

Seattle Socialist  
Councilmember  
Kshama Sawant  
Wins Primary



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**ALTERNATIVE**

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Issue #16 - September 2015



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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. ✦

Socialist Alternative Editor Tom Crean • Editorial Board Ty Moore, Tony Wilsdon, Jess Spear, Joshua Koritz

# WHY I AM A SOCIALIST

## Margaret Whittier-Ferguson Northeastern University Student Boston, MA



For me, becoming a socialist started with learning about the food system. The passing of the \$1 trillion Farm Bill that benefitted big agribusiness also cut food stamps for over 46 million Americans: capitalism is a broken system. I'd heard rumors about the climate march in New York City, and I decided that I wanted to be a part of the march that would hopefully agitate huge swaths of the American population. I needed a ride to New York, and it just so happened that Socialist Alternative Boston had a spot for me in their van. Now, I don't know if any of you have taken a road trip with socialists before – but, boy oh boy, did I get a crash course in socialism during that drive.

This drive is the epitome of one reason why I'm a socialist: because, as socialists, it is our job to undertake a critical analysis, it is our job to ask questions, and it is our job to make connections between capitalism and the subjugation of the working class. The drive provided me a glimpse of how patient these comrades were, as they answered my questions without "forcing" propaganda on me. What clicked for me in the van full of

the motley SA crew was that, no matter how much work I do to take down big agribusiness, at the end of the day the whole capitalist system has got to go.

Capitalism is failing us, and the only plausible solution is to try a new system: socialism. We need to connect capitalism to global climate change and to our industrialized food system. It is imperative that we, as socialists, fight against police brutality, fight for a living wage of \$15 an hour. We must fight for free public education and free, high-quality health care. But, above all, we need a mass movement of young people and the working class. How do we build the movement? I say throw people in vans with some socialists and tell them to ask questions. ✦

## On the Web

# Socialism and the Fight For Women's Liberation



Today's women's movement stands on the shoulders of countless women who fought against oppression in all its forms and won substantial reforms. From the abolitionist movement to the labor movement to the Civil Rights Movement, women have been at the forefront in the struggle for the rights of all oppressed people. ... Following in this tradition, it has been women leading the way in the fight for a \$15 minimum wage.

Read more at: <http://www.socialistalternative.org/2015/03/07/socialism-fight-womens-liberation/>

Socialist Alternative is written from the perspective of working people, the 99%. Stay in touch with the movements and analysis! Subscribe online – details below!

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# 52% for Kshama Sawant

All Out to Win the General Election!

Keep the Voice for Working People on the City Council!

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Follow Kshama Sawant's campaign in Seattle at [KshamaSawant.org](http://KshamaSawant.org)



Kshama Sawant Column

Social Security, Medicare: “Scrap the Cap!”

Twitter: @cmkshama



*On August 8, 2015, thousands gathered in Seattle to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Social Security at Westlake Park. Two local Black Lives Matter activists prevented Bernie Sanders from speaking there, in order to draw attention to the fundamental changes needed to take on racism in the U.S. Before that intervention, socialist Councilmember Kshama Sawant spoke at the rally and highlighted the history of how workers won Social Security and Medicare through mass movements and the integral role socialists played. She discussed how it applies to today's movements for economic and racial justice. Here is an excerpt:*

Social Security and Medicare have been under attack ever since [they were passed]. Not because they do not work. They are under attack precisely because they do work. Because they efficiently provide human services to those in need, and all while not creating a penny in profit for the billionaire class...

If we are going to defend these programs, we have to recognize that they are under attack from the establishments of both parties. It should be a grim reminder to us that it was Obama who reached out to the Republicans, offering to make cuts as part of the so-called “grand bargain.”

We are told that there is no money for health care or for our retirees. And yet, there is no shortage of money to bail out those big banks, to wage imperialist war, to subsidize oil barons – and there is no shortage of money to incarcerate 2.2 million people, mostly people of color.

There is a very, very simple fix for the so-called “baby boomer” problem: Charge rich people the same Social Security tax that everyone else pays – rather than capping the taxable income at just over a \$100,000, leaving the income of the super-rich virtually tax-free.

The solution is simple: Scrap the Cap!

But, of course, under capitalism the simple is not simple, and the rational is rejected as unreasonable. Why? Because it's a question of power. Our power versus their power. The power of millions of working people versus the power of the billionaire class.

