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Issue #15 - July-August 2015

END THE RULE OF THE BILLION AIRE CLASS!



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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. ✦

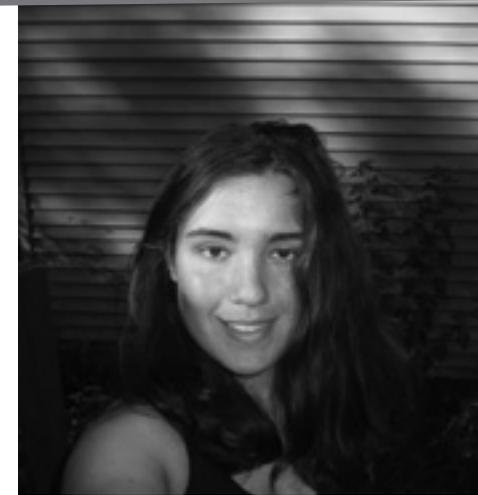
WHY I AM A SOCIALIST

Emily Malone Milwaukee, WI

My first real experience being active in politics was during the Scott Walker recall when I was a freshman in college. Disgusted by the anti-union legislation Walker got passed, I joined in this effort that was doomed to fail. My proudest moment during the whole campaign was when I got kicked out of a grocery store parking lot for circulating petitions.

This rebellious attitude later led me to reject the Democratic Party after I had time to reflect on its actions – both in the recall debacle and at the national level. I came to the conclusion that the social function of the Democrats is to crush popular movements like the 2011 protests. This led me to look into more radical alternatives.

Earlier this year, I joined Socialist Alternative in Madison. I'd heard about Kshama Sawant and the \$15 victory in Seattle well before I joined. In Socialist Alternative, I



have focused on my own political education and learned to look at society from a new perspective.

Looking at all the social problems we face today, whether that's racism or economic inequality or climate change or any number of other things, we cannot ignore the role the capitalist system plays in perpetuating them. That is the real reason I consider myself a socialist: because I understand how all injustices are interrelated and how fundamental systemic change is needed to overcome them. ✦

Big Business Funding Opposition to Sawant

Kailyn Nicholson

From the spreading of the 15 Now campaign across the country, to being featured in *The Nation* and *Democracy Now*, as well as endorsements from national figures like Chris Hedges and Jill Stein, it's clear that Kshama Sawant's brand of uncompromisingly pro-worker, independent leadership is inspiring to people across the country.

It is exactly that inspiring quality that makes her such a threat to the corporate establishment. They recognize that, if left unchecked, the movements that Kshama is helping to build in Seattle – to take back power and resources from the super-wealthy and their corporate politicians – will be eagerly embraced by ordinary people all over the country and represent a serious threat to their profit margins.

Proof that the establishment sees Kshama as a huge threat can be seen in the donation records of her opponents in the current city council race.

Donations from Big Developers and Bankers

Public disclosure reports reveal a who's-who of corporate CEOs, big developers, investment bankers, owners of union-busting hotels, and business lobbying groups – like the loudly anti-\$15 an hour Washington

Restaurant Association – giving thousands to opponents of Kshama. While accepting these donations, they attack Kshama for being more focused on "global socialist revolution" than issues relevant to voters.

Of peculiar note are donations from Plum Creek Timber Company. Anyone who lives in Seattle can tell you: There is no timber in District 3! There is no timber anywhere NEAR District 3! So why are timber companies jumping to give maximum donations to a candidate in that race?

Because these big businesses DO have an interest in keeping the minimum wage low, keeping political power in corporate hands, and in preventing the growth of grassroots environmental movements like those Kshama has helped build against oil trains and the Shell arctic drilling platform.

Donate \$20 Today to Push Back

The corporate elite are not stupid; they know a credible threat to their power then they see it. And that's why they are flooding Kshama's opponents with cash and creating PACs to run attack ads against her. Will they succeed? Can corporate money drown the struggles of ordinary people for a better world? That's up to us to decide. Donate to Kshama's campaign today at KshamaSawant.org/donate. ✦

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Re-elect Kshama Sawant

More than 800 people came together at Kshama Sawant's kickoff for her re-election campaign. The rally brought together a range of speakers including Abdi Mohamed, one of the organizers who led the successful fight for 15 in SeaTac; nurses fighting Swedish Medical Center for a fair contract; and SEIU leader David Rolf who praised Kshama's role in winning \$15 in Seattle.



Photo Credit: Clay Showalter

Kshama Sawant Column

My Vision for Seattle

Twitter: @cmkshama



At the June 6 rally, speakers highlighted the challenges faced by working people in Seattle. While construction cranes and luxury condos increasingly dominate the skyline, most of us face an affordable housing crisis. While our city and state are home to some of the world's wealthiest corporations, we face underfunded services and the most regressive tax system in the nation.

free from discrimination and poverty, where our city is a leader in mass transit and environmental sustainability. Where we have a powerful labor movement, a working waterfront, and good paying union jobs across all sectors of our workforce. Where young people, retirees, all people, are able to flourish and live in dignity. A city of equality between people of different colors, gender identities, immigrants and first nations. A city where never for a moment forgets that black lives matter.

The crisis of affordable housing and the devastating outcome of endless cuts is of course not just a Seattle problem but is devastating working class communities across the country. In New York, for example, the median rent is now \$2,840 while median income in many parts of the city is well below \$50,000 a year.

This is my vision – not just for Seattle but for cities and communities across the country. I think this vision is worth fighting for.

I explained at the rally that I have a different vision for Seattle. A Seattle based on social justice,

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

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

facebook.com /VoteSawant

@votesawant

Make Seattle Affordable for All!

Seattle's voice for working families on the city council, Kshama Sawant, is up for re-election. It is up to you to help us to defend the seat of an unapologetic socialist, an outstanding advocate for working people and the oppressed, a voice of the 99%.

need Kshama on the council to build relentless pressure to tax the rich to fund mass transit and education.

an hour minimum wage less than six months after she took office. Based on her movement building skills and ability to bring coalitions together, she led the effort to win an Indigenous People's Day, stopped the planned rent hikes of 400% by the local housing authorities and won millions in the budget debate for human services based on the people's budget coalition she launched.

We need Kshama on the council to represent the struggles that are developing in Seattle especially the fight for affordable housing, to implement rent control, to make the big developers pay. We

Since her election in 2013, Councilmember Kshama Sawant has used her position to help build mass opposition to the corporate-driven agenda in Seattle and beyond.

Kshama has been a champion of working people, delivering on her campaign promise to make Seattle the first major city to pass a \$15

Find out more, donate and volunteer: KshamaSawant.org

Voices from the June 6 Rally to Re-elect Kshama



"What is happening in Seattle is important not only for the city of Seattle but for the country because you are setting an example of what cities across this country must do, and that is wipe out the Democratic and Republican parties and replace them with socialists who are antagonistic to the forces of corporate power and will work in every way possible to drive corporate power back from our prisons, from our schools, from our healthcare service.

"Every single thing we do must be to send the message that we are going to destroy the structures of corporate power and take back our country."

- Author and commentator Chris Hedges



"Kshama's election is an inspiration to you but it's an inspiration to us as well, because Europeans see America as an indomitable force of capitalism... So when lefts and socialists get elected, and put forward... uncompromising socialist ideas, that's actually vital in Europe for us to see.

