spreading, unification, and coordination of the strikes, the mining houses and the government were forced to instead recognize the workers' committees. In the minds of the striking workers, this was right from the start linked to the need to also take the government bosses out of their Union Building offices and put in place a workers' government. As workers regained their confidence in the ability to organize, fight, and win, the idea of building a new party, a working-class

alternative to the ANC and all the established parties, took root as an urgent necessity. The development of the strike committees into the National Strike Committee by October 2012 and the formation of the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) by December 2012 came out of these realizations.

Political Expression

Despite the ANC's efforts, its ongoing internal rifts are evidence that its big-business handlers are yet to be convinced that "the centre can hold." Increasingly, however, the ruling class is shopping around for political "Plan Bs" outside of the ANC. The formation of Agang-SA, a new political party led by former mining magnate and World Bank director Mampela Rampele, is one such experiment. The right-wing opposition Democratic Alliance is aggressively attempting to swallow other parties into a "super-opposition." The ANC is widely expected to suffer big losses in next year's elections to national and provincial parliament.

A year after Marikana, on the threshold of turmoil that could shake South Africa to its core, the working class has only just begun the reconstruction of its own organizations.

It is high time for workers,

the unemployed, youth, and students to act on the key lesson of Marikana – that there is no more powerful force than the working class independently organized and united in action. The Democratic Socialist Movement (South African section of the Committee for a Workers International, in political solidarity with Socialist Alternative in the U.S.) calls for the mineworkers' National Workers Committee to work for a joint fight-back plan, coordinated across the different mining sectors and trade unions, to stop the mass layoffs and fight for living wages and jobs. We also call for a national day of action against the job cuts, for the nationalization of the mines, banks, and big business, under democratic control and management by workers and communities, and for jobs and decent living conditions such as housing and education for all. The Democratic Socialist Movement campaigns for working-class unity and urges all genuine working-class fighters to come together in the building of the Workers and Socialist Party.

The best honor we can pay to those comrades who were mowed down at Marikana is to craft the political weapon we will need to defeat their murderers once and for all – a mass workers' party armed with a socialist program. ✪

Brazil

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Protests and Strikes Start New Phase of Struggle

André Ferrari (LSR, Brazil)

The LSR is the Brazilian section of the Committee for a Workers International, which stands in political solidarity with Socialist Alternative in the U.S.

After gathering more than two million people in demonstrations in 500 cities during the month of June, Brazil is experiencing a new phase of mobilization. The national day of struggles on July 11 represented the first action of the organized working-class movement in this process of struggle.

This time, more important than the street demonstrations, the July 11 national day of struggle called by unions paralyzed production and the movement of goods and services. According to official data, 66 federal highways were blocked in all regions of the country. Workers in industry, trade, and services also conducted strikes in many regions.

Production was paralyzed in the whole car industry and in various car parts factories in the metropolitan area of São Paulo. Also, many plants in the metallurgical, chemical, oil, and power industries in the Paraíba Valley were shut down. Auto workers from other states, such as Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul, also paralyzed production.

Civil construction workers in Belém, Fortaleza, and São Paulo also stopped construction sites. The strike, organized by the public transport workers in big cities like Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte, affected other economic activities. Several categories of public sector workers also conducted strikes.

Included in the demands of the day of struggle were: the reduction of transport fares and improved quality of transport, more investment in health and education, an increase in pensions, reduction of working hours, the end of the selling off of oil reserves, against the bill that promotes outsourcing and, finally, the defense of agrarian reform.

In addition, many categories of workers will start their campaigns in the coming months for wage increases and other specific claims. This scenario, along with the pressure organized by the base, may end up pushing the federations to call a general strike.

The Mobilizations of June

The events of July 11 occurred shortly after the social explosion during the month of June. The "June days" started around the fight for reduced fares for public transport. The harsh police repression of the movement sparked massive outrage and widespread solidarity.



A demonstration in Brazil against austerity.

State and local governments were forced to change policy and revoke transport fare increases. Instead of holding back further demonstrations, this victory only urged on the mass movement.

In cities such as Brasília, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Salvador, etc., there was a strong police repression, which only served to radicalize the movement, including occupations of Municipalities and State Legislative Assemblies. Many games of the Confederations Cup (soccer) had more people protesting outside the stadium than fans inside.