Read the full speech at [sawant.seattle.gov/soc-security-medicare/](http://sawant.seattle.gov/soc-security-medicare/)

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

## Patrick Ayers, Seattle Socialist Alternative

Socialist Alternative City Councilmember Kshama Sawant won more than 52 percent of Seattle's District 3 August primary vote, putting her in a strong position to be re-elected this fall. However, the corporate establishment will step up its efforts to silence the voice of the 99% in Seattle. Without a concerted grassroots effort, it is by no means guaranteed that we will win.

Clearly, Kshama has support among ordinary people. In her first six months in office, she helped win the highest minimum wage in the country, working alongside unions and helping to build the 15 Now grassroots movement. The \$15 an hour victory has since rapidly spread across the country.

Kshama also led a series of other fights, including the struggle for affordable housing. In July, 1,000 people packed a town hall meeting to hear Kshama and Councilmember Nick Licata debate rent control with a developer lobbyist and a Republican state representative.

The voter turnout in Kshama's district was six percent higher than the citywide average, showing how her efforts have engaged and brought ordinary people into politics. We built a grassroots campaign with 600 volunteers. We knocked on 30,000 doors and raised more than \$270,000 – without taking a dime from corporations or big business.

## Challenging Election Campaign Ahead

Elections are a difficult terrain for the struggle of working people, as the establishment has many tools it can use: money, media, personal attacks, rumors, lies, etc. Kshama's supporters everywhere should be prepared for a challenging general election campaign. The establishment wants to erase and tarnish the example we are setting.

Our opposition already has significant backing from corporations and developers. Just for the primary, more than \$100,000 was donated in max donations from corporate executives to our opponent Pamela Banks. She will get loads more, and this will be the most expensive city council campaign in Seattle's history (see [www.RunfortheMoney.org](http://www.RunfortheMoney.org)).

## “Independent Expenditures”

To get their candidates through the primary, developers and big business groups laid out more than \$200,000 in independent expenditures, citywide. But, knowing Banks would get through, they did not unleash their full power on

the District 3 race. They will now. To counter that, please donate today and get involved.

Meanwhile, the corporate media will use their influence against Kshama. The morning after the primary, *The Seattle Times* published their third op-ed in two weeks attacking rent control. The piece began with a directive: “Seattle City Councilmembers and candidates should stop talking about rent control.” No worries – Kshama will not be silenced that easily.

The corporate establishment's echo chamber has worked hard to portray Kshama as “divisive.” This is *The Seattle Star's* answer to this: “As for the absurd allegation by rabid Kshama-bashers that Sawant is ‘divisive’: oh, bish-bosh. Sawant's not the one who created the current gaping divide between Seattle's haves and our have-nots — she's among the ones currently trying to solve that problem. Vote Sawant,” (7/13/2015).

While Kshama has opened the council doors wide open to working people, they spread claims that she is not “accessible.” There is no other councilmember who organized more town halls that engaged hundreds of people in discussion about affordable housing, hate crimes against the LGBTQ community, a people's budget, and so much more.

They say she is just one vote and can't get things done, ignoring the unanimous votes Kshama won, including the minimum wage, Indigenous People's Day, and millions in new city funding for the homeless, city workers' wages, and a women's shelter.

## Join Kshama's Re-Election Campaign

The attacks that are inevitably coming will have an effect on voters, particularly those who are not very engaged and not well informed. By no means can we be complacent. We will need to continue building our grassroots army of volunteers, knocking on tens of thousands of doors to counter the attacks, and spreading our message: “Make Seattle Affordable For All.”

Ensuring Kshama's victory is important, not just for District 3, but for working people across the country. If she is re-elected as a socialist, without corporate cash, it will help raise the confidence of progressives across the country, and it will help speed up the process of building a new party for the 99%.

To win, we urgently need all the support you can give. Donate and volunteer today. Join Socialist Alternative and help us fight for an end to the rule of the billionaire class. ✪

# Divisions Mark a Discredited Establishment



*The field of candidates vying for the Republican nomination at the first debate.*

## Bryan Koulouris

Robert Reich, the former labor secretary under the Clinton administration, warned the political establishment in a recent article:

“Political insiders don’t see that the biggest political phenomenon in America today is a revolt against the ‘ruling class’ of insiders that have dominated Washington for more than three decades,” (8/2/2015).

There is a revolt against racism, a revolt against low wages, a revolt against “politics as usual.” Despite a prolonged economic recovery, young people face dead-end jobs, piles of debt, and environmental destruction. The political establishment, bought off by big corporations, is widely distrusted in poll after poll.