"Become a socialist... We need to build an alternative set of ideas to this system and socialism is the only set of ideas that are an alternative to capitalism."

- Ruth Coppinger, member of the Irish Parliament for Socialist Alternative's sister organization, the Socialist Party

"Polls now show that nearly 60% of people are saying that the corporate Wall Street sponsored political parties have abandoned the American people. It's time for a new force in politics."

"It's time for us to stand up for independent politics and the future we deserve, not only in Seattle but all across the nation. What happens in Seattle should not stay in Seattle. We must nationalize these victories, we must nationalize these struggles, demand living wages and union rights all across the country, health care, education, and housing as human rights, abolish student debt, make public higher education free, end police brutality and the racist prison state."

- Jill Stein, Presidential Candidate, Green Party

"Here are three reasons why we should re-elect Kshama Sawant:
1. She courageously stood up and supported the No New Jail campaign to stop the building of a new detention center in Seattle. And I gotta say... she was the only one!
2. She has been a passionate fighter for economic justice in this city.... In this city, low-wage workers... and renters are disproportionately people of color."
3. She understands this is not about her. This is about all of us. This is about us building a grassroots anti-racist, anti-capitalist people's movement to say 'NO' to the corporate agenda, to say 'NO' to the capitalists who want to make this city only a city for the rich, the powerful, and the well-connected.

"... We will fight together, until we change this city and transform this whole city and this whole country. Re-Elect Kshama Sawant!"

- Dustin Washington, an organizer with the Black Lives Matter movement



Sanders' Campaign Gains Momentum

How Do We Build a Decisive Challenge to Corporate Political Domination?

Bryan Koulouris

This article is an edited and adapted extract of a longer contribution to the debate about socialists should intervene in the Bernie Sanders campaign. For the full text visit SocialistAlternative.org.

The Bernie Sanders campaign for President is gaining more traction than anybody expected. This reflects the massive hatred of Wall Street, the frustration at big business domination of the political system and the openness to socialist ideas in U.S. society. Sanders rallies have constantly necessitated bigger venues than organizers planned. Thousands are being turned away at the doors from New Hampshire to Colorado.

Socialist Alternative, which stands for building a new mass working people's party, disagrees with Sanders' approach of running in the Democratic primary. However, we also see the tens of thousands of people flocking to his campaign, excited to fight against corporate America, many getting involved in politics for the first time.

The thousands of people getting involved in the Sanders campaign are often new to activism and angry at the massive inequality in society. They are disgusted with the potential prospect of having former Walmart executive Hillary Clinton running as the "lesser evil" against arch-reactionary Scott Walker or yet another Bush.

We want to engage with these people and their efforts in order to win them to building movements that can change society.

Avoid the Democratic Party Trap

While building support for Sanders' proposals for a political revolution, to fight for a federal \$15 minimum wage, single-payer health care and much more, we are very clear: the Democratic Party primaries are dominated by corporate cash. Sanders will almost certainly lose. He has already said that he will support the Democratic Party's nominee – most

likely Hillary Clinton – in 2016. As that moment approaches, the Sanders campaign will be thrown into crisis. Socialists must help the current Sanders supporters avoid the trap of the Democratic Party – the graveyard of social movements. Our energetic intervention within Sanders' audience with proposals to connect his campaign to real social movements will lay the basis for the strongest possible challenge to Clinton and the Republicans in 2016.

Jill Stein and the Green Party

Jill Stein is running for the Green Party nomination for President. Socialist Alternative supported Stein's previous campaign for President and her local campaigns in Massachusetts. Socialist Alternative welcomes her announcement and her clearly independent left campaign.

Socialist Alternative will support the strongest independent left campaign in the Presidential election in 2016. We want to build maximum pressure from below in the Sanders campaign to encourage him to *not* endorse Hillary Clinton and to run beyond the primaries and into the general election to challenge the corporate elites, or at least to support the strongest independent, left challenger. This will very likely be Jill Stein, and we want to get her on every ballot possible in the election.

This positive proposal for the boldest possible challenge to Clinton and Bush or Walker, alongside boldly building the socialist movement and connecting the campaign



Bernie Sanders speaks to 20,000 at a campaign stop in Wisconsin, May 30, 2015.

to protests and struggles, can gain an echo that can translate, at a later stage, into a big breakthrough for independent working-class politics.

Engaging in the Debate

Socialist Alternative has acknowledged many times our political differences with Sanders. We disagree with his support for the Israeli state. We also urge the Sanders campaign to take a stronger stand in opposition to racist attacks and police brutality. While these criticisms are important, they will not stop us from putting forward our plans and ideas for how to win the positive things Sanders stands for.

Within the Bernie Sander campaign – for example at "People for Bernie Sanders" meetings – we want to talk about how to win 15, a massive jobs program, guaranteed quality health care, and an end to budget cuts. This can open a discussion about how Democrats as well as Republicans carry out attacks on working people and the need to build movements from below in the streets, workplaces, campuses and communities against all the injustices of capitalism. We can pose this in a positive way by talking about how to build the broadest possible movement to challenge the Wall Street agenda. This is the most effective way to get an echo in the campaign for independent working-class and socialist politics. And this will reveal, in practice, the limitations of Sanders' strategy of working within the Democratic Party.

If Sanders does endorse Clinton in 2016, then we would want to organize the best activists in his campaign and in "People for Bernie" to protest against this move and split from the Democratic Party. Alongside a second election victory for Kshama Sawant in November of this year, this would be a crucial step in laying the basis for what is really needed: A mass working-class party that fights against capitalism and its political representatives. ☘

Why We Need a "Political Revolution"

"When I talk about a political revolution, what everybody here has got to understand is that the billionaire class and their representatives in Washington are so powerful that the best president in the world cannot defeat them alone. We need a mass movement of millions of people."

- Bernie Sanders, Minneapolis, May 30, 2015

- ❶ We have record levels of inequality, debt and poverty, while the 1% makes record profits. Wall Street got bailed out, but where is the relief for working people?
- ❷ Public services are being eroded so big corporations don't have to pay taxes. In the richest country in the world, we should have fully funded education, health-care, pensions, jobs, and poverty programs.
- ❸ Big Oil is running roughshod over concerns about climate change. What right does Big Oil have to drill, mine, and frack every last bit of fossil fuel no matter what the cost to communities and future generations?
- ❹ The criminal justice system is broken. The U.S. makes up five percent of the world's population but has 25 percent of the world's prison population. Militarized police forces are out of control. Every 28 hours a black person is shot.
- ❺ The vast majority of the media is owned by six corporations.
- ❻ Big business has stacked the two-party system against us. The Republicans are more blatant, but the Democrats are also awash in corporate cash. While they disagree on some things, they ultimately come together to pass pro-corporate, anti-worker legislation like TPP fast track. ☘

By Patrick Ayers

#MillionStudentMarch

Bernie Sanders calls for free college tuition: What's it going to take to win?

Elan Axelbank, Socialist Alternative member and student leader in the 15 Now Campaign at Northeastern University, explores the next steps towards a mass student movement to scrap tuition, get rid of student debt and fight for \$15/hour minimum wage at all universities

"If a million young people march on Washington, [and] they say...you better vote to deal with student debt, ou better vote to make public universities and colleges tuition free, that's when it will happen."