The mass movement that exploded in Brazil in June represents a qualitative change in the situation of the country. The feeling of power that is created by collective struggle is present in the consciousness of millions of young people, students, and workers. A willingness for the direct struggle, to occupy the streets, to strike and protest, is now far more prevalent among sectors of the masses.

In only a few weeks, the contradictions of more than two decades of neo-liberalism, including ten years of PT management of Brazilian capitalism, exploded onto the surface.

These events have changed the balance of forces between the classes in the country. While the capitalist class maintains its position of strength, in defense of their interests the institutions of the political regime were forced to make concessions to contain the movement.

Demands of social movements over the years which had received no response from governments were suddenly just accepted out

of the blue, as in the case of the increased "stock-rents" given to homeless workers on the outskirts of São Paulo.

Government Crises on All Levels

Despite supporting repression of the protests, President Dilma Rousseff of the PT tried to demonstrate that she was not against the mass movement, and organized a media show where she received leaders of social movements and trade unions. The impact of the movement poses many doubts about the general elections of 2014, which before now were regarded as relatively "safe" for Dilma and the PT.

After overseeing a decade of cuts and neo-liberalism, the PT is losing its profile as a party for workers and the poor. Because the main left party, PSOL, has been slow in gaining ground, some people upset with the PT can unfortunately turn to the right. This confusion can be reflected within the protests as well, as right-wing forces try to gain an echo.

Signs of Economic Crisis

The political crisis is fueled by the increasingly clear signs of difficulties in the economy. The government of Dilma Rousseff is hit by low economic growth. In

Brazil

Continued on p. 18

Committee for a Workers International (CWI) News

Socialist Summer School Brings Together International Activists

Socialist Alternative stands in political solidarity with the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), a worldwide organization fighting for fundamental change in over 40 countries around the world. Every summer, the CWI hosts a school that attracts hundreds of activists, workers, and young people from around the world to discuss movements and a socialist strategy to build them forward.

Below are some articles and videos that are a product of the discussions from the school on international developments. "We stand on the eve of convulsive events, the greatest in world history, of which the mighty movements in these countries are the precursor."

This was how Peter Taaffe of the CWI's International Secretariat described the current international situation in the session at this year's CWI Summer School on the "Capitalist World in Turmoil – the crisis and the class struggle today." The "mighty movements" he referred to were the huge protests in Turkey, Brazil, Egypt, and South Africa over the last 12 months, which have shown the colossal power of the masses once they move into action. These have followed on from the protests against austerity in Europe of the last few years.

"We Stand on the Eve of Convulsive Events, the Greatest in World History" World Capitalist Crisis and the Class Struggle



Idea of Combative Trade Unions Back on the Agenda

<http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6422>



New Uprisings Hit Latin America

<http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6418>



Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Middle East and North Africa

<http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6421>



Seattle Campaign for \$15 an Hour

The Sawant campaign and Socialist Alternative understand that electing one representative to Seattle's City Council will not be enough to win the victories that the working class so desperately requires, like a \$15/hour minimum wage. Instead, we believe that it is absolutely vital that our campaign support and encourage broader movements of workers, students, and the poor.

Due to this understanding, we have taken concrete steps to push the movement for a \$15/hour minimum wage forward. Our campaign in 2012 was the first to introduce this demand to Seattle; this has cemented us as one of the leaders in this movement. Kshama Sawant is definitely seen as leading this charge. This was further augmented by publishing an article by Sawant in *The Stranger*, a prominent local alternative weekly newspaper, dispelling some of the common myths around raising the minimum wage (6/4/2013). This article was later picked up by a few national news outlets.

In addition to the work for the campaign, Sawant campaign workers and volunteers have been actively participating in the protests and marches organized by Good Jobs Seattle. Sawant's campaign and Socialist Alternative have also mobilized supporters to go to nearby SeaTac to lend support to workers there who have fought to get an initiative on the ballot this fall that would create a \$15/hour minimum wage for workers at the airport. Once again putting our work front and center of the debate!