The world, meanwhile, is a mess. Ethnic and religious division and war dominate much of the Middle East. China’s currency devaluations and



*Robert Reich, labor secretary under Clinton, warns of growing discontent toward status quo politicians.*

stock market crash sent tremors through the global economy. Europe faces austerity policies and the potential to be broken apart. In short, many can see that this system isn’t working.

## How Could a Racist, Sexist Billionaire Be So Popular?

In this situation, how can a racist, sexist billionaire like Donald Trump get such an echo? Trump gains a hearing because he attacks both parties and all politicians. He openly says that the political system is bought, and he can prove it – he’s bought politicians himself! He will not talk in careful tones, and some of the Republican base finds this refreshing. He’s also a monster created by the right-wing establishment, who have been stoking up racism and grandstanding with slanders and polarization for over six years.

What’s striking is that Trump is gathering support and enthusiasm that mainstream Republicans are unable to mobilize. They were also slow to attack Trump’s outlandish and objectionable statements. The Republicans face a fundamental problem: They need to excite a right-wing base that is increasingly out of touch with an electorate that is shifting to the left.

## Clinton Unable to Excite People

In the Democratic field, Sanders gathers momentum while Clinton is unable to excite people. This again shows a distrust in the establishment. Both parties’ primaries are gaining attention for candidates the big corporations that rule U.S. politics won’t get behind. These tremors in the

political system and implicit possible independent runs for the presidency foreshadow a bigger coming earthquake in U.S. society.

Reich notes, “America has long had a ruling class but the public was willing to tolerate it during the three decades after World War II, when prosperity was widely shared and when the Soviet Union posed a palpable threat. Then, the ruling class seemed benevolent and wise.

“Yet in the last three decades – when almost all the nation’s economic gains have gone to the top while the wages of most people have gone nowhere – the ruling class has seemed to pad its own pockets at the expense of the rest of America.”

## Organize to Cut Across Empty Populism

This system is no longer delivering, no longer legitimizing itself as a new generation enters the workforce expecting to do worse than its parents. Movements for jobs, equality, and freedom will come to the forefront and find a political expression. But the Donald Trump phenomenon is a warning to the labor movement and progressive organizations that anti-establishment sentiment can be mobilized behind right-wing and sometimes racist and sexist causes.

In this context, we must organize around the issues that matter to people in our communities, campuses, and workplaces: higher wages, affordable homes, quality schools, and an end to racist policing. This can cut across the empty populism of billionaires while also building a movement that can inspire and motivate people to get active. ✪

## Join the Socialist Movement Today!



*Socialist Alternative at the Seattle Shell No! protests.*

“There has never been a better time to join the socialist movement.” – Socialist Alternative City Councilmember Kshama Sawant, elected without any corporate cash and a leader of Seattle’s historic \$15 an hour minimum wage movement.

The world is a mess, but working people and young people have had enough. A new era, one of powerful movements for far-reaching change, has begun.

A June Gallup poll showed 47 percent of Americans, and almost 70 percent of young people, would vote for a socialist president – unthinkable a few years ago!

Two years ago, the fight for \$15 and fast-food workers’ strikes launched a national movement. In the past 15 months, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and the University of California have all passed a \$15 an hour minimum wage, and more cities are discussing it. A January poll by the Hart Research Center showed that 63 percent of Americans support a \$15 an hour minimum wage.

In the past year, the Black Lives Matter movement brought a whole new generation of black and brown youth into struggle and unleashed a huge wave of mass protest.

Last September, 400,000 people marched in New York City in the biggest climate justice protest in a generation.

In June of this year, the Supreme Court was forced to legalize same-sex marriage, this year, just a decade after the first victory in Massachusetts in 2004.

And despite a vicious slander campaign against Planned Parenthood in July, public opinion has been almost completely unaffected – most people still support funding for this organization that plays a vital role in providing health services to poor and working-class women.

The world is changing. Working people and young people are angry at the establishment and hungry for a fundamentally new direction for our society. Socialist Alternative is a rapidly growing organization which aims to bring together all those who are fighting back against oppression and exploitation. We seek to build a new political force, independent of both the right-wing Republicans and the corporate-dominated Democrats, based on the interests of working people and the poor. Join us and help us fight for a socialist world! ✪

We Have Nothing to Lose But Our Debts

# Why We Need Free Public Higher Education Now

The movement for free public higher education is gaining momentum. What was only recently seen as a progressive pipe dream has now become a public debate, and several states – including Tennessee, Mississippi, and Oregon – have passed or are considering legislation to make community colleges free. Meanwhile, President Obama has called on all states to eliminate community college tuition and, in May, Senator Bernie Sanders introduced a bill to make every public college and state university in the country free.