- Bernie Sanders

<http://tinyurl.com/MillionStudentsMarch>

The Fight for Equality is Not Over!

Ellie Bloom

From the transgender women and gay men who fought back against racist police during the Compton Cafeteria Riots in 1966, to the militant ACT-UP organizers who demanded the FDA approve life-saving AIDS medication in the early 1980s, the material gains of LGBTQ people have consistently been won in the streets long before they are won in the courts. Marriage equality is a huge victory for all LGBTQ people, but it is only one step on the road to true equality, as the developing transgender liberation movement shows.



On June 26, 4,000 people took to the street for Trans* Pride Seattle.

Grim Realities

There can be no doubt that Caitlyn Jenner's decision to come out as a transgender woman on television has captured the attention of the American public, launching the transgender community into the national spotlight while instilling some much-needed humanity into a national conversation that has, up to now, focused disproportionately on misinformation and dehumanizing stereotypes. While Caitlyn Jenner's wealth does not make her personal narrative or identity any less important, the lived experience of thousands of transgender and queer individuals remains dramatically at odds with that of Ms. Jenner, a wealthy celebrity with a reality television show and an Olympic gold medal.

In fact, for transgender and queer people, the fight to be seen as equal under the law is just beginning. Racism and bigotry continue to rot our judicial system from the top down. For example, across the country transgender women are still being housed into male prisons, regardless of government ID. By housing trans women with cisgender (non-trans) males and/or denying hormone treatment and gender-confirming surgery to prisoners, the state ignores the very transgender identity they claim to recognize – and, in doing so, greatly increases the likelihood of the trans inmates being subjected to rape, violence, and needlessly cruel psychological suffering. This kind of contradiction sends a clear message to the most oppressed members of the LGBTQ and queer communities: in the eyes of the judicial system,

transgender lives – especially black transgender lives – do not matter at all.

For transgender adults and children, the fight to be treated with dignity is a life-or-death struggle. The Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) still allows for legal discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in 19 states, with several more states pending. Under RFRA, anyone who appears homosexual or gender-nonconforming can be denied housing, proper restroom access, and medical care, among many other basic services.

LGBTQ people comprise approximately 40% of homeless youth, and transgender people are four times more likely to live in poverty than the general population: “For those trans people who do find work, 44%, are underemployed, and 17% maintain a household income under \$10,000 a year (compared to 4% of the general population in that age bracket)” (*RapidNewsNetwork.com*, 06/28/2015).

Next Steps

At a time when the LGBTQ movement is making sweeping gains on the marriage equality front, we must not forget that transgender people are still fighting for acceptance. The victories on marriage equality can act as a springboard to launch a movement that takes up the issues that affect all LGBTQIA people but tend to disproportionately impact the transgender community: discrimination in housing and employment, a \$15 minimum wage, and #BlackLivesMatter.

Many working-class trans and queer people have rightly begun to doubt politicians who claim to support LGBTQ people yet continually fail to take real action. The Democratic Party, while not leading on the issues, at least pays lip service to LGBTQ rights. Meanwhile, not a single candidate running for the 2016 Republican primaries supports marriage equality, and the vitriolic response from the religious right on the Supreme Court ruling is a vivid reminder of the very real consequences of the Republicans in power.

However, what the women's movement gained, and then lost, in terms of access to abortion demonstrates that the Democrats are not effective at advancing – let alone defending – victories won by social movements. And we should not forget that, just a few days before the marriage equality ruling, President Obama silenced and mocked Jennicet Gutiérrez, an undocumented transgender woman of color, when she interrupted his speech honoring LGBTQ history at the White House.

A mass movement that is able to mobilize broad sections of the LGBTQ working-class holds the best potential to build on the momentum coming out of the Supreme Court decision. However, in order to achieve larger and lasting victories for queer and trans people, we must keep our movement independent and, ultimately, direct our struggle against the very system that exploits all working people and uses gender and sexual norms to keep us divided. ✪

Supreme Court Decision

Historic Victory for LGBTQ People



Jess Spear

The Supreme Court's decision that same-sex couples have the right to be married in all 50 states is a historic victory in the struggle for LGBTQ equality in the United States. It is the result of a determined, well-organized mass campaign, which was fought state by state and in the early years faced many reverses.

The past decade has seen a massive and rapid shift in social attitudes in the U.S. toward LGBTQ people, which is also mirrored in a number of other countries. It was only 11 years ago that the Supreme Court overturned state laws banning gay sex, and only ten years ago that Massachusetts became the first state to adopt marriage equality. Polls now show that a majority of Americans, especially young people, support marriage equality.

Marriage equality, upheld by the highest court in the country, is more than a symbolic recognition of the love and commitment shared by LGBTQ couples. It means that a whole number of legal benefits enjoyed by married straight couples will now be extended to married LGBTQ couples. From hospital visitation rights to survivor benefits, the long list of benefits granted to married couples are a reminder of the very real consequences when

federal and state governments don't legally recognize your relationship. We believe *all* couples, married or not, should have these benefits.

The Supreme Court decision comes in the wake of the victory in Ireland, the first country in the world to bring in marriage equality by popular vote. This stunning change took place in a country where, for decades, the Roman Catholic Church had an effective veto on social policy. Our Irish sister organization, the Socialist Party, has followed up by introducing the Employment Equality (Amendment) Bill to remove the legal protections granted to schools and hospitals run by religious organizations to discriminate against employees who are LGBTQ, atheists, single parents, and others from minority faiths on the basis of the “ethos” of the organization.

Both in Ireland and the U.S. the legalization of marriage equality is part of a broader shift to the left among big sections of the population. However, we should not be under any illusions that the right will not continue to push other parts of its reactionary agenda or that the fight for queer equality is completed. The victory of the movement for marriage equality should be used as a platform to mobilize for further change. ✪

HOW THE WAR M

40 YEARS SINCE THE END OF THE VIETNAM WAR



George Martin Fell Brown

Forty years ago, on April 30, 1975, at 7:53 in the morning, the Marine helicopter *Swift 2-2* departed from the United States embassy in Saigon, capital of South Vietnam. The helicopter carried the last batch of soldiers who had been waging a brutal, protracted war against the revolutionary peasant uprising of Hồ Chí Minh's Việt Cộng guerrillas. Two and a half hours after the departure of *Swift 2-2*, the U.S. puppet regime in South Vietnam formally surrendered to Hồ. By the afternoon, Hồ announced that the South Vietnamese government was "completely dissolved at all levels." The Vietnam war was over.

Vietnam was the first time in history that the United States lost a war. A country, armed to the teeth with the latest in modern weaponry, which had marched to victory in two world wars, found itself stopped in its tracks against a poor, colonized peasant nation struggling for freedom. The U.S. military was faced with a different kind of enemy: the popular resistance of the Vietnamese workers and peasants, a rising tide of social struggles at home, and increasing dissatisfaction within its own army. As the socialist historian Howard Zinn put it, "it was organized modern technology versus organized human beings, and the human beings won."