All of the attention this demand has been receiving has forced the corporate Democrats running in Seattle to address the issue. Their comments are revealing though. On one hand, they say they support the workers' demands. But then they refuse to support the call for \$15/hour (*Seattle Weekly*, 6/4/2013). This clearly demonstrates that their sympathies are little more than election-year rhetoric. Meanwhile, the



union leaders who help fund and organize these protests have consistently excluded Sawant from speaking at rallies and have instead featured these same Democrats who refuse to support their demands.

This demand is no longer debated on the fringes of society. Instead, it has been propelled into the mainstream political debate in the city, the region, and even nationally as evidenced by an AP article featuring Sawant in August that has been picked up around the nation.

We plan to continue the push to keep this demand at the front and center of Seattle politics. There are town hall meetings planned to discuss the demand with communities throughout the city. We also plan to call for a well-organized mass protest that can reach out to large portions of the community.

We believe we can win this fight but we need the help of workers, the community, and you! ✪

Alabama Socialists Campaign Against Keystone Pipeline



Stephanie Van Arsdale

Just days after the Mobile, Alabama branch of Socialist Alternative led a rally of hundreds demanding justice for Trayvon Martin, we organized a successful public meeting against a proposed pipeline. Grace McGee presented all the facts about how the pipeline would negatively affect our community, and I explained how capitalism is the root cause of this and how we can fight for the needs of people and the planet.

The response from our ideas was very positive; due to a lack of direct action from other environmental groups, the community was very excited and motivated about what we were saying and are looking up to us as an organization to step in where others are lacking.

One older lady, who was an activist all her years, stated that Grace and I were the best speakers she has ever heard. She was overwhelmed with joy that we are picking up the torch where she left off. We had members of the community willing and ready to start a door-to-door info campaign and a petition for an injunction to stop the pipeline.

There were two local TV stations there and they interviewed me while also giving us the public label of Socialist Alternative and listing our Facebook page on their website under the story. We are planning a further campaign on this issue, and we also built the protests against racist injustice at this meeting, as well. ✪

Brazil: New Phase of Struggle

Continued from p. 18

2012, Brazil's GDP grew only 0.9%. Estimates of higher growth in 2013 are already being revised to around 2.5%, but there are those who point to the prospect of GDP growing less than 2% despite all the measures taken in the previous period to stimulate the economy.

Along with low growth, high inflation in the previous period, mainly affecting the poorest people, was one of the factors that stimulated the outburst in June. To curb inflation, the Brazilian Central Bank resumed its policy of high interest rates which should further affect growth, and which also complicates the government's fiscal position.

The government's rhetoric about "fiscal responsibility" shows its overriding commitment to the payment of the public debt and interest to big banks. Last year, for example, it destined 44% of the federal budget to this end, while health spending accounted for 4.17% and education 3.34%. About 80% of the Brazilian public debt is under control of a select group of 20,000 investors. An audit, controlled by workers, and non-payment of such debt to the big capitalist speculators would create a source of funds for a revolution in education, health, transport, and

housing.

The Reorganisation of the Left

The mass mobilizations of June in conjunction with the action of the organized labor movement on July 11 point to a completely new situation in Brazil. Since the final integration of the PT into the capitalist state with the beginning of the Lula government in 2003, the socialist left sought to reorganize in preparation for future fights.

Most of the leadership of PSOL in previous years has adopted a policy of prioritizing the electoral contest, using the argument that there was a downturn in mass struggles. This policy has led the party leadership to advocate electoral coalitions with the PT and other governing parties. This attitude did not help PSOL to intervene in mass struggles.

With a Congress scheduled for the end of the year, the rise of the struggles is already affecting PSOL internally. There is room for the left of the party to grow, against the opportunistic electoralist positions of the leadership. LSR (CWI in Brazil) argues for the building of a democratic socialist political platform to be defended in PSOL's Congress.

We collaborate with others toward this end.

The backdrop of the rise of the struggles can only help PSOL, from the point of view of its internal debates and its social integration among workers, youth, and their struggles, beyond a mere electoral intervention. The party grew electorally in the municipal elections of 2012, but also made serious mistakes that risk everything, such as the alliances with the PT and other governing parties.

