

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



150 Years Since the End of the Civil War - p. 6

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THE 99% NEED A POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE!



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Bernie Sanders
Runs for
President. How
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WHAT WE STAND FOR

Fighting for the 99%

- ✦ No budget cuts to education and social services! Full funding for all community needs. A major increase in taxes on the rich and big business, not working people. The federal government should bail out states to prevent cuts and layoffs.
- ✦ Create living-wage union jobs for all the unemployed through public works programs to develop mass transit, renewable energy, infrastructure, health care, education, and affordable housing.
- ✦ Raise the federal minimum wage to \$15/hour, adjusted annually for cost of living increases, as a step toward a living wage for all.
- ✦ Free, high quality public education for all from pre-school through college. Cancel student debt. Full funding for schools to dramatically lower teacher-student ratios. Stop the focus on high stakes testing and the drive to privatize public education.
- ✦ Free, high quality health care for all. Replace the failed for-profit insurance companies with a publicly funded single-payer system as a step toward fully socialized medicine.
- ✦ A guaranteed decent pension for all. No cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid!
- ✦ Stop home foreclosures and evictions. For public ownership and democratic control of the major banks.
- ✦ A minimum guaranteed weekly income of \$600/week for the unemployed, disabled, stay-at-home parents, the elderly, and others unable to work.
- ✦ Repeal all anti-union laws like Taft-Hartley. For democratic unions run by the rank-and-file to fight for better pay, working conditions, and social services. Full-time union officials should be regularly elected and receive the average wage of those they represent.
- ✦ No more layoffs! Take bankrupt and failing companies into public ownership and retool them for socially necessary green production.
- ✦ Shorten the workweek with no loss in pay and benefits; share out the work with the unemployed and create new jobs.

Environmental Sustainability

- ✦ Fight climate change. Organize mass protests and civil disobedience to block the Keystone XL oil pipeline, coal export terminals, and fracking. Massive public investment in renewable energy and efficiency technologies to rapidly replace fossil fuels.
- ✦ A major expansion of public transportation to provide low-fare, high-speed, accessible transit.
- ✦ Public ownership of the big energy companies. All workers in polluting industries should be guaranteed retraining and new living-wage jobs in socially useful green production.

Equal Rights for All

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

- ✦ Immediate, unconditional legalization and equal rights for all undocumented immigrants.
- ✦ Build a mass movement against police brutality and the institutional racism of the criminal justice system. Invest in rehabilitation, job training, and living-wage jobs, not prisons! Abolish the death penalty.
- ✦ Fight sexual harassment, violence against women, and all forms of sexism.
- ✦ Defend a woman's right to choose whether and when to have children. For a publicly funded, single-payer health care system with free reproductive services, including all forms of birth control and safe, accessible abortions. Comprehensive sex education. Paid maternity and paternity leave. Fully subsidized, high-quality child care.
- ✦ Equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, including same-sex marriage.

Money for Jobs and Education, Not War

- ✦ End the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. Bring all the troops home now!
- ✦ Slash the military budget. No drones. Shut down Guantanamo.
- ✦ Repeal the Patriot Act, the NDAA, and all other attacks on democratic rights.

Break with the Two Parties of Big Business

- ✦ For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people, and activists from workplace, environmental, civil rights, and women's campaigns to provide a fighting, political alternative to the corporate parties.
- ✦ Unions and social movement organizations should stop funding and supporting the Democratic and Republican Parties and instead organize independent left-wing, anti-corporate candidates and coalitions as a first step toward building a workers' party.

Socialism and Internationalism

- ✦ Capitalism produces poverty, inequality, environmental destruction, and war. We need an international struggle against this system.
- ✦ Repeal corporate "free trade" agreements, which mean job losses and a race to the bottom for workers and the environment.
- ✦ Solidarity with the struggles of workers and oppressed peoples internationally: An injury to one is an injury to all.
- ✦ Take into public ownership the top 500 corporations and banks that dominate the U.S. economy. Run them under the democratic management of elected representatives of the workers and the broader public. Compensation to be paid on the basis of proven need to small investors, not millionaires.
- ✦ A democratic socialist plan for the economy based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people and the environment. For a socialist United States and a socialist world. ✦

URGENT SOLIDARITY NEEDED!

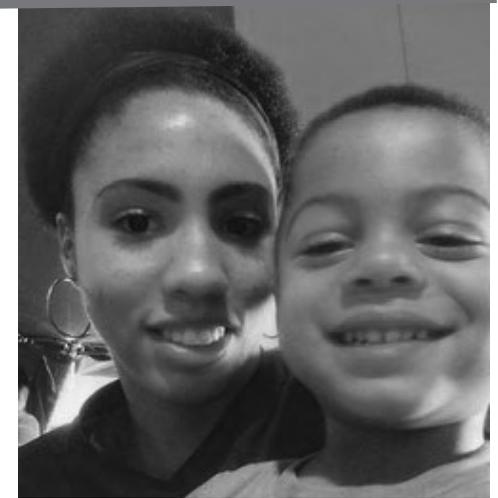
Single Mom Fired for Organizing Strike for \$15 and a Union

Brink's armored trucking terminated Darletta Scruggs, a 15 Now activist and single mother, for organizing a strike of 50 drivers and messengers as part of the April 15 National Day of Action for \$15 and a union. Brink's can't be allowed to threaten workers with financial ruin for standing up for their rights on the job.

Darletta's Story

I worked as a route coordinator at Brink's on the West Side of Chicago since August 2014. Despite being the single mother of a three-year-old child, I was required to work a minimum of 50 hours a week. I was often told not to leave the building for my lunch break.

Brink's pays most of its workers way under \$15 an hour and has taken away our annual raises, even though the company made \$3.5 billion last year. Brink's cut workers' overtime pay last year, even though most workers work up to 16-hour days, often with no breaks. Then, earlier this year, they took away workers' earned vacation time, implementing an accrue-as-you-go policy with no compensation for time that workers had saved under



the old system. So when I told my coworkers about the April 15 national strike for \$15 and a union, they were ready for action. Things got organized in just three days, and a big majority of the drivers and messengers walked out on April 15!

I was targeted and fired, just one week after our successful strike. Management gave no official communication as to why I was fired, but they repeatedly intimidated and threatened me for supporting the drive for union recognition. Because I was a dispatcher, paid a salary instead of hourly pay, Brink's labels me as "management" and says I don't have legal protection to fight for my rights or be represented by a union. But we've filed with the National Labor Relations Board, legally challenging the company's definition of management and their unjust decision to fire me.

Since the strike, a majority of Brink's drivers and messengers have signed union cards, but management refuses to recognize the union or negotiate. Instead, they are using the leverage of the economic hardship they can inflict on employees through reduced hours or termination. We must not allow companies like Brink's to just fire someone for speaking up against unfair working conditions or to intimidate workers into submission while they pocket millions. We must fight back!

Brink's provides service for many banks like Chase and Bank Of America, as well as large corporations like Walmart and McDonald's, companies known for opposing workers' rights. It is time that workers be paid adequately and big businesses be held accountable for worker exploitation and intimidation tactics. That's why I got active with 15 Now. We need to fight, because MONEY IS NOT MORE VALUABLE THAN HUMAN LIVES!!! ✦

Let Brink's know we have Darletta's back!

Show your solidarity by:

1. Signing the petition at www.coworker.org/petitions/solidarity-appeal-single-mom-fired-for-organizing-strike-for-15-and-a-union

2. Make a donation to Darletta's defense campaign today: www.gofundme.com/darletta

Flood Brink's phone lines today! Demand they give Darletta her job back.

Call Brink's Customer Service at 773-475-2600, Ext. 1. Ask to speak to the Branch Manager. If there is no answer, leave a message!

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Interview with Kshama Sawant's Political Director

Blazing a New Path for the Left

Philip Locker is the political director of the Kshama Sawant re-election campaign and a national spokesperson for Socialist Alternative.

Kshama is up for re-election and has an approval rating of 61%, the highest among all Seattle City Councilmembers. How likely is it that Kshama will be re-elected?