The story of how the humans won is highly relevant today as we face a ruling elite that has carried out a policy of constant foreign wars for 14 years while attacking democratic rights at home and concentrating unimaginable wealth in its hands. If ordinary people stood up and stopped the war machine 40 years ago, we can build a mass movement to end the rule of the billionaires in our time.

A History of Resistance

For over a century, the history of Vietnam was one of colonial conquest and anti-colonial resistance. Between 1859 and 1885, the French government instigated a series of military conquests in Southeast Asia, eventually establishing the colony of French Indochina in what is now Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. France ruthlessly exploited its colony through an oppressive plantation system. By the Second World War, the rising imperial power of Japan briefly drove out the French and established an even more ruthless colonial rule. It was during this time that Hồ Chí Minh, founder

of the Communist Party of Indochina, formed the Việt Minh, an alliance with nationalist forces against Japanese rule.

Hồ became a socialist while living in France in 1921. Inspired by the Russian Revolution, he joined the communist movement. But by the time Hồ came to prominence in the Vietnamese anti-colonial movement, the Russian Revolution had degenerated and the Soviet Union was under bureaucratic dictatorship of Joseph Stalin. Capitalism remained abolished and real social gains were achieved. However the political power was taken away from working class people and concentrated in the hands of a privileged, parasite caste at the top of society.

Hồ adopted Stalin's bureaucratic, brutal and dictatorial methods, and embraced his political turn away from working class internationalism. He followed the Stalinist advice to subordinate workers' struggles to a nationalist alliance with "progressive" capitalists.

But there was also a genuine revolutionary socialist movement developing in Vietnam, led by Tạ Thu Thâu, which supported Leon Trotsky's fight against Stalinism and called for the working class to lead the struggle against colonialism. The Vietnamese Trotskyists established a powerful base among the workers of Saigon. When the Japanese were driven out of Indochina in 1945, the Trotskyists played a prominent role in a general strike in Saigon against the return of French rule. Hồ's Stalinists at this point looked to British, French, and American imperialism as a "progressive" ally against Japan. After the general strike, the Việt Minh, the fighters for independence under Hồ's leadership, had the Trotskyists slaughtered and facilitated the return of French rule.

While Hồ Chí Minh saw French imperialism as an ally facilitating independence, French imperialism didn't see things that way. As France re-established its colonial rule, the Việt Minh was pushed to the left by the force of events and waged a guerrilla struggle against French rule. This culminated in the battle of Điện Biên Phủ in 1954, which forced out the French and established Hồ's rule in North Vietnam. Hồ's regime overthrew capitalism and launched a massive land reform program that vastly improved the standard of living for the majority of the population. But politically, North Vietnam was a bureaucratic dictatorship made in the Soviet Union's image. Nevertheless, given the nightmare of capitalist

stagnation and poverty in the colonial and neo-colonial world, it is understandable that the Vietnamese Revolution was enormously attractive to millions of people around the world.

In South Vietnam, an entirely different regime was established. The US emerged from the Second World War as the world's biggest superpower, with the Soviet Union as its biggest rival. Despite the willingness of the Stalinists to cut deals with the US and other imperialist powers, the US ruling elite feared the spread of further revolutionary upheavals. In particular, they believed that a Việt Minh victory would lead to a "domino effect" with more countries leaving the sphere of capitalism across Southeast Asia. Therefore the U.S. propped up the corrupt and repressive South Vietnamese puppet dictator Ngô Đình Diệm. This regime had nothing to do with democracy, independence or self-determination.

In response, the Việt Cộng guerrilla movement was formed, backed by North Vietnam and, in 1959, a new guerrilla war was launched against the South Vietnamese regime.

American War Drive

Ostensibly, the Vietnam War was not a war at all, but a "police action." The process began under Eisenhower, who secretly sent military advisers to South Vietnam. Under Kennedy, the number of secret advisers rose to sixteen thousand. But it was Kennedy's successor Johnson who, under the guise of the manufactured "Gulf of Tonkin incident" in 1964, stepped up the intervention into a full-scale war.

The scale of the war was massive. A total of 2.7 million American soldiers served in the war, representing 9.7% of their generation. Vietnam and its neighbors Laos and Cambodia were hit by 7 million tons of American bombs, more than twice the amount of bombs dropped on Europe and Asia in the Second World War. As part of Operation Ranch Hand, almost 20 million gallons of chemical herbicides were sprayed as well, including the notorious Agent Orange. This was part of a policy of "forced draft urbanization," destroying the peasants' crops to starve guerrillas out of the countryside. In addition 338 thousand tons of napalm bombs were dropped in the region, all to back and defend a hated dictatorial regime.

As the U.S. military effort became bogged down because of the mass opposition of the Vietnamese people, the brutality of the occupation increased. In one infamous incident, American troops entered the hamlet of My Lai on March 16, 1968, rounded up the inhabitants, children included. They were then ordered into a ditch, 500 in all, and methodically shot to death. The My Lai massacre was only the most well-known incident of this sort. As Colonel David H. Hackworth put it, "There were hundreds of My Lais. You got your card punched by the numbers of bodies you counted."

On January 31, 1968, the Việt Cộng launched the Tet Offensive, a military assault on over 100 cities in South Vietnam designed

to provoke a national uprising. Although the U.S. was able to militarily defeat the Tet Offensive, the war began to look increasingly like a quagmire. That year, Richard Nixon was elected on the slogan of "peace with honor." Despite promising to wind down the war, he instead expanded it. The bombing campaign was expanded from Vietnam to the country's neutral neighbors of Laos and Cambodia. But this simply took the U.S. deeper into the quagmire. By the end of the war, 58,220 American soldiers had been killed and over 150,000 wounded.



The War at Home

Ultimately, the United States was defeated because it was fighting a popular resistance. But it wasn't just the resistance of the Vietnamese peasants, but also the massive anti-war movement in the U.S. itself. The movement began slowly in the early 1960s. Serious anti-war organizing first took place on university campuses, with groups like the Students for a Democratic Society holding anti-war teach-ins across the country and organizing demonstrations. Soon the movement would balloon into the biggest anti-war movement in U.S. history.

Establishment accounts of the anti-Vietnam war movement portray it as dominated by privileged students with the working class making up the "silent majority" that backed Nixon. However, this is a gross distortion of how consciousness actually developed. Due to the nature of the draft, the vast majority of soldiers were drawn from the ranks of the working class and oppressed. And they were the ones who witnessed the horrors of the war first hand. It's true that conservative union leaders supported the war, but this position faced internal dissent. By the end of the war opposition to the war was higher in the working class than the middle class and particularly strong among poor workers and African Americans.

The most significant working class resistance occurred within the army itself. A number of radical groups actively pursued a policy of entering the army to carry out anti-war activity among the soldiers. Other left-wing activists on the civilian side set up a network of coffeehouses, storefronts, and bookstores

MACHINE WAS STOPPED



outside military bases, which became centers for dissent within the military. Anti-war GI papers flourished, with names like *Fatigue Press*, *Harass the Brass*, and *The Star-Spangled Bummer*. These organizing efforts helped bring the army into a state of disarray. In 1971, Marine Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr. wrote:

“By every conceivable indicator, our army that remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and non-commissioned officers...Sedition, coupled with disaffection from within the ranks, and externally fomented with an audacity and intensity previously inconceivable, infest the Armed Services.”