LSR also advocates the need to accelerate the process of reorganizing the workers' and popular movement. We call for the building from below of a conference of workers and youth bringing together sectors that remain independent of the governments and employers. This meeting should define a common action plan for the next period, including the campaign for a 24-hour general strike organized from below.

In addition to these points, our program must defend a united front of the left and the workers, with a socialist program as a way to build a political left, socialist, democratic alternative to both the PT and the right. We need to create the conditions for the establishment of a real workers' government. ✪

Fight Capitalism! Join Socialist Alternative!

With low-wage workers rising up, tens of thousands protesting against racism and poverty, this is a good time to become an activist. Movements for social justice will develop even further in the coming months, and thousands will become radicalized while looking for solutions.

Still, the politicians from both parties plan to deliver only dysfunction and misery. They are bought off by the corporate elite, and the system has no solutions to the problems of low pay, unemployment, sexism, and homophobia. Internationally, capitalism is creating more war and environmental destruction. The situation is crying out for an alternative.

Socialist Alternative, in political solidarity with the Committee for a Workers International, is growing in both numbers and influence. We have shown in practice that we can struggle against the big corporations and their two political parties. Not only can we fight back, we can win! We helped initiate Occupy Homes, which has protected families' houses against the big banks and the cops. We have also popularized socialist ideas, getting tens of thousands of votes for an anti-capitalist program.

While we must struggle to win any reform to improve the lives of the 99%, we have to realize that the whole system is the root cause of our problems. Any concessions the capitalists give with the left hand, they will try to take away with the right. History shows that we need to be organized into a coherent force for fundamental change. Socialist Alternative seeks to learn the lessons of movements, historically and internationally, in order to be the best organizers for working people.

Working people produce everything, provide all the services and distribute all the goods. We clean the floors, answer the phones, teach the kids, flip the burgers, treat the sick and more. If we don't work, then their system doesn't move. We can shut down capitalism and create a new world, providing a sustainable future of good jobs, democracy, health care, education, equality, and environmental sustainability. We have a world to win, but we need to get organized. Join Socialist Alternative and help us in this struggle! ✪

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WHAT WE STAND FOR

Bail Out Workers, Not Wall Street

- ✪ Create living-wage union jobs for all the unemployed through a massive public works program to develop mass transit, renewable energy, infrastructure, health care, education, and affordable housing.
- ✪ 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. The federal government should bail out states to prevent cuts and layoffs. A massive increase in taxes on the rich and big business, not working people.
- ✪ Raise the federal minimum wage to \$12.50/hour, adjusted annually for cost of living increases and regional differences, as a step towards a living wage for all.
- ✪ A minimum guaranteed weekly income of \$500/week for the unemployed, disabled, stay-at-home parents, the elderly, and others unable to work.
- ✪ Stop home foreclosures and evictions. For public ownership and democratic control of the major banks.
- ✪ No more layoffs! Take bankrupt and failing companies into public ownership and retool them for socially necessary green production.
- ✪ Free, high quality public education for all from pre-school through college. Full funding for schools to dramatically lower teacher-student ratios. Stop the focus on high stakes testing and the drive to privatize public education.
- ✪ 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.
- ✪ For a guaranteed living-wage pension.
- ✪ Shorten the workweek with no loss in pay and benefits – share out the work with the unemployed and create new jobs.
- ✪ Money for Jobs and Education, Not War
- ✪ End the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. Bring all the troops home now!
- ✪ Slash the military budget.
- ✪ Repeal the Patriot Act and other attacks on democratic rights.

Environmental Sustainability

- ✪ Fight global warming – 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, and accessible mass 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 on the grounds of race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age, and all other forms of prejudice. Equal pay for equal work.
- ✪ End 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.
- ✪ Full legalization and equal rights for all undocumented immigrant workers.
- ✪ Fight sexual harassment, violence against women, and all forms of sexism.
- ✪ For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children. Defend abortion rights. Full reproductive rights, including affordable, accessible birth control, sex education, paid maternity and paternity leave, and high-quality, affordable childcare.
- ✪ Equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, including same-sex marriage.