I am confident that Kshama will be re-elected, given her strong track record of fighting for and winning real improvements for working people in Seattle. At the same time, there is no room for complacency. This is going to be an extremely hard-fought election exactly because of the importance of what we've been able to do, demonstrating the viability and value of independent working-class politics.

Kshama's record in office is an example that the big corporations and the Democratic Party establishment are absolutely determined to snuff out before it can spread more extensively. So, the stakes are high.

Our enemies recognize, just as we do, that Kshama's re-election will be an historic victory that will encourage and speed up the development of more independent left campaigns in Seattle and nationwide. We know the mayor and the Chamber of Commerce consider defeating Kshama their top priority in this year's elections, and they are, of course, being clever about how they go about it.

They are not running an openly pro-business candidate. Instead, they have recruited and are backing a candidate, Pamela Banks, who is running as a longstanding community and civil rights leader, and president of the Urban League, who is running as a progressive champion, just like Kshama, with the exception that she is "collaborative" and will be able to get things done and be effective.

What are the most important issues for workers in this election?

The biggest issue is the crisis of affordable housing. Seattle has seen the fastest growth in rents of any major city in the U.S. There's hardly anyone in Seattle who doesn't have a friend or neighbor, or who hasn't experienced for themselves, what we call an "economic eviction," where you're forced to move because the rent is increased by 10, 20, 50, and sometimes 100% or more.

"Kshama's campaign and record in office are an example that the big corporations...are absolutely determined to snuff out before it can spread more extensively."

Unsurprisingly, real estate owners, developers, and landlords currently have a political lock on City Hall. The City government has spent years giving all sorts of handouts and special favors to billionaire developers like Paul Allen, while failing to stand up for tenants' rights and small homeowners.

Kshama is running on a bold platform for affordable housing, such as passing rent control, making the developers finally pay for affordable housing, and kicking them off of the gravy train of corporate handouts. She also supports



Kshama Sawant on a Duamish canoe in the Shell No! flotilla in Puget Sound on May 16, 2015.

facebook.com /VoteSawant
@votesawant

Follow Kshama Sawant's campaign in Seattle at **KshamaSawant.org**

very specific proposals to strengthen tenant rights, like mandating renters get a six-month notice before any rent increase of 10% or more and providing relocation assistance to people forced to move due to economic evictions from skyrocketing rents.

But what I think has the greatest potential impact over the medium term is Kshama's plan for building thousands of high-quality, city-owned apartments, to be rented at below-market rates as an affordable alternative to the out-of-control private housing market.

Kshama's campaign is playing a pioneering role, blazing a new path for left activism in the U.S. on housing. We can popularize and demonstrate the importance of having solutions based on social ownership with city-owned housing, as opposed to the dominant outlook, unfortunately, of most affordable housing advocates of trying to bribe and coerce private, for-profit developers to provide housing that will meet our needs.

Why does Socialist Alternative call for building an independent political alternative to the Democratic Party, and is Kshama's election campaign part of building an alternative?

Absolutely. Kshama's re-election is a critical battle for all those who support independent left politics in the U.S.

The majority of workers and young people are absolutely fed up with our broken political system. Everyone knows that big corporations and the super-rich have bought the political system and both parties, Republicans and Democrats, to serve their interests. But, for working people, students, women, people of color – where's our political voice? Who represents our interests in government?

In Seattle, corporate politics take the form of the Democratic Party because this is a one-party town. Before Kshama was elected, the Seattle City Council was 100% Democrat, and it was this Democrat-controlled city council and mayor that were busy giving giant developers handouts year after year, while working people faced skyrocketing

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Kshama Sawant Column

Shell No!

Twitter: @cmkshama



There are climate change deniers and there are climate change deniers. The first have completely lost their battle for the minds of people, a battle they were fighting to keep the oil-driven corporate profits flowing. Throwing a snowball in Congress to "prove" that the planet is not heating up – that's a slap in the face of future generations. And too many are aware of that.

But then there are climate change deniers 2.0. They are the bigger problem right now. They deny to act based on what they pretend to accept. President Obama's recent decision to grant Shell permission to drill in the Arctic is such an act of denial.

Drilling in the Arctic is not, as Obama has claimed, part of a "transition off of fossil fuels" or towards renewable energy, but a commitment to continue developing drilling technology over the next ten to twenty years – which is how long it will take to exploit the oil and gas reserves in a meaningful way.

Shell is on the list of 90 companies that are responsible for almost two-thirds of carbon emissions in the whole of human history. There is no existing technology, nor is there the infrastructure, in the remote Arctic to deal with a disaster like the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. And the conditions of drilling in the Arctic make such a disaster more likely, while at the same time inflicting damage on an even more vulnerable environment!

Stop Arctic Drilling

In 2015, Shell Oil is trying to use the short Arctic summer to establish an initial base for drilling in the Chukchi Sea. But first it must repair its drilling rig, and Shell Oil chose Seattle's port as the cheapest option.

The arrival of this massive symbol of climate disruption has already spurred hundreds of activists into organizing kayak flotillas and mass direct actions. The Polar Pioneer should not be repaired in Seattle, and not anywhere else. We cannot allow it to leave Seattle.

As corporate politicians fail to stand up to Shell, we need to build on these efforts, reach out to workers who would be employed repairing Shell's oil rig, and not allow Shell to divide our community on the issue of job creation. This is not about the false dichotomy of jobs or the environment. A program to transfer to sustainable energy and energy savings will create a massive number of jobs. That's what's needed – and that's what unions and environmentalists need to fight for together.

Be part of this movement, organize protests, and help us challenge all corporate politicians who – despite their words – just act as servants of Shell, Chevron, Exxon, and the like. Arctic drilling ends here!

Yours,
Kshama Sawant

Kshama Sawant is a Seattle City Councilmember and a member of Socialist Alternative

Bernie Sanders Announces Run for Presidency

What Should the Left Say?

Promising a “political revolution” against the “billionaires and oligarchs” who have hijacked the political system, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders has launched a campaign for the Democratic Party presidential nomination. There was a huge response to the announcement, with 75,000 people donating \$3 million to his campaign within four days. “People for Bernie” meetings have been held around the country.

Socialist Alternative and many others on the left have urged Sanders – who describes himself as a democratic

socialist – to run as an independent in order to clearly challenge both corporate parties. Unfortunately, he has chosen to run in the Democratic primaries.

How should socialists respond to Sanders’ campaign? What is the best way to galvanize the radicalizing forces in U.S. society? These issues have provoked a significant debate on the left. Socialist Alternative asked Todd Chretien from the International Socialist Organization (ISO) to present that organization’s view alongside Philip Locker, who summarizes Socialist Alternative’s position.



Socialist Alternative and the International Socialist Organization wrote longer statements that offer more background to this development:

- ✦ **Socialist Alternative statement: “Bernie Sanders Calls for Political Revolution against Billionaire Class: Campaign Needs to Build Independent Political Power,”** SocialistAlternative.org/2015/05/09/bernie-sanders-independent-campaign/
- ✦ **ISO statement: “The Problem with Bernie Sanders: Ashley Smith Writes From Vermont on Bernie Sanders’ Plan to Run for President,”** SocialistWorker.org/2015/05/05/problem-bernie-sanders

Hard Truths About Bernie Sanders’ Campaign

Todd Chretien,
International Socialist Organization

Bernie Sanders’ campaign will stand out from the status quo of U.S. politics. He has promised to support a trillion-dollar green jobs program for renewable energy. He defends Social Security and advocates for a single-payer health system. Faced with an intramural battle between the Clinton and Bush wings of the 1 Percent, he calls for a “political revolution.” On top of that, he identifies himself as a socialist and says his hero is Eugene V. Debs. It’s no wonder many people on the left are excited.

But there’s one way that Sanders’ campaign doesn’t stand out, and it’s decisive for socialists. He is running for the Democratic Party presidential nomination, and he has ruled out in advance an independent campaign in 2016. “No matter what I do,” he said in January, “I will not be a spoiler. I will not play that role in helping to elect some right-wing Republican as president of the United States.”