This disintegration of the armed forces proved to be the final nail in the coffin and rendered the war unwinnable for the U.S.

Aftermath

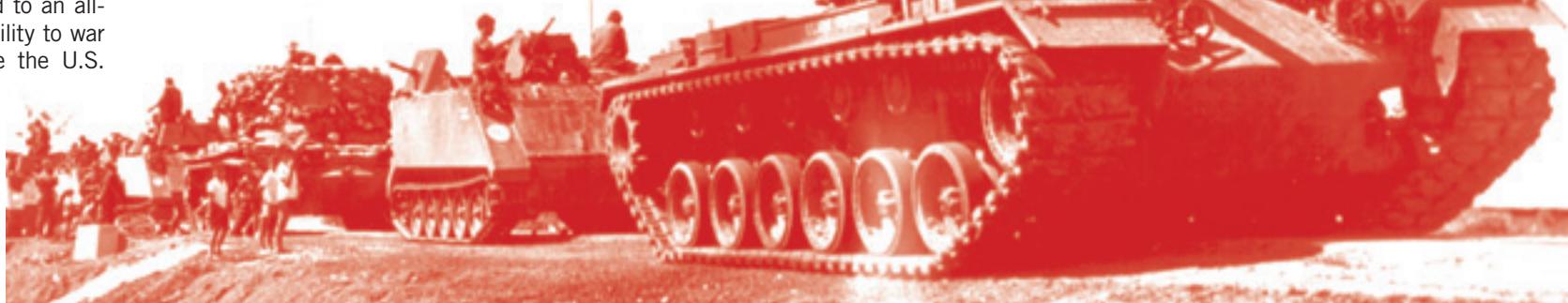
It was the power of collective struggle, in the U.S. and Vietnam, that led to the defeat of U.S. imperialism.

This had immediate consequences for the future of U.S. foreign policy. The draft was abolished and the military switched to an all-volunteer army. And an overall hostility to war led to “Vietnam Syndrome” where the U.S. government became unwilling to engage in direct warfare for fear of provoking immediate massive opposition.

With the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, capitalism proclaimed itself triumphant.

More slowly, Vietnam also headed towards the restoration of capitalism. Globally the workers movement went into retreat. George Bush used the 9/11 attack as the pretext to launch the “War on Terror” and the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. This temporarily and partially helped to overcome the Vietnam Syndrome but the occupation of Iraq has led to a full scale disaster for U.S. policy, now spawning the new conflict with ISIS. Bush faced a sizable anti-war movement but, with fewer “boots on the ground”, Obama has pursued the same aims with less opposition.

There is increasing resistance to the war on working people and people of color here at home. This will inevitably lead to a greater understanding of the need to oppose U.S. intervention abroad which serves the interests of the corporate elite. Just as in the 1960s, what is needed is the international solidarity of working people fighting to end the domination of the planet by capitalism. The heroic resistance of the Vietnamese people and the mass movement against the war inside the U.S. remain a shining inspiration for this generation. ✪



DEEP CRISIS WITHIN U.S. SOCIETY

Tom Crean

In 1975, as Saigon fell to the National Liberation Front (NLF), the U.S. was in the middle of the most profound political, social and economic crisis it had faced since World War II. There were a number of elements comparable to what we have seen in recent years.

Beginning in 1973, the U.S. experienced a sharp economic downturn which marked the end of the huge postwar economic expansion. By May 1975, official unemployment had reached 9%. The ruling elite were unsure of how to respond to this crisis.

All the institutions of American capitalism increasingly came into question. This process culminated in the constitutional crisis caused by the Watergate break-in. In August 1974, Richard Nixon, facing the threat of Congressional impeachment, was forced to resign because of Watergate.

But the most important feature of the situation was the development of a whole series of mass struggles that pointed in the direction of fundamental change. Besides the mass movement against the war, society had been rocked by a powerful movement for civil rights and black liberation which also helped spur movements for women's liberation and gay liberation.

There was an enormous radicalization of young people who were inspired by

revolutionary movements against colonialism and capitalism around the world. Hundreds of thousands considered themselves socialists. In 1968, there was a month-long general strike by workers in France, followed by Italy's “hot autumn” in 1969 and the Portuguese Revolution of 1974.

The U.S. working class had not reached such far reaching conclusions but there was upheaval in workplaces here as well. Between the mid-60s and mid-70s there was a huge wave of class struggle. In 1974 alone, nearly 1.8 million workers were out on strike and nearly 32 million workdays lost due to strikes! Many of these were “wildcat” strikes taken without union sanction because of the frustration of workers with their leadership for not fighting back against attacks on living standards and working conditions.

What was missing was a political force with sufficient authority to galvanize the massive discontent in the working class and throughout American society. Even an initially small multiracial workers party with a clear socialist program could have rapidly reached and led millions in this period. The key lesson for today, as we witness a new wave of social struggle, is precisely the urgency of laying the basis for an independent political party to challenge the rule of the billionaires and within that the need to build a cohesive socialist force. ✪

Obamacare Upheld by the Supreme Court

Sarah White,
Nurse Practitioner

Millions of people breathed a sigh of relief as the Supreme Court ruled on a challenge to the plans' federal subsidies, found in favor of Obamacare. Despite severe shortcomings, Obamacare brings desperately needed health insurance to millions of people who have previously gone without. From January to September 2014 alone, the number of uninsured people dropped by 11.4 million.

This step forward was a result of struggles over decades, as working people, community organizations, and unions fought for high quality, affordable health care.

Since its passage, Obamacare has come under repeated attack by the right wing. This most recent case before the Supreme Court threatened the health insurance of people in states that refused to set up insurance exchanges.

Now that Obamacare is upheld, however, 35 million people in the U.S. remain uninsured, and people who purchased plans on the exchanges can still face bills of up to 40% of their income, with some deductibles as high as \$5,000. The number of people underinsured has actually risen to 23%, up from 12% in 2003. It's clear: Health insurance doesn't equal access to health care. Further, high-quality plans, bargained for by many unions, will also face steep taxes, causing businesses to attempt to shift that tax bill onto the backs of workers.

Meanwhile, the real bloated cost problems lie in the insurance companies' profits and overheads. Private insurance companies operate with a 23% overhead, compared to Medicare's 2%.

While Obamacare is a start, we need to implement improved Medicare for All, providing free, high-quality health care to all. Socialist Alternative wants to tax the super-rich to fund this plan. We support Medicare for All as a first step towards fully socialized medicine. Prior to the passage of Obamacare, there was a movement in this direction. It was built up through struggles over decades, as working people, community organizations, and unions fought for high-quality, affordable health care. The more progressive aspects of Obamacare were a reflection of this movement.

Two Wings of Profit-Driven Interests at Odds

During his 2008 campaign for president, which immediately preceded



the negotiation for Obamacare, Obama received a record \$20 million in campaign donations from the health care industry. Insurance companies bought their influence in the process, thereby protecting their profits. The result? Obamacare forces people into the arms of insurance companies, while using taxpayer money to subsidize the coverage. The Democrats defend the profits of the insurance companies and hope to benefit politically from the support of those who gained health coverage.