Break with the Two Parties of Big Business

- ✪ For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people, and activists from workplace, community, civil rights, environmental, and antiwar campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business 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 system.
- ✪ Repeal NAFTA, CAFTA, and other 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 the oppressed 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 and run them under the democratic management of elected representatives of the workers and the broader public. Compensation to be paid on the basis of proven need to small investors, not millionaires.
- ✪ A democratic socialist plan for the economy based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people and the environment. For a socialist United States and a socialist world!

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Issue #1 - Sept/Oct 2013

Low-Wage Workers Fighting Back!



Fast-food workers and supporters demonstrate for higher pay in St. Louis (left) and Detroit (right).



Audrey Monroe, Seattle

What's the first thought that comes to mind when you think about fast food? Is it the grease? The indigestion? Maybe it's a squeaky-voiced, pimple-covered teenager at the counter? That's what we tend to believe when we think about fast-food workers – that they're just teenagers working for some pocket change. Sadly, the reality is far different. In fact, the median age of a fast-food worker is 28 years old. (*Huffington Post*, 12/1/2012) While their median hourly wage is just \$8.94/hour (National Employment Law Project Data Brief, July 2013).

These statistics, and the fact that most jobs being added to the U.S. economy are part-time or low-wage (*Huffington Post*, 8/21/2013) may seem depressing. But low-wage workers are not giving up. It's just the opposite; they're fighting back! Workers across the country, from New York to St. Louis to Seattle, have walked out of their jobs demanding better wages and the right to unionize! Backed by unions like SEIU, organizations like Fast Food Forward and

Fight for 15 have sprung up in major cities across the country, beginning to show it is not impossible to organize fast-food and low-wage workers. SEIU assistant to the president for organizing, Scott Courtney, said in a recent *Salon.com* article, "The story is leverage in and of itself...the fact that workers are taking these risks I think is our leverage," (8/14/2013).

Nationally, the movement of low-wage workers is growing; the biggest actions so far were on August 29, spreading across the country. One of the areas where workers are showing the most leverage is here in the Pacific Northwest. Last year, there was a string of walkouts and rallies at local Walmart locations and, recently, non-union berry-pickers went on strike multiple times in order to secure better wages and working conditions, winning victories on both counts.

Like other cities, Seattle has seen strikes of fast-food workers. In June, a one-day strike was held, shutting down a handful of fast-food locations across the city. More recently, workers and activists have focused on the issue of wage theft, which is illegal

yet rarely prosecuted in Seattle.

However, the most interesting development has been to the south of Seattle in SeaTac, a suburb of about 27,000, according to the 2010 U.S. census, and home to the region's largest airport. Workers at SeaTac Airport are paid the lowest wages of any of the West Coast's five major airports – just \$9.19 compared to \$13.45 in Oakland, \$14.18 in San Francisco, \$14.71 in San Jose, and \$15.37 in Los Angeles. Workers at these other airports also enjoy health insurance benefits, retention raises and paid time off, (*Below the Radar*, Puget Sound Sage, 3/2013). SeaTac employees enjoy none of those benefits. The Economic Opportunity Institute outlines the situation nicely:

"Menziez began contracting with Alaska in 2005 and, overnight, nearly 500 Alaska Airlines ramp employees, who earned an average wage of \$15.59 per hour, were terminated and replaced with new Menziez staff who earned \$10.17 per hour. Seven years later, the average non-supervisory Menziez employee makes an estimated \$9.66 an hour, or over \$12,000 less in

annual earnings than Alaska ramp employees in 2005," (6/27/2013).

All the while, Alaska Airlines, headquartered there, enjoys massive profits.

Once again, workers have fought back and, with the help of a coalition of organizations including labor, they have managed to get an initiative on the ballot that will ensure those workers receive \$15/hour and paid sick leave! They even beat back a lawsuit brought by Alaska Airlines and other business interests trying to block the ballot initiative this fall!

These struggles show the way forward for low-wage workers and the working class in general. Through mass, collective action, the working class can win victory after victory; the victories above are just the tip of the iceberg. Additionally, workers need to support independent working-class candidates that come out of their ranks – like Kshama Sawant, an Occupy and Socialist Alternative activist running for Seattle City Council, who has become one of the strongest voices calling for a \$15/hour minimum wage, not just in Seattle but in the entire region. ✪