Though the legislation proposed by Sanders has little chance of succeeding, it is clear that the neoliberal agenda of austerity and privatization is increasingly untenable, and support among the 99% for making free public education a reality is growing. But actually winning will require a mass movement of students, educators, and activists.

## What Went Wrong?

It wasn't that long ago that many of the country's public university systems were entirely or mostly free. Both the University of California and the City University of New York charged little or no tuition until the 1970s and 1980s, when a fiscal crisis and conservative reaction led to steady increases in tuition and fees at public universities and colleges across the country. Not surprisingly, many of the colleges hit the hardest were those with the biggest populations of working-class students and students of color.

This trend has many dimensions, including charter schools in K-12 and massive construction projects at state colleges and universities, including ever-larger sports stadiums. Boards of trustees, stacked with corporate executives, have raised pay for presidents at many schools to corporate CEO levels, while raising tuition, cutting services, and replacing good-paying campus jobs with low-paying jobs. This includes a steady increase in low-paying, part-time, adjunct faculty positions. There has also been a connected ideological goal of convincing ordinary people that education is not a right to which they are entitled but, rather, a good that they purchase as consumers.

One of the biggest attacks on public higher education is in Wisconsin, where Governor Scott Walker has cut \$300 million from the university budget and is moving to eliminate academic tenure. At the University of California, in-state tuition and fees doubled in less than a decade, rising from an already unaffordable \$6,802 in 2006 to almost \$14,000 in 2015. Meanwhile, at the City University of New York, a system with a historic mission to serve the poor and working class of the city, tuition and fees have increased almost 40% since just 2010. To add insult to injury, federal Pell Grants, which help the neediest students attend college, were cut in 2015. As a consequence, student loan debt now exceeds credit card debt in the United States, averaging \$35,000 per borrower – and total student loan debt in the U.S. now far exceeds \$1 trillion.

## Make Big Business Pay

The effects of this corporate offensive on education have been disastrous. Currently in the U.S., only about 50% of students who attempt to obtain a bachelor's degree do so within six years. As a consequence, graduation rates for 25- to 34-year-old students have fallen sharply compared



to other countries where tuition is free. Of the 28 countries compared in 2012 by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the U.S. was ranked 19th.

At one level, the solution to this affordability crisis is simple. We must fight to fully fund higher education, eliminate tuition and fees, provide cost-of-living and book stipends to all students who need them, and return public colleges and universities to their original mission: to provide a rigorous and broad education to the children of the mass of working- and middle-class Americans. Though such a move might sound radical, it would not only lead to greater economic, racial, and social equality, it would also drastically improve college access and graduation rates, while actually reducing costs.

The actual funding increase needed to make college free for everyone who wished to attend is far less than you might think. As Ann Larson and Michael Checque argued recently in *Jacobin* magazine, if you consider all of the money state and federal governments already spend, the total cost to make public higher education free would be just \$15 billion. To give some sense of how little money this is, consider that the Pentagon's F-35 fighter jet program was \$163 billion over budget!

Making higher education free is also much more cost-efficient for society as a whole. The neoliberal agenda has compelled public institutions to increasingly compete against each other, as well as private colleges, in order to attract more tuition-paying students, wasting billions on advertising, stadiums, luxury dormitories, and recreation centers. Remove tuition and competition, and you remove the dual incentives to waste money on nonacademic needs while prioritizing the academic mission of our universities.

## Build a Broad-Based Movement to Win

While the economic challenges are easily surmountable, we will not win free public higher education for all without a massive and sustained movement of students, educators, debtors, and all those interested in fighting for a society that works for all – and not just the 1%. It is time to take back public education from the corporate forces that will end up destroying it! ✪

## University of California Introduces \$15 Minimum Wage

Andrew J. Mackay  
Student  
UC San Diego

California is a key leader in the \$15 minimum wage struggle, but with a population of almost 39 million, there are still many workers who need a raise.

The Fight for \$15 scored another major victory when the University of California (UC) system introduced a plan to raise full-time workers to a \$15 per hour minimum wage by 2017.

This was a result of tremendous grassroots pressure from labor unions and the growing momentum behind the Fight for \$15 in California. San Francisco passed a \$15 minimum wage in 2014, followed by Emeryville, located near Oakland, this past June, which raised its minimum wage to \$16 by 2019.