On this point, we should take Sanders at his word. He promises to confine his “political revolution” to the role of loyal opposition within the Democratic Party, and to support Hillary Clinton if she rides her billion-dollar campaign to the nomination.

As Bruce Dixon, former Black Panther and Georgia Green Party chair, put it,

Sanders will serve as a “sheepdog” for the Democratic Party – his bark may cause a stir, but his job is to bring discontented voters back into the Democratic flock.

This was the result of Dennis Kucinich’s primary campaigns in the 2000s and Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow Coalition runs in the 1980s. The hopes of some on the left that, for example, the Rainbow Coalition would break with the Democrats were dashed when Jackson did exactly what Sanders is promising to do in 2016 – endorse the mainstream Democrat who gets the nomination.

As a U.S. senator, Sanders calls himself an independent, not a Democrat – but his record should lead socialists to question that label. He caucuses with the Senate Democrats, and left-wing activists in Sanders’ home state of Vermont are critical of his support for Democrats like budget-cutting Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin.

And, like the increasingly neoliberal social democratic and labor parties in Europe on which Sanders models his socialism, he takes positions on critical questions that aren’t radical at all. He voted for the Authorization for Use of Military Force after 9/11 and, more recently, refused to vote against a Senate resolution supporting Israel’s 2014 massacre in Gaza. Asked about the mass protests in

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Socialists Should Engage Sanders’ Campaign

Philip Locker,
Socialist Alternative

Bernie Sanders’ campaign has a fundamental built-in contradiction. On the one side, it stands out as a credible national presidential campaign, giving voice to the seething anger against inequality and the war on working people. Despite significant shortcomings – for example, his failure to speak out clearly in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and his support for key aspects of U.S. foreign policy – his platform has the potential to mobilize hundreds of thousands against corporate politics.

On the other side, Sanders has decided not to run independently, as we have consistently argued he should. Limiting his campaign to the corporate-dominated Democratic Party primaries – that he will not win – is a dead end for building the kind of powerful grassroots movement that is needed. Calling on people to mobilize against Wall Street and at the same time saying you will support the eventual corporate-endorsed Democratic nominee is like trying to start a fire and announcing your intention to pour water on it as soon as it really heats up.

A Battle Not to Miss

But Sanders’ inspiration of hundreds of thousands could lay the basis – and provide the experience – for many people to

leave the orbit of the Democratic Party. Socialists can play a key role in this process by intervening in a skillful but determined way.

For those moving into action around Sanders’ campaign, we can provide the link to building mass movements and structures independent of the Democratic Party. We can make the case for a real challenge, arguing that Sanders should run all the way to November 2016 as an independent and, if he doesn’t, striving to involve those attracted by Sanders’ policies to support the strongest independent left campaign in the 2016 presidential election.

Some of Sanders’ supporters have a conscious strategy of working within the Democratic Party. But the majority are looking for a political alternative to big-business politics.

If Sanders endorses the pro-business Democratic nominee, as is most likely, there will be a section of his supporters who will want to continue fighting and will split off to support the strongest independent left candidate for president. In 2004, when Dennis Kucinich and Howard Dean endorsed the Democratic nominee, John Kerry, an important minority of their supporters ended up joining Ralph Nader’s independent campaign.

Given the weakness of the forces for

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Debate: Bernie Sanders

ISO - Hard Truths

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Baltimore after the police murder of Freddie Gray, Sanders said that “being a cop is a hard job” before backing tame policy proposals that were no more radical than Hillary Clinton’s.

Sanders’ announcement comes amid widespread political discontent and the spread of young movements such as Black Lives Matter; Fight for 15; the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement in solidarity with Palestine; and more. Socialists have a responsibility to discuss the real record of the Democrat Party, including its liberal wing, with these new movements. We can’t shy away from the hard lessons of past attempts to reform the Democrats.

Does that mean we are stuck on the sidelines? Not at all. The Sanders campaign gives us an opportunity to debate socialist politics. If Sanders wants to bring movement and union activists into the Democratic Party through its left entrance, we should try to get them back out that door and into the streets. We can engage on political issues with People for Bernie groups and encourage them to take part in activism outside the electoral arena. And since Sanders’ version of “revolution” doesn’t challenge the boundaries of one of the richest capitalist parties in the world, we can introduce Debs’ socialism to a new generation as an alternative.

What socialists should not do is follow



Sanders into the Democratic Party and organize for his primary campaign, even on a temporary basis. History teaches us that this will make it harder, not easier, to build an independent left-wing alternative to the two-party system.

As Kshama Sawant in Seattle and Howie Hawkins and Brian Jones in New York demonstrated with their independent campaigns, we don’t have to wait to begin building that alternative. We can begin our discussion with Sanders supporters by stressing our common aims for radical change – but we have to tell it to them straight: To win that change, the left can’t follow Sanders into a corporate party, but must help organize the new movements while building an independent political challenge outside the Democratic Party. ✪

SA - Engage Sanders’ Campaign

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independent politics, Sanders’ campaign is most likely to be the largest arena over the next year for discussion on fighting corporate politics, and will provide the largest audience for proponents of independent politics to build support.

By boldly intervening in the Sanders campaign – supporting its call for a determined fight against big business while arguing for independent politics – we can most effectively advance the project of independent politics under the current circumstances.

Fighting for Independent Politics

Socialist Alternative will, at each stage, politically explain the role of the Democratic Party as a big-business party and argue for building a movement that can create a real alternative for working-class people. We will not help to sign people up for the Democratic Party. Instead, we will work with those drawn to Sanders’ campaign to fight for \$15, for single-payer health care, and to take on the billionaire class.

Sanders’ campaign will be an arena for debate on the role of the Democratic Party. Sanders believes his platform is compatible with working within the Democrats. We disagree. Many energized by Sanders have not yet thought this through fully but are, instead, pragmatically looking to find a way to fight back. But the experience of Sanders’ campaign could be part of the process of clarifying, for tens of thousands, the necessity of building a completely new political force for working people, especially if socialists are actively involved.

The real mistake for those who want to build an alternative to corporate politics is to abstain, to simply criticize from the sidelines. If we are absent from the Sanders campaign, the concrete effect will be to help facilitate the corraling of Sanders’ left-wing supporters behind the eventual Democratic nominee.

We need a correct political understanding and critique of Bernie Sanders’ politics. But we also need to actively engage with the genuine workers and youth being drawn to Sanders’ campaign by his fierce denunciations of the political establishment. Socialists need to go through this experience with them, helping to speed up the process of drawing the conclusion that an independent political alternative to the Democrats is needed. ✪

After Baltimore: Where Do We Go From Here?

continued from back cover

question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy.”

The crucial task is building a mighty force rooted in the working class that will challenge the ideas of capitalism and racism and mobilize people around clear and far-reaching demands. Powerful movements like the Civil Rights Movement and the militant labor movement struggles of the 1930s and ‘40s are what truly frightens the ruling elite. It wasn’t the “riots” or rebellions that brought an end to Jim Crow in the South, but uncompromising and organized social struggle at home and abroad that forced the hand of the U.S. political establishment.

Are the Ferguson and Baltimore rebellions the new normal for U.S. society? As long as the conditions remain the same, the working class

and poor will rebel against the tyranny of the 0.01%. Baltimore’s State’s Attorney Marilyn Mosby represents a sector of the ruling elite that believes that police violence against people of color has gone too far. Another section of the ruling elite fears that victories will give the movement confidence and a point of reference for future struggles for housing, education, and jobs, and it seeks to repress any emerging struggles.

Which Way Forward for Black Lives Matter?

On July 24-26 in Cleveland, Ohio, the leading grassroots and NGO organizations in the Black Lives Matter movement will meet for an all-important conference to



discuss and debate the direction of the movement. Socialist Alternative welcomes this conference to coordinate a sustained national

movement to confront police violence in our cities and towns. The question that must be answered for the movement to grow politically

and strengthen its reach is how it speaks to the tens of millions of workers and youth, particularly black workers and youth, whose lives are being devastated under capitalism today.