Even with insurance companies' profits strengthened, the right wing isn't satisfied. But corporations are divided: On the one hand, insurance companies have made huge profits from Obamacare, while employers who have to pay a small share of the cost of coverage rebel against the tiniest cut to their profits. The Republican Party's opposition to Obamacare is driven by the opposition of these employers. Further, some corporate politicians fear that working people in the U.S. will see Obamacare as a starting point to demand what people around the globe fought for and, in a number of countries, won: universal, high-quality health care for all.

What Was at Stake in *King v. Burwell*?

King v. Burwell, brought by lawyers from the Koch-funded American Enterprise Institute, threatened to drastically undermine Obamacare. The suit challenged the federal government's provision of insurance subsidies in states that didn't set up health insurance exchanges. If the justices had ruled

against the Obama administration, the federal subsidies that make health insurance affordable would be withdrawn, and 6.4 million people would be priced out of their health care coverage – primarily white, lower-middle-class workers in Southern states.

But the problems wouldn't have stopped there. These insurance schemes rely on a pool of healthy people to pay for the care of the sickest. With a mass exodus of insured people out of the pool when people without federal subsidies can't pay their premiums, insurance companies would likely raise rates on those left, which will only exacerbate the problem, leading to what's known as the "Obamacare death spiral."

Truthfully, many Republican politicians are probably also breathing a sigh of relief because the drastic consequences of upholding the suit could have become a political liability for them in 2016.

Profits Get Better Care Than Patients

Even with the favorable court decision today, one thing is clear: we need a better system. Unions that organize health care workers should lead the way, mobilizing to defend working families from attacks like *King v. Burwell* and fighting for a universal health care system for all. Like all serious gains for working people, this will require mass mobilizations and facing down the entrenched opposition of key sections of the ruling elite.

An alternative to corporate politicians in the pockets of big business

Vermont

Democratic Party Governor Dumps Single-Payer Plan

The recent defeat of a single-payer health plan in Vermont that seemed on course to implementation has been presented by the media as indicating basic problems with the idea of universal health care. This is not the case. The idea of government-run universal health care is as popular as ever. Instead, recent events in Vermont demonstrate once again that the Democratic Party cannot be relied upon to stand up to corporate interests and deliver on this issue.

The single-payer plan had previously been passed into law in Vermont. But in December 2014, Democratic Party Governor Shumlin, in conjunction with other Democratic legislators, without referring to any official studies, unexpectedly declared that the finances were not there to fund it. Shumlin has since attacked social programs and public sector workers. Shumlin refused to consider an alternative plan backed by 100 economists that targeted the wealthy and capital gains to fund the plan. This demonstrates once again the importance of building a powerful grassroots campaign independent of the Democratic Party to achieve genuine universal health care for all. ✪

is also needed. Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign, and his call for a single-payer health care system, are gaining momentum. The tremendous echo his campaign is receiving is a sign of support for an improved health care system, and the energy for his candidacy can be used to put improved Medicare for All back on the agenda! Sanders refused to run as an independent and, despite the huge impact his campaign is having, faces almost certain defeat in the Democratic Party primaries. Worse, he vows to throw his support to Hillary Clinton in the general election if she is the party's nominee. Working people, activists, and unions should refuse that: The demand for health care for all, in itself, should be a reason not to hand over support to Hillary Clinton's campaign. Sanders and the movement behind him should push beyond the limitations of the Democratic Party and campaign independently all the way to the general election, with a fighting, working-class platform that includes improved Medicare for All!

- ✪ Defeat all attacks on Obamacare by the right wing! Extend Medicaid expansion to all 50 states.
- ✪ Tax the super-rich to fund improved Medicare for All.
- ✪ Take the pharmaceutical and insurance companies under democratic public ownership to reduce costs, improve quality, and put the needs of working families over the greed and profits of a few. ✪

Is China Heading for a New Tiananmen?

The 26th anniversary of the Beijing massacre on June 4, 1989, is also a warning of revolutionary shocks ahead.

Vincent Kolo, chinaworker.info

The anniversary of June 4, the culmination of the “Beijing Spring” and a day that will always be remembered for one of the most barbaric massacres ever perpetrated against peaceful protesters, is a cause for much official unease, and this year more than ever. The Chinese dictatorship (CCP) is grappling with unprecedented problems with a debt-laden economy, burst real estate bubble, and growing unease among workers and poor farmers.

The mass Democracy Movement of 1989, which spanned seven weeks and witnessed millions of students and later also workers moving into political struggle, with demonstrations spreading to 400 cities, pushed the Chinese dictatorship to the brink of collapse.

Could it Happen Again?

Over the past 26 years the dictatorship has refined its repressive methods and used a combination of “carrot and stick” to defuse protests when they break out. When a large-scale protest erupts, the authorities are quick to shut down the internet in that area, enforce strict media controls, and effectively cut off the “infected area” from the rest of China. The regime’s “stability maintenance” (*weiwen*) methods – supported by a budget that dwarfs even military spending – have succeeded in keeping protests local, short-lived, and in most cases without a leadership or lasting organisational forms. But as the ‘carrot’ of rapid economic growth withers away this poses the question how long before the regime faces mass movements it can no longer quickly defuse or break-up?

The past year has seen a wave of mass protests ripple through China’s “periphery” including the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement, the biggest ever anti-government protests in Macau, and the political earthquake of the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan. These movements are a portent of what awaits in China, where social and political grievances are potentially even more explosive.

Signs of Crisis

There are at least three major signs of a deepening crisis in China that could ultimately spell the end of the one-party dictatorship. Top of the list is the worst economic performance for three decades, which has led many global commentators to point to a Chinese “hard landing” as the main threat to



Protests in Linshui erupted into violence in May, 2015.

the global economy. The downturn is already being felt from mining regions in Australia and Chile, to the coal and iron ore producing regions of China itself, which are experiencing a severe recession. This is matched by a downturn in manufacturing industry, where employment has fallen for 19 consecutive months.

The government’s professed 7 percent growth rate is now widely seen as fictional, with the real growth rate falling to around half this level. The government is attempting to shore up economic growth with a series of interest rate cuts and monetary loosening measures, but to date this has mostly fueled a stock market boom and capital flight to other countries.

The second sign of crisis is the ongoing power struggle at the top – within the closed ranks of the CCP hierarchy. This has in particular taken the form of an extended “anti-corruption” campaign by President Xi Jinping which has targeted a number of high profile competitors in the party apparatus. The economic crisis and increasing perception that Beijing has lost its former “golden touch” for policy-making can only sharpen the divisions within the regime. As Gideon Rachman noted in the Financial Times (9 February 2015), “It may be that Mr Xi is so perfectly in control of the political system that he can afford to take on powerful interest groups. But well-connected people in Beijing now speculate about the possibility of an attempt to remove the president. Some note that previous bouts of popular unrest, for example in 1989, coincided with divisions at the top of the Communist Party.”

Thirdly, and heavily influenced by the first two factors, is the rising spiral of mass unrest. The movement in Linshui was extremely significant as this occurred in a poor region dependent on farming and mining. It is a warning that many more such protests

could break out if the economy slips further into recession. The protesters – numbering 100,000 by some accounts – chanted “Bring back our railway” following the announcement that a planned high-speed railway line would follow a more expensive route through the nearby town of Guangan, but missing Linshui. Guangan already has a railway and an airport and local people in Linshui see the loss of the railway as a body blow for the local economy.