A \$15 minimum wage may be on the ballot statewide in 2016, as the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has submitted a potential measure that would bring \$15 by 2021. Though not as strong as San Francisco's measure, it still goes further than a current bill in the California legislature for a \$13 statewide minimum wage by 2017.

The most impactful development has been in the city of Los Angeles, where a path to \$15 was won in June, raising wages for over 800,000 low-wage workers. This was followed by a similar resolution for Los Angeles County in July. ✪



# How Will Decisive Gains Be Won?

# Socialism and the Struggle Against

Tony Wilsdon

The past decade has seen a wide range of important struggles and campaigns for social justice in the U.S., from the Occupy Wall Street movement to the fight for LGBTQ equality. We are seeing the 99% starting to find its political voice. More recently, though, the cutting edge of struggles has been the fight against inequality spurred by fast-food workers and the growing movement against police brutality. Since the revolt in Ferguson after the killing of Michael Brown a year ago, Black Lives Matter (BLM) has spread nationally and won limited, but important, victories. For the first time in many years, police officers are facing indictment for murdering civilians. BLM has broken open a public debate and has had a big effect on raising consciousness. Critically, the movement has led to the emergence of new young black activists and leaders.

But this also raises the question: how to build a sustained movement that can continue to win gains and also start to tackle the broader structural issues of mass incarceration and discrimination in employment, housing, and other institutions in society? Many of these same issues of movement-building have important relevance for the struggle of women and the LGBTQ community against oppression.

Socialists argue that serious reforms are won as a result of powerful social movements. The more powerful the movement, the more that can be won. But also, the stronger the movement, the greater is the resistance by the ruling class. This poses the importance of developing dynamic and successful strategies and tactics to take the movement forward. For example, Socialist Alternative has emphasized the need to link up the anger of oppressed communities on questions like police violence with economic and social issues such as low pay, unemployment, gutted social services, blighted inner cities, affordable housing, etc.

## The Fight for Reforms

Clearly, the ruling elite is on the defensive on police brutality, as vivid examples of blatant police killing and brutality have flooded the Internet. The establishment is split on this issue. It is worth remembering that mass incarceration on the scale we see today is a relatively recent phenomenon. It is the result of the racist “War on Drugs” initiated by Republicans in the 1970s under Richard Nixon and largely supported by the Democrats.

Many in the elite now see elements of this policy as outdated. Many also see an economic benefit from reducing the numbers in jail. This gives the movement a unique opportunity to push hard and force the ruling class to dismantle key parts of drug and mass incarceration policy.



Racism has been part of the foundations of American society from the beginning. Slavery was abolished through a revolutionary Civil War, but economic and social discrimination against black people, backed by brutal repression, remained entrenched. Racist ideology was used to justify the status quo and to prevent the unity of oppressed people on class lines. Despite talk of a “post-racial” society, the ruling class will not abandon institutional racism and sexism, just as it will not abandon economic exploitation, since it is necessary for its survival. In fact, facing growing anger and incipient revolt by sections of the working class and poor, it will revert to more direct repression and racist “divide-and-rule” policies in an attempt to weaken the movement. There has already been increased use of militarized police against social protests in recent years.

So, does this mean that we cannot win major reforms that directly affect the lives of black people? Socialists say that we absolutely can win improvements. But our ability to win major reforms will depend on the strength, scale, and resolve of our movement. It will also depend on potential splits in the ruling class and their determination to resist the struggle.

Historically, the capitalists have been willing, under pressure, to give concessions – sometimes even far-reaching ones, if fundamentally challenged – to at least maintain their control of society in the long run. However, to maintain their ability to make a profit, they will move to claw back any concessions they give. A socialist challenge to their rule,

linked to a mass movement of working people, not only offers a fundamental alternative, but also, by building such a movement, we can win the biggest concessions today.

Sections of the ruling elite are now willing to reduce the level of mass incarceration, reform drug policies, and even grant a \$15 minimum wage in some cities – with many limitations – since they hope that these concessions can dampen anger at inequality and can even provide an increased market for some capitalists. Also, in the case of the minimum wage, it is a better alternative for them than dealing with a serious movement to unionize the workplace. But such concessions can also act as a spur to the movement to fight for more.

## Lessons From Past Struggles

The struggle to overthrow institutional racism is linked to fighting for and winning reforms. The Civil Rights movement grew stronger out of the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott, the fight to desegregate lunch counters, and the march