Building a multiracial working-class mass movement, independent from corporate politics, is paramount. The forging of links between the community and the labor movement – like the One Baltimore United coalition, which includes unions like the Laborers, ATU, and SEIU 1199, as well as organizations like Fight for 15 – are an important step forward. In the immediate sense, it is necessary to keep up the pressure by building powerful protests in Baltimore and exposing the political establishment of the city until the judicial process is complete. ✪

1865 – A REVOLUTIONARY TURN

The Road to Civil War

For over 200 years, the bulk of African Americans in North America were held in bondage, families ripped apart, human beings bought and sold, brutally tortured, and treated as the “private property” of a small minority of rich white men. A whole legal framework was developed to enforce this system. The Constitution famously counted blacks as “three-fifths” of a human being and enshrined the Fugitive Slave Clause – protecting the “property rights” of slaveowners. Racist ideology was whipped up to new heights to justify this brutal oppression.

The slaveowners lived in constant fear of rebellion. Nat Turner, in 1831, led a major revolt and, in 1859, John Brown’s attack on Harper’s Ferry – and the support he won in the North during his trial – scared the hell out of the slaveowners. The abolitionists waged a moral crusade against slavery, while Harriet Tubman and others organized the Underground Railroad.

But, it was the Civil War that brought the system crashing down 150 years ago. 200,000 freed slaves joined with hundreds of thousands of small farmers, workers, immigrants, and others in the Union Army and militarily crushed the slaveowners. While slavery was defeated, racism was not. 150 years after the Civil War, there are more black men ensnared in the U.S. criminal justice system than there were slaves in 1850, as Michelle Alexander, the author of *The New Jim Crow*, has pointed out. Today, it’s Wall Street and their capitalist system that perpetuates the racist legacy of slavery.

Revolution

The Civil War – a struggle for power between the slaveowners and the capitalists of the North – was America’s Second Revolution, and resulted in a reordering of economic, political, and social relations in U.S. society. The first revolution – the struggle for independence from the British Empire – established one of the first democracies in the world. However, it ended in a compromise between the capitalist class in the North and the plantation owners in the South.

The question of slavery was not just a moral issue. It was a question of the economic and political structure of the U.S. Slavery had its own needs, and the slaveowners had their own interests that were at odds with the development of capitalism. The existence and rivalry of two powerful ruling classes within the framework of a single nation-state defined this period.

History is full of all kinds of twists and turns. As such, the capitalist Industrial Revolution – centered on the development of manufacturing and wage labor – strengthened the slave system in North America because of demand for cotton in textile manufacturing. By 1850, cotton accounted for more than 50 percent of all U.S. exports. The dominance of cotton gave the slave plantation owners enormous power, just as the dominance of finance capital gives Wall Street a dominant power in U.S. politics today.

But by 1845, capitalism in the North had outstripped the South, while the plantation system was reaching its own internal limits. Cotton could not grow everywhere, and the methods of growing it quickly exhausted

the soil, requiring a constant search for new lands. Meanwhile, the price of slaves and land became more expensive, making the landlords more dependent on debts with Northern banks.

The slaveowners were not passive in the face of the crisis facing their system and their power. They exhausted every possible avenue for overcoming the limits of the slave plantation system. They agitated for new slave states and to reopen the slave trade, and they waged wars. Increasingly, the slaveowners used their power over the political system – particularly their control of the Senate, whose structure, with two members from each state, favored the less populous South – to ram through policies narrowly designed to protect their system. This set them on a collision course with millions in the North, ultimately making it absolutely clear that a revolutionary overturn of society was needed.

Political Revolution

The election of Abraham Lincoln as president in 1860 was the first act of this revolution. The Republican Party was a “third party.” Between 1800-1860, the slaveowners dominated U.S. politics through their own two-party system made up of the Whigs and the Democratic Party. Through this two-party system, the slaveowners dominated every government institution, including Congress, the White House, the Supreme Court, the military, and foreign diplomacy. The Whig Party was considered the “lesser evil” by progressives, while the Democrats, contrary to popular mythology, were set up as the main party of the slaveowners.

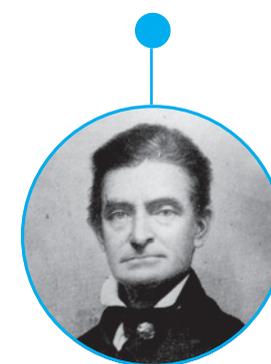
This two-party system began to crack in the 1850s. The population of the North rapidly outpaced the South between 1800-1860, changing the balance of forces in society. Small farmers made up the majority of the new population, and they wanted land for small farming, not for rich slave plantations. One of the key issues that came to the fore was the enormous



The heroic Massachusetts 54th African American regiment in the assault on Fort Wagner near Charleston on July 18, 1863. Their role is *Glory*.



Harriet Tubman



John Brown

One hundred and fifty years ago, on June 2, 1865, Confederate forces west of the Mississippi, signed the Union Army’s terms which as Patrick Ayers explains, can also truly

power a small minority – the rich slaveowners – wielded in U.S. politics and society. The slaveowners were increasingly seen as a threat to the democratic gains of 1776.

The key question that sharpened divisions between the ruling classes of the North and South was: how much land for slavery? The Missouri Compromise of 1820 had limited slavery to lands beneath the 36th parallel. In 1854, the Democrats repealed the Missouri Compromise, opening up Kansas and Nebraska to slavery and creating outrage in the North. The conflict spilled outside legislative channels and into the fields and towns of Kansas, where pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces fought open battles. “Bleeding Kansas” led to the almost overnight creation of the Republican Party, which won sweeping congressional election victories in the North in 1856, annihilating the “lesser evil” Whig Party and finally giving a powerful tool to all those who wanted to break the power of the slaveowners.

Revolutionary War

The second act of the revolution was the

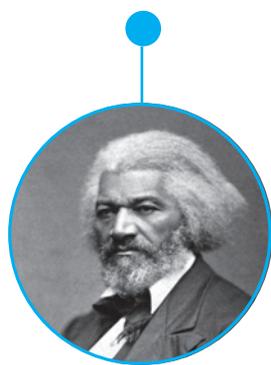
military struggle to put down the slaveowners’ revolt against the Republican Party government after Lincoln’s election in November 1860. With Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, issued as an executive order out of military necessity on January 1, 1863, the war became a revolutionary war against the slave system itself. Emancipation was the biggest attack on “private property” in history, and undermined the whole basis of the slaveowners’ power.

It should be stressed that Lincoln’s first priority at the start of the war was not dismantling the slave system but, rather, ending the secession of the Southern states and preserving the Union. But the logic of the revolution was that the social system which underlay the South’s power had to be destroyed. This necessarily meant freeing the slaves. It was also the case that the North needed to bring African Americans directly into the military effort on the basis of fighting for their freedom in order to turn the tide of the war.

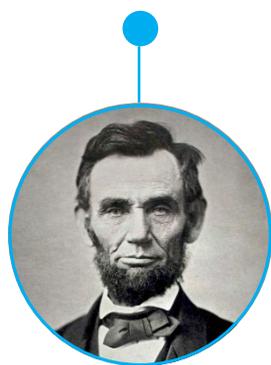
Lincoln represented a more radical section of the Northern capitalists, and he showed real determination to put down the

TURNING POINT IN U.S. HISTORY

h was one of many all-
the Union Army formed
Proclamation. They led the
Charleston, South Carolina
s depicted in the movie



Frederick Douglass



Abraham Lincoln

ate General Edmund Kirby Smith, commander of Confeder-
terms of surrender. This marked the final end of the Civil War,
ly be described as America's Second Revolution.

slaveowners' rebellion, unlike another section of the ruling elite, which was willing to make even further rotten compromises. It's true that, without the struggle of the masses – the initiative of the slaves, small farmers, and workers themselves – Lincoln would not have been in a position to lead. But Lincoln showed outstanding leadership and was not afraid to take decisive measures, even if it meant concentrating more power in his hands.