Repression

In Linshui fierce clashes were triggered by police brutality, according to eyewitness accounts, evoking a ‘miniature Tiananmen’. There are unconfirmed reports of four people killed, including a teenaged girl. Pictures on social media show many bloodied protesters, men and women, and eyewitnesses say riot police drafted into the town brought armored cars and used tear gas. This also shows that heavy-handed policing is not exclusive to restive non-Han provinces such as Xinjiang and Tibet, many parts of which are now under de facto military rule. Workers’ strikes, which rose three-fold in the first quarter of 2015 over the same period a year ago, have also met with increasing repression. At the same time the government is intensifying its crackdown on labor NGOs that in many cases have helped workers to organize industrial action.

But while the “stick” of repression can help the government to stamp out protests in the short-term, this is at the price of a massive build-up of anger and resentment. Hundreds and thousands of victims of the current repression – injured protesters, sacked workers’ representatives, and arrested feminists – are being pushed into an increasing search for alternatives to the current system. Just as Beijing’s “stimulus” policies have created an economic time bomb in the form of crippling

Turning Point in Greece

Read news from the Committee for a Workers International

SocialistWorld.net



As we go to press, Greece and Europe are facing a turning point. The government led by the left party, SYRIZA called a referendum on the latest package of austerity measures from the Troika (European Central Bank, European Union and IMF) to be attached to any further “assistance.” After a week of mass mobilizations where the working class began to assert itself, the Greek people decisively rejected the Troika’s demands.

This was also a mass rejection of the campaign of fear waged by the local corporate media, echoing the EU authorities, who said that voting “No” means leaving the Euro and even more economic uncertainty. Indeed a “Grexit” is a real possibility. But Greece’s economy has already collapsed due to endless austerity. SocialistAlternative’s sister organization, Xekinima, campaigned aggressively for a “No” vote. They also call on the government to refuse to pay the debt and implement a programme of socialist policies which would win enormous support from the long-suffering Greek working class and middle classes. This would need to be linked to a direct appeal for support from the working class of Europe.

The “No” vote opens up a new chapter in the struggle against endless austerity internationally. For on the ground coverage and analysis from a working class standpoint of what comes next go to SocialistWorld.net, the website of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI). ☛

levels of debt, its repressive measures are creating a political time bomb. When this detonates, which is only a question of time, then China could witness a wave of mass struggle that puts even the events of 1989 into the shade. ☛

\$15 Moves to Center Stage of U.S. Politics



Tony Wilsdon

The demand for a \$15 minimum wage continues to surge forward as a concrete answer to the one of the central issues driving U.S. politics: income inequality.

Not only has Los Angeles joined Seattle and San Francisco in passing an ordinance for \$15, but also politicians in other cities like St. Louis, New York City, and Philadelphia are starting to feel the ground moving under their feet.

Already, polls show 63% of the public supporting a \$15 minimum wage. With Bernie Sanders embracing \$15, it can surge even more in coming months. Leading Democrats have started to realize that the minimum

wage issue could be central to keeping control of the White House and regaining control of the Senate.

Bernie Sanders' bold campaign is further exposing divisions within the Democratic Party. Facing a major challenge to its left, the Clinton campaign is attempting to play "catch up" with sharper rhetoric about income inequality, while at the same time reassuring its Wall Street backers that Clinton can be relied upon to defend their interests. She recently called into the Fight for \$15 conference, stating she wanted to be the fast-food workers' "champion" without committing to any figure for a minimum wage.

With the April 15 nationwide day of action by fast-food workers the largest and most

dynamic yet, pressure continues to build. A group of 18 senators, led by Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, has demanded that Obama write an executive order lifting pay to \$15 an hour for federal workers. Considering that Obama was talking about \$10.10 only 18 months ago, this demonstrates the effect our movement is having.

There are enormous opportunities to push for a \$15 minimum wage in the coming months, particularly at the local and state levels. On the one hand, we need to continue organizing and protesting in the streets. 15 Now, launched by Socialist Alternative in Seattle, is playing a key role in a number of cities alongside a number of unions which are putting in real resources. On the other hand,

we need political candidates who can raise the issue in the public arena. While Sanders is helping push forward the \$15 demand, we need to be clear that the corporate leadership of the Democratic Party is mainly interested in using the minimum wage issue to get back into power. It will take running candidates independent of the Democratic Party, like Kshama Sawant, Seattle's socialist councilmember, who has combined movement-building with implacable opposition to the corporate agenda in order to achieve the kind of gains we need. This is why we have urged Sanders to keep his campaign and its call for a federal \$15 minimum wage going irrespective of who the Democratic Party nominates as its candidate. ✪

\$15 Wins in Los Angeles – St. Louis Next?

Workers in Los Angeles, the largest city on the West Coast and the second-largest U.S. city overall, have secured a major victory in the fight to raise the minimum wage. On June 14, Democratic Mayor Eric Garcetti signed into a law a wage increase to \$15 an hour that will impact 800,000 workers.

The victory in Los Angeles is a watershed moment for working-class people across the country. Los Angeles is not only the largest American city to win \$15, but also a big city with one of the highest rates of poverty in the country. One study estimated that, in Los Angeles County, fully 27% of the population lives below the official poverty line. By the time the increase is fully implemented, it will directly improve the wages of an astonishing 39% of the city's workers.

The national movement for \$15 has

created a rapid shift in public opinion, especially in major cities, and has led to growing demands for change from progressives, low-wage workers, people of color, and union members. As a result, a number of Democratic politicians in big cities have taken up the \$15 minimum wage demand to appease their voting base. The political situation in Los Angeles demonstrates this rapid shift, as Democratic Mayor Eric Garcetti pivoted to support \$15 an hour, instead of \$13, shortly after the massive April 15 fast-food strikes that put 60,000 workers on the street across the country.

\$15 Spreads to St. Louis

With the fight for \$15 spreading to more cities with a higher proportion of low-paid workers, critics can no longer claim that \$15

can only be won in cities with a relatively higher-paid workforce, like Seattle and San Francisco. Gains in economically and racially diverse cities like Los Angeles demonstrate that it is possible to win \$15 in every major city across the country.

On the heels of the Los Angeles legislation, St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay presented a \$15 minimum wage proposal to the City Council. There is no doubt that the Democratic political establishment is reacting to the Black Lives Matter movement. The fast-food strikers in St. Louis and Black Lives Matter have linked the struggles against police brutality and poverty in the black community, in Missouri, pushing the Democratic establishment to respond following the Ferguson protests.

The Missouri business community and the



GOP are already pushing back hard to pass a statewide ban on municipal wage hikes. In response, Democrats are racing to pass a local minimum wage hike before the August deadline the Chamber of Commerce is pushing for. We know, however, from our experience in Seattle that we cannot rely on Democratic Party leaders not to bend to pressure, so urgent mass working-class mobilizations are needed in Missouri to win the strongest possible law by the August deadline. ✪

“Fast Track” Passes

Next Steps to Stop TPP

Both the House and Senate have passed “fast track” authorization, giving President Obama the go-ahead to finish negotiating the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which he can now present for an up-or-down vote without amendment. Winning fast-track authority is a major victory for big business and a big defeat for the labor and environmental movements which had fought to block it.