He used a loose interpretation of the Constitution to go over the heads of Congress and raise an army of hundreds of thousands. He suspended *habeas corpus* and had suspected traitors in the Maryland legislature arrested and held without charges. Lincoln hesitated on the issue of slavery for fear of losing support in Unionist slave states, particularly the strategically important state of Kentucky. But events changed Lincoln's outlook.

Consulting with Frederick Douglass, Lincoln opened the doors of the Union Army to the increasing number of slaves who were fleeing the South and wanted to join the army to fight for their social liberation. In early 1864, exhaustion and years of grinding conflict led

many to believe that Lincoln would lose the presidential election to the Democrats, who were willing to make concessions on slavery. Lincoln rejected concessions on emancipation at this time, arguing that it would be a victory for the South and a betrayal of the black soldiers who fought heroically for the Union.

Victory in Atlanta in September 1864 changed the mood of the North and signaled that the Union's full economic, military, and social advantage was coming to bear. Lincoln was re-elected in November 1864. The Confederacy was forced to accept defeat in April 1865, and the final surrender came in June. Although racism remained, slavery was smashed.

Consolidation of Capitalism

At the same time, the victory of the Union consolidated the power of the capitalist class in the North. A controversial outcome in the 1876 election led to a rotten compromise between the elites of the North and South. In exchange for withdrawing Northern troops, whose presence underpinned Reconstruction

(see box), the Democrats conceded the presidency. This closed the period of Radical Reconstruction and opened a period of counterrevolution where, once again, racism was whipped up to establish a new form of social control and special oppression of black people: the Jim Crow system.

Karl Marx first developed the idea that the historic role of the working class was to wage a powerful struggle against capitalism and for the creation of a socialist society. However, in the U.S. Civil War, Karl Marx supported

President Lincoln, the Republican Party, and the Union Army because, as he saw it, the most important task of working people in the U.S. was to defeat slavery, in order to create more favorable conditions for the united struggle of all working people. In *Capital*, he states, "Labor in the white skin can never free itself as long as labor in the black skin is branded."

Jim Crow complicated the task of uniting the working class, but its destruction was another historic step forward. Today, we still need to struggle against racism, as capitalism has completely failed to overcome the legacy of the racist slave system. We need to fight tooth and nail against the new form of social control and racial oppression directed at African Americans: mass incarceration, disproportionate poverty, and militarized policing of black communities.

Today, it is the multiracial working class which has the potential power to defeat racism and end the rule of Wall Street over our lives. Black workers have been to the forefront of the fight for \$15, which is pointing the way toward rebuilding a fighting labor movement. The fight for \$15 is now beginning to build more direct links with the Black Lives Matter movement of the youth fighting police brutality.

As in the 1850s, our political system is dominated by two parties which, while different in important ways, both defend the rule of corporate America and Wall Street. The example of the radical Republican Party's victory under Lincoln in 1860 shows us that, when the conditions are right, a mass political force representing the interests of working people can break through and transform the completely dysfunctional political system.

The history of America's Second Revolution is essential study for those who would prepare the Third, socialist transformation of American society, when the legacy of slavery can be finally buried once and for all. ✪

The Radical Legacy of the U.S. Civil War

When the Confederacy surrendered in 1865 – completely outmatched by the power of Northern capitalism and the radicalized small farmers, workers, and freed slaves that fought – one of the most revolutionary chapters of U.S. history immediately opened up: the period of Radical Reconstruction.

The essence of this period was the awakening and coming together of the most oppressed layers of society around their common interests. Black people were at the forefront of these struggles in the South, fighting for democratic rights and electing radical legislatures. Significantly, both black and white sharecroppers in the South joined together to fight for land reform. Racism was employed by the ruling class of the South to divide and hold back these struggles.

Internationally

At the same time, the defeat of the slaveowners was celebrated internationally. Most of Europe was under the thumb of

monarchies and dictatorships, while much of Asia and Africa were under colonial rule by European powers. The young Republic in North America, born out of struggle against the British Empire, stood out as a beacon of hope for a different kind of society, one that upheld democratic ideals, in spite of its limitations.

The victory over the slaveowners gave a mighty impulse to democratic revolutionary movements internationally. In the course of the war, the International Working Men's Association (IWMA), the First International, was established – the first attempt by the working class to build an international organization to coordinate a united struggle across national borders. Just six years after the end of the Civil War, workers in France formed the Paris Commune, the first attempt ever by the working class to take state power.

In the U.S., The IWMA grew to more than 50 branches and was a key force in helping spread agitation for the 8-hour day. The women's suffrage movement also grew out of this period. ✪

Beyond the Supreme Court's Equal Marriage Ruling

The Next Steps In Queer Liberation

This month, the Supreme Court will rule on whether marriage rights should be given to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI) people across the country. The fact the Court is hearing this case reflects a welcome shift in social attitudes brought about by decades of struggle and significant marriage equality victories in state after state.

At the time of writing, it is not clear whether the Court will endorse nationwide marriage equality. Whatever it decides, the hesitant and discriminatory process underscores how ineffective the capitalist system is at meeting the needs of marginalized and oppressed Americans. However, even a ruling against marriage equality will not stop the LGBTQI struggle: too much has been won by pressure and organizing from below.

From Marriage Equality Victories to Broader Tasks

Regardless of the outcome, queer socialist activists have continually argued that the fight for equal marriage rights must be linked to broader issues like solutions to the homelessness, incarceration, and unemployment too many LGBTQI people face.

Unfortunately, the struggle for marriage equality has not been used as a springboard to widen the struggle, but rather to open up new divisions within the LGBTQI communities who have so far benefitted from these steps and those with different needs. This must be changed. New leaders in the LGBTQI struggle should offer such a perspective.

Socialist Alternative is celebrating Pride month by developing a radical, socialist program for queer liberation in the post-marriage equality age. Grass-roots struggle highlights three issues, among many others:



The Seattle Trans-Pride parade is now an annual tradition.

Social and economic liberation

First, the false economic recovery since 2008 has revealed the importance of united mass struggle by working people, including LGBTQI workers, challenging the capitalist system that failed the 99%. According to Talk Poverty, 20.7% of LGBT people make less than \$12,000 a year and 15% of transgender people make less than \$10,000 a year.

Queer inclusion in unions, 15 Now, and radical movements must be a top priority. The solidarity and collective struggle between the Black Lives Matter movement and Black trans women leaders around the abominable murders of Black trans women, which every year represent the majority of anti-LGBTQI homicide, should serve as an organizational model.

Fighting the Reactionary Right and Ensuring HIV+ and Trans-Friendly Universal Health Care

Second, attacks from the Right, such

as bills criminalizing trans people using the bathroom, must be resisted. What our community needs isn't aggressive policing: instead, sustainable and safe housing, such as the LGBTQI youth shelter campaigned for by Kshama Sawant in Seattle, is the answer.

Finally, the fight against HIV/AIDS must link arms with the struggle for universal public healthcare. Despite enormous advances against HIV, only half of HIV+ people in U.S. get regular care (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). With advances like PrEP and PEP (drugs to prevent HIV transmission), the rates of new HIV infections should be plummeting, but Big Pharma has viciously withheld lifesaving drugs. These must be publicly accessible to everyone who needs them. The same principles apply to people whose bodies do not reflect their true genders: applicable trans-related healthcare is not cosmetic, but rather a matter of life and death. ✪

Continue reading in next month's Socialist Alternative and online at www.SocialistAlternative.org

"A \$1 Raise is Not Enough!"

Airport Workers Demand \$15 in Minneapolis

It was a strange victory. After a raucous three-hour meeting, an angry silence filled the room as the Metropolitan Airport Commission voted to set wages for 3,000 low-wage workers at Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport to at least \$1 above the state minimum. Just one year before, a 10% raise for minimum

wage workers would have been greeted as a big victory. But since 15 Now launched the minimum wage fight at MSP ten months ago, and especially since SEIU made the call for \$15 the main slogan of their AirServ organizing drive last November, workers' expectations have risen. Commissioners

defending the small raise were booed.