The TPP has been in secret negotiations by representatives of 12 nations in the Pacific region, including the U.S.

Previous free-trade agreements, like NAFTA, were a huge boost to corporate interests and created huge problems for working people in both “advanced” and “developing” countries – including the displacement of millions, massive job losses, escalating privatizations, and ripping up of environmental protections. TPP will be even worse.



Unions Halt Fast Track... For a Time

Recognizing these threats, the labor and environmental movements waged a campaign to put a stop to fast track. In early June, as the fast-track vote neared in the House, the unions called on their members to inundate their representatives' offices with calls, demanding a “no” vote and threatening to withhold campaign funding from those who voted “yes.” This strategy was particularly focused on the Democrats. In early June it seemed to work, with a vote against fast track in the House. However, just a few days later, these hopes completely collapsed: On June 18, thirty Democrats in the House voted with their Republican colleagues to authorize fast track. A few days later, on June 24, another blow came when 13 of the 44 Democrats in the Senate

joined with Republicans to end the debate in a vote of 60 to 37.

The future fast-track legislation requires only 51 votes to pass. The challenge is now even bigger.

The outcome showed that, while there are real divisions in the Democratic Party on this question, the Obama administration, along with the bulk of Republicans and many key Democrats, were willing to go to almost any lengths to give the Chamber of Commerce what they want. The outcome also showed that the unions' approach to fighting TPP did not go far enough.

Next Steps to Defeat TPP

Fast track could have been crippled had the unions fully mobilized their memberships through mass mobilizations and workplace actions like informational

pickets during breaks and work slowdowns. Such an approach would show that workers meant business, but it would need to be linked to a strategy to really challenge corporate politicians through an alternative to right-wing Republicans and big-business Democrats. The unions and environmental organizations should take on the Democratic politicians who supported the TPP and fast track by funding independent candidates against them in 2016 as a first step toward building a political alternative for the 99%.

Through a united and determined strategy, the country's 16 million trade union members and the millions more who would back the unions if they gave a clear lead – as well as the millions of young people committed to environmental and social justice – can win the argument in society and defeat the TPP. ☺

10 Books That Shook the World

State and Revolution, by V.I. Lenin

Jess Spear

“The U.S. government does not represent the interests of the majority of the country's citizens, but is instead ruled by those of the rich and powerful.”

This quote isn't some declaration from socialists; this is how *The Telegraph* reported the result of a study done by Princeton and Northwestern Universities looking at U.S. government policy data from 1981-2002. To the vast majority of working people, this is not news. In the wake of the Citizens United ruling, revelations about NSA mass spying, and increased awareness of police killings, the question of who exactly decides what kind of society we live in is more and more dominating the public discourse.

But how can we fundamentally change how – and in whose interests – the state operates? In 1917, in the midst of the Russian Revolution, Lenin wrote a foundational book on the Marxist theory of the state that generalized the experience and analyses of past attempts by the working class to take power. If we want to change society, we must first understand the laws that govern its development, including the repressive institutions of the state – which reflect the division of society into social classes with opposed interests. In *State and Revolution*, Lenin deals with questions such as: What material conditions necessitate a state and how can we use that understanding to change society to work for the billions, not the billionaires? How do the ruling elite maintain power in a democracy if they ultimately don't serve our interests?

The ideas Lenin lays out were essential to the success of the Russian Revolution, the first time workers took power and built up their own state institutions to deal with the tasks at hand. However, the misunderstandings and distortions of Lenin's ideas on the state by parties calling themselves socialist contributed to the defeat of revolutions in Spain in the 1930s and Chile in the 1970s. In both cases, the ruling elite – the capitalists – were able to come back to power, at enormous cost to working people.

Though it was written 100 years ago, the ideas in *State and Revolution* are relevant for socialists who seek to connect with current consciousness and point the way toward the socialist transformation of society. Every socialist can gain valuable insight on how we work today for the socialist future where a state, with all its coercive power compelling people to maintain “order,” is no longer necessary – and we can finally live in free association with one another. ☺

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SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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Fight for Black Freedom!

Domino LaMarr

The one-year anniversary of the murder of Mike Brown, killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, is right around the corner. His death, like that of 14-year-old Emmett Till's at the hands of racists in Mississippi in 1955, helped sparked a mass movement. Today it is known as Black Lives Matter, a way to tell the world that our lives are just as important as any other human being's.

After making significant gains through the civil rights and black power movements, the black working class has faced a series of attacks. Starting in the '70s, we saw the beginnings of the deindustrialization of major American cities. Then, in the '80s, the War on Drugs began the horrific process of mass incarceration followed by Clinton's neo-liberal gutting of the welfare system in the '90s. All these policies have disproportionately hurt black Americans.

Although this process has happened over decades, there has been no real sustained fightback. For this reason, the death of

Michael Brown is a turning point in history for black people in this country and around the world. To the workers and youth in Ferguson, Missouri, facing day-to-day brutality, this young brother's death was the last straw. Whether they were affected by unemployment and low wages or street harassment from cops or the criminalization of poverty, they had had enough. The more than 100 straight days of protesting inspired hundreds of thousands around the world to stand up against institutional racism.

An example of the full extent of institutional racism has only just come to light. The Bureau of Justice Statistics recently acknowledged that the FBI has been underreporting deaths of civilians by cops by nearly 50%! There are 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the U.S. – more numerous than public school districts – but there is no law that mandates them to report to the federal government when they kill a person. Freddie Gray's home state of Maryland, and many others, flat-out refuse to collect data on police killings. The underreporting of police killings

is yet another way the ruling class masks the reality of the institutional racism that exists.

The ruling elite does an excellent job of manipulating people into thinking that if they are not living the "American dream," it is their own fault. They claim that racism died with slavery and Jim Crow and are happy to throw the fact that we have a black president in the White House in our faces when we stand up against racism.

Charleston Massacre

The June 17 massacre of nine black people in Charleston, South Carolina by a white supremacist was initially described as a heartbreaking incident by a mentally unstable man. But the mainstream media has buried the stories of the six black churches that were torched in the weeks following the Charleston killings. They would have to address the issue of race terror groups and would not be able to simply blame it on insanity.

Removing the Confederate flag from

statehouses in the South is galvanizing thousands of people. This is a symbol of slavery (although many white Southerners might not see it that way). It has been used again and again to rally reactionary forces and has no place on public buildings. But it is also clear that many figures in the establishment hope to cut across the broader movement by rapidly removing it.

What is urgently needed is to link the demand for removing the Confederate flag to building a mass struggle against all forms of systemic racism and poverty from voter suppression to cop brutality, mass incarceration as well as poverty wages.

150 years after the defeat of the Confederacy and 50 years after the Voting Rights Act, it's clear that U.S. society has failed to overcome the racist legacy of slavery, of super-exploitation and brutal divide-and-rule tactics. By fighting against racism and linking this to a bigger struggle by the powerful, multiracial working class for a socialist society, we can finally put all of these horrors in the history books where they belong. ✪