"A \$1 raise is not enough. We need a union. We need \$15," said Abdi Ali, a leader in the AirServ union drive and in 15 Now Minnesota. Meeting afterwards, workers and supporters agreed to continue the fight for \$15 at MSP. ✪

10 Books That Shook the World

The Transitional Program, by Leon Trotsky

George Martin Fell Brown

Capitalism is facing a crisis of legitimacy. We're given war, poverty, and environmental destruction to satisfy the profits of a tiny minority. The 1% get bailed out for bringing the economy to ruin, but fast food workers demanding enough to live on are called lazy. Protesters against racist police violence have naturally come to the conclusion that "The whole damn system is guilty". It's no wonder that support for socialism is on the rise. But, as even the hard-won reforms of previous generations are being reversed, the question naturally arises: how can we actually get to socialism? This is the question the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky tackled in his *Transitional Program*, written in 1938.

Generalizing from his own experiences as a central leader of the Russian Revolution and of the resistance to Stalinism, Trotsky recognized that it was through the day-to-day struggles for reforms that working people gain the experience and confidence necessary to change society. The function of the *Transitional Program* was to build a bridge between those struggles and the need for a socialist transformation. "This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

These transitional demands are things that workers would find reasonable but go beyond what capitalism will allow. These include demands such as shortening the workweek to create full employment without cutting weekly pay and opening the books of companies that lay off workers and claim they have no choice. The forms of struggle themselves can also take on a transitional form. As workers' confidence grows in the struggle against capitalism, strikes give way to sit-down strikes, to factory committees, to revolutionary change.

Trotsky's *Transitional Program* also addressed the organizations and individuals who lead the masses into struggle only to buckle under the pressure of the ruling elite and make decisive mistakes at a later stage. It wasn't enough to denounce those leaders from the sidelines. Trotsky placed positive demands on the leaders of unions and political parties with a working class base that would engage the masses and help them educate themselves. The transitional method allows us to go beyond what the capitalists deem "possible" without confining ourselves to empty revolutionary phraseology.

Of course no single program can be applied universally to all situations. Trotsky was writing in the age of Hitler and Stalin, on the eve of the most destructive war in human history. Programs must be continually examined and updated to meet changes in consciousness and conditions facing working people. But even if the program's individual details can't all be applied directly to today's struggles, the *method* behind the program retains immense value as a guide to action. As such, the *Transitional Program* is as relevant as ever. ✪

Earthquake Disaster in Nepal Amplified by Capitalism

Read news from the Committee for a Workers International

SocialistWorld.net



Tu Senan, CWI

Nepal, one of the poorest countries in South Asia, has been further devastated by the recent wave of earthquakes at the end of April and in May. More than 5,000 people are estimated to have perished, and around 10,000 estimated to be injured. But the number of deaths and injuries is expected to become much higher as time passes.

Most of the victims were rural poor and the poor in the cities who lived in "precarious housing." *The Guardian* reports the grief of a paralyzed newspaper seller who is angry and desperate: "If we had money we would have built a strong house. But we had none. There is no place to go. There is no one to look after us. Life was hard for us already. I don't want to be alive," (04/27/2015).

Capitalist governments across the world pretend to be "sympathetic," but they have offered very little help so far. The pathetic initial U.S. promise of \$1 million help was even less than some of the poor countries are pledging. This aid is nowhere near the resources needed to provide essential services. According to UNICEF, apart from anything else, 940,000 Nepalese children are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

Disaster Was Waiting to Happen

The government of Nepal and geologists across the world knew in advance that a disaster of this scale was waiting to happen, given the understanding about the movement of seismic plates in the subcontinent. And yet the Nepalese government and other governments in the region made no effort whatsoever



The earthquake in Nepal was disastrous for an unprepared, impoverished people.

to prepare and take precautions to prevent large-scale death and disaster in the event of a major earthquake. The scale of the disaster is therefore man-made, in the sense that it could have been dramatically lessened if adequate preventive measures were put in place.

Nepalese politics has been dominated by an endless tug-of-war waged between the Unified Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist (UCPN-M), and the right-wing Nepali Congress (NC) and their ally the Communist Party of Nepal–United Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) regarding establishing a new constitution.

The Maoists (UCPN-M) gained significant support in 2006 after the great general strike saw the end of the rule of the Nepalese

king. This was regarded then as a significant "political earthquake" which was to shape the whole region. Nepali workers, peasants, and poor turned up in tens of thousands, demanding not just the overthrow of the kingdom, but the establishment of a new government which reflected their interests. This desire was echoed in India, as well as in many other countries in the region.

However, the Maoists failed to carry through the fundamental socialist transformation of society which would have enabled them to fulfil the wishes of the masses. Breaking with capitalism and implementing a socialist planned economy with the aim of spreading it across the region and beyond will be the only

way for the Nepalese masses to free themselves from their shackles.

Lost Opportunity to Change Society

Despite the favorable conditions that existed, the Maoists have argued that they need to pass through a "bourgeois democratic [capitalist] stage" of the revolution. They have argued the need for an alliance with the right-wing NC and CPN-UML, at a time when support for these parties was in decline due to their past collaboration with the monarchy.

These pro-capitalist parties put this to good use by continually extending the negotiations for a new constitution – buying time to regain strength and influence. The direct involvement of the regional powers India and China also helped to strengthen them, while the Maoists continued to argue that they needed to collaborate with them to go forward. Prolongation of the discussions meant that the people won only very few improvements in their lives.

All the parties have claimed to be in opposition to the kingdom of the past, yet no meaningful land reforms have been carried through. The king is still one of the largest landowners in the world.

As a result, at the 2013 election the UCPN-Maoists suffered a significant loss of support.

However, the period of support the ruling right-wing parties enjoyed has been put into question by the recent earthquakes. There is a massive discontent emerging against the government due to its mishandling of the disaster. This can rekindle protest and trigger new movements. ✪

Alberta Elections

Conservatives Routed in Canada's Oil Heartland

Socialist Alternative, Canada

The people of Alberta have delivered a stunning election result, upsetting the landscape of Canada. There were headlines in the U.S. about "Canada's Texas" electing a socialist government.

The Conservatives were kicked out of office after 44 years, and the New Democratic Party (NDP) won a majority government. The province, the centre of Canada's oil and gas industry and home to the tar sands, is reeling from the collapse in oil and gas prices. The province's finances faced an \$8 billion deficit, the economy is falling into recession, and unemployment is climbing.

The Conservatives announced a crisis austerity budget and then called a snap election, hoping to win before the cuts hit home. The proposed budget had 59 increases in taxes and fees for working people; cuts to health, education, and other services; and no tax increase on corporations. At 10%, corporate taxes in Alberta are the lowest in Canada and, in a pre-budget government survey asking how to deal with the budget, the most popular response, with 70% support, was to tax the corporations.

Albertans were hurting, angry, and looking for answers. The NDP, Canada's left-leaning party with roots in social democracy, put forward a reform platform promising to raise

the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2018, increase taxes on the rich and corporations, reverse the cuts to public services, and not implement many of the taxes and fees. They promised to diversify the economy from its reliance on oil and gas extraction, as well as to encourage more green energy production and energy efficiency.

The victory was due to the platform, which generated enthusiasm, with many young people turning out to work in the election campaign and the highest voter turnout in 20 years. In addition, the Conservatives were disliked for past arrogance and failures, and the right wing was split between two parties. The leader of the Tories told Albertans to "look in

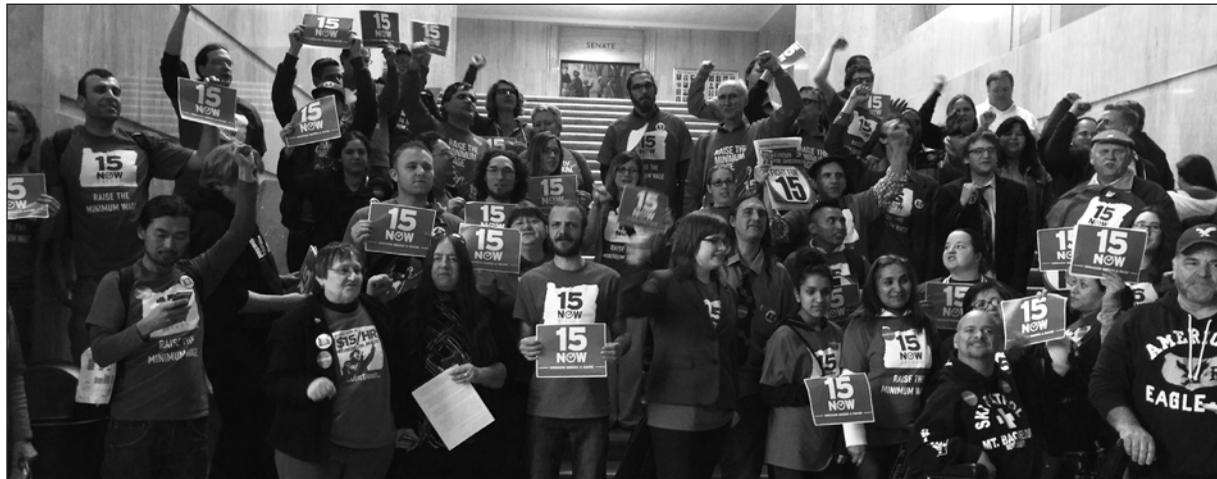
the mirror" to see the cause of the problems.

The NDP won 41% of the vote and 53 out of 86 seats, sweeping every city with over 50,000 people.

This result adds to the problems of Stephen Harper, Canada's prime minister, who faces a general election later this year. Alberta is his home province and the original power base of Harper's right-wing ideology.

Although not a socialist platform, the NDP approach in Alberta contrasts sharply and positively with the very weak proposals of the British Columbia and Ontario NDP in recent elections that ended in defeats. It shows that, even in places that are considered conservative, a radical platform can win victories. ✪

Could Oregon Be the First State to Win \$15?



Justin Norton-Kertson, 15 Now PDX

The movement for a \$15 minimum wage in Oregon has gained massive momentum during 2015, with 16 legislative sponsors, hoards of media attention, and a rally drawing hundreds from all over the state. By the time the legislative session began in February, Oregon had become the first state in the country to seriously consider a statewide \$15 minimum wage.

With over 100 labor unions, community groups, faith organizations, and small businesses endorsing \$15 for Oregon, and with poll numbers showing majority support, it seems the movement to make Oregon the first state to win \$15 is an unstoppable force.

When legislative committee hearings were held on raising Oregon's minimum wage, hundreds of people from around the state again flooded the Capitol, filling the hearing room and three overflow rooms. They kept the committees in session for four hours of testimony in favor of \$15 from low-wage workers, small business owners, and other allies.

Despite overwhelming support, news out of the capitol

is that a minimum wage bill won't pass. Using the typical tactic of hiding corporate interests behind the facade of concern for small business, some legislative leaders reason that, because they are trying to pass paid sick days, small businesses can't handle a minimum wage raise, too.

As a result of what seems to be a clear unwillingness to listen to the will of working Oregonians, on April 17 a coalition of 15 Now, PCUN (Oregon's farmworkers' union), and Rural Organizing Project filed a ballot initiative for a statewide \$15 minimum wage. If the state legislature fails to act, we'll take \$15 to a vote of the people and make Oregon the first state to win \$15! ✪

For more information on the Fight for \$15 in Oregon go to www.15nowpdx.org or www.15noworegon.org



87% of Philadelphia Supports \$15

Kate Goodman & Justin Harrison,
15now Philadelphia

The numbers are in: a recent survey commissioned by AFSCME (the union representing city workers) showed that 87% of Philadelphia voters support increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour ("Crafting an Economic Agenda for Philadelphia's Next Mayor," 04/21/2015). This shows concretely what we have been arguing to city and state elected officials: there is overwhelming support for significantly higher wages. 1 in 3 people in Philly lives in poverty, and we are the poorest large city in the U.S. There is nationwide momentum for winning campaigns to increase the minimum wage. Similar major cities like Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, have already implemented or are exploring large wage hikes. New York Governor Cuomo is exploring legal options that allow him to use special powers to raise wages for fast-food workers in New York State.

In Philadelphia, like in many cities across the country, local efforts to raise the minimum wage are blocked by a statewide pre-emption. 15 Now Philadelphia has taken the position that these laws are immoral and unjust. Our city is in crisis and, in times of crisis, our elected officials have the duty to use their political authority to enact emergency legislation to ensure the health and safety of their constituents. Slavery and segregation were firmly encoded in the law before advocates organized to demand bold action. Historically, courts have responded to social movements. Recently, the gay rights movement has pushed courts to reverse dozens of decisions denying same-sex couples to marry.

15 Now Philadelphia is working with allies, including SEIU 32BJ, Fight for \$15, and POWER, to keep the minimum wage issue on the political agenda. On May 14, City Councilman Johnson introduced legislation into City Council to put a question on the November ballot calling for a \$15 an hour minimum wage. At the state level, Senator Daylin Leach introduced a bill that would abolish the tipped minimum wage, raise the statewide minimum wage to \$15 an hour, and link it to inflation. On the ground, we continue our campus and neighborhood campaigns to deepen grassroots support. We are calling on the major public employers of the city to pay a \$15 an hour minimum, and we are ready to take the fight to the streets, classrooms, and workplaces of Philadelphia. ✪

Washington Teachers Strike to Demand Fully Funded Education

Matt Maley,
Math Teacher, Seattle, WA

Teachers' unions are common villains in the tales of far-right talk show pundits, especially when striking. Painted as taking a day off work from the crucial task of educating our children, just to get a raise, this caricature doesn't hold much water.

Teachers and students in Washington state are staging rolling walkouts to protest the underfunding of public education. On May 19, I marched with thousands of Seattle educators and students. Actions across the state have bridged the political divide, from agrarian, "conservative" Eastern Washington to the "liberal" Puget Sound region. This strike is a harbinger of renewed strength and

militancy in the labor movement.

A Recent History

In the January 2012 McCleary decision, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled that the state Legislature has failed to fulfill its paramount duty to "make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders."

In 2014, the state Supreme Court went a step further and found the state Legislature in contempt of court for having not made adequate yearly progress toward funding the districts that are struggling most – especially those not benefiting from Washington's regressive, sales-tax-reliant tax structure. Also in 2014, voters approved a state ballot

initiative mandating a reduction in class size.

Yet the Legislature prioritizes a 11.2% "cost of living" raise for its own members and refuses to reverse the \$8.7 billion hand-out to Boeing given in 2013! It's little wonder why 24 school districts across the state have voted for and/or participated in one-day strike actions. In Seattle, teachers, in an astonishing 96 out of 97 buildings, voted to strike.

The Rebirth of Union Militancy

Political gridlock in the state Legislature and the failure of ballot initiatives and court decisions to make progress have forced the Washington Education Association (WEA) to take a more militant approach. Union locals have used rolling walkouts to focus

community and social media pressure on legislators. The coordinated statewide actions are a warning shot, and the union is threatening a full-scale strike in the '15-'16 school year if a budget is not passed that fully funds public schools. On the ground, Socialist Alternative is advocating for further parent- and community-supported mass strike action as the way to organize against neoliberal cuts to public education. We demands:

- ✪ Funding of all public schools as required by the McCleary decision.
- ✪ No tying teacher pay to test scores. Against the pseudoscience of value-added modeling.
- ✪ End the privatization of public schools through corporate charter school networks and the for-profit testing industry. ✪

“House of Cards,” Season 3 Review

Savage Portrayal of Politics

Below is an excerpt from a review “House of Cards” by **Christian Theodore** which we will publish on SocialistAlternative.org.

“House of Cards” returned for a third season in March 2015 and brought with it twice as much artistic quality, but only half the political criticism of the first two seasons.

Much of the intrigue which made the show wildly successful in its first two seasons is now gone – a cursory browse of fan reactions online corroborates this. In Season 3, we have a new pivot towards deeper character drama; a much smaller universe which revolves precariously around Frank and Claire, whose story arcs have all but eclipsed those of the all other interesting characters in the show.

The show’s inherent cynicism – and its wider resonance – in many ways reflects the dashed hopes of President Obama’s “hope-and-change” revolution.

As a piece of popular culture, it isn’t surprising that House of Cards resonated so deeply with its viewers. Beloved anti-heros like Walter White, Don Draper and Tony

Soprano, paved the way for our eager reception of Frank Underwood. His Machiavellian charm is directed squarely at us, and walking through the seediness of American politics by his side helps us develop an intimate relationship with him on screen. He’s a villain we can’t help but root for.

The show’s inherent cynicism – and its wider resonance – in many ways reflects the dashed hopes of President Obama’s “hope-and-change” revolution. But its meteoric success also follows from the broader context of economic turmoil, deep mistrust in the political system, and a groundswell of social protest since Occupy. In a very concrete way, “House of Cards” proves that the American populace was ready for an antidote to the sanctimony and naïve reverence of liberal democracy that “The West Wing” represented a decade ago.

“House of Cards” is about the raw, visceral ambition of two people and their reptilian-brained resolve to manifest their destiny at all costs. Frank and Claire are not here to resolve any of the serious political and social issues, which are directly in the orbit of their power. They use those issues opportunistically to leverage more political capital. Friends – to the extent that either has any – are mere pawns.



The world described in “House of Cards” is predictably patriarchal, homophobic and implicitly racist. Part of this is how Hollywood tells a story – for example, people

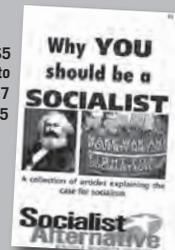
of color are fully expendable and have well-defined expiration dates; Frank must keep his non-heterosexual desires firmly in the closet – but partly this is just an accurate

description of how those in power operate.

The cynicism of “House of Cards” makes it easy to ingest in this period of deep disillusionment with the institutions of power and possibly even easier to mistake as political satire. It’s a show whose message is unpretentious and clear: bad men and women hold the reigns of power in the great free world. All of the sacred precepts of democracy and the social contract are subordinate to the self-interest and callous intentions of a minority of powerful people. This is all tremendously entertaining to watch. Just don’t call it a progressive show. ☹

Why You Should Be a Socialist
A Pamphlet by Socialist Alternative

\$5
Send checks to
PO Box 150457
Brooklyn, NY 11215



Read online at
SocialistAlternative.org

Sawant Campaign

continued from p. 3

rents and stagnating wages.

We hope the example of what Kshama’s been able to achieve here in Seattle – by taking on corporate politicians and winning, by basing herself 100% on the support of working people and refusing any corporate donations – will be replicated across the country. We want to use Kshama’s re-election to open up a debate among union activists across the country. Why are unions giving hundreds of millions of dollars to the Democratic Party, which is utterly subservient to the needs of Wall Street? Why aren’t the labor unions, civil rights organizations, environmentalists, and progressives uniting around running our own independent political representatives, rather than supporting this or that version of establishment politics?

What are the lessons from Kshama’s campaign in relation to the fight for \$15 in Seattle?

Too often, activists fall for the trap of thinking they have to tone down their agenda and fit in with “normal politics.” Rather than reducing

our appeal, left-wing candidates will be able to tap into greater reservoirs of support by boldly going up against the political and corporate establishment.

The fight for \$15 only underscores this point: there was far more enthusiasm and willingness to struggle in Seattle for a bold increase, for a \$15 minimum wage, than for the timid and extremely limited proposals coming from the Democrats locally and nationally. Now we see a number of local politicians supporting \$15, but they are reflecting the pressure of the movement we built. Either way, Walmart and McDonald’s will vigorously oppose any serious wage increase. So, the key is to put forward demands that will mobilize the maximum effort from our side to overcome their opposition, which is what \$15 has done.

To really change things, we need to inspire the majority of low-paid workers, students struggling under massive debt, and other activists that our campaigns are worth them investing their time and money in, because we are fighting for significant change that will really make a difference in their lives. ☹

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SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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After the Baltimore Rebellion Where Do We Go From Here?

Eljeer Hawkins

The announcement by Baltimore's top prosecutor, Marilyn Mosby, that six Baltimore law enforcement officers will be charged in the death of Freddie Gray, followed by the announcement of the Department of Justice investigation of the city's notorious police department, was greeted with celebration by the black community of Baltimore as a vindication of their claims of systemic abuse and racism. The decision by Mosby is a welcome and important short-term victory for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, and the black working class and youth of Baltimore. But this is a long way from securing a conviction.

A Revolt Against Austerity

"The U.S. is more segregated by race and income now than in 1960."- City University of New York Professor Ruth Wilson Gilmore

The death of Freddie Gray was the final straw for the working class and poor of Baltimore. Baltimore is home to the Ravens football team, Orioles baseball team, and Johns Hopkins, one of the most prestigious hospitals in the country. The downtown and Inner Harbor area of Baltimore has been transformed into a picturesque landscape for

all to marvel at. But the black working class and poor of Baltimore have been force-fed a horrific cocktail of neoliberal capitalism, police surveillance, and prison-state conditions. Conditions for the black population in Baltimore, the twentieth largest city in the U.S., are comparable to Southern Jim Crow conditions a century ago.

The statistics are shocking. Baltimore had the second-largest foreclosure rate, behind Florida, during the bursting of the housing bubble and the Great Recession in 2007-08; 40,000 housing units and 16,000 homes are vacant. This is coupled with a legacy of housing discrimination against black workers that dates back to the early 20th century. Fifty percent of Baltimore's homes are burnt out, dating back to the rebellion of 1968 following the assassination of Dr. King. Homelessness is a bitter reality for 30,000 people. The median income is \$24,000 a year. Low-wage jobs and 19% unemployment are the dominant features in this 63% black city.

For the next three years in Baltimore, water rates will be raised a total of 37 percent; thousands are threatened with having their water cut off if they can't pay these outrageous increases. To compound the dire situation, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan, diverted 68 million dollars from the Baltimore schools system to shore up the state wide pension system while state officials approved 30 million dollars for a new 60 bed youth jail.

These conditions are presided over by a democratic black Mayor, Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, black-led city council, black police commissioner and majority-black police department. The root of this crisis is the complete failure of the Baltimore political establishment to address the desperate social conditions in poor communities while carrying out the gentrification and "development" agenda of big business. The top 0.01% have been profiting hand over fist from this unspeakable misery. The seeds of the rebellion are embedded in this classic example of disaster capitalism.

What Strategies to Fight Racism and Poverty?

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Watts Rebellion in LA. The explosions of Watts and in many other urban areas in the mid-to-late '60s were the culmination of the failure of the civil rights movement to liberate the Northern ghettos after defeating Jim Crow in the South. President Johnson's "war on poverty" was a concession to the movement but it did not fundamentally change the underlying systemic problems faced by the generation of African Americans who migrated to the north in the '20s and '40s to escape rural poverty, white supremacy, violence, and Jim Crow.

Today, some would argue that the "riot" or rebellion is a much needed action to confront

this daily onslaught by big business. Clearly, the rebellion of the youth in Baltimore had an effect in winning the indictments. At the initial stage of the rebellion the ruling elite was on the defensive. However, the rebellion was quickly put down by the state sponsored curfew, violence, harassment, and illegal detention of the youth.

Then the corporate media and political establishment moved into action, demonizing the mainly black youth as "thugs" and "looters." This rebellion was a visceral reaction to the denial of justice, endemic racism and lack of answers to the cause of Freddie Gray's death. While understanding the anger, and the dire conditions that sparked the rebellion, are "riots" a way to defeat the endemic problems of police brutality, racism and poverty that dominate the inner cities like Baltimore?

While "riots" can have a shock effect, they fail to provide a way forward to address the underlying causes of racism and poverty and racism. Socialist Alternative advocates taking that raw energy and potential power of the black working class, poor, youth and channeling it in a sustaining mass movement. As Dr. King stated, "And one day, we must ask the question, "Why are there forty million poor people in America? And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising questions about the economic system, about broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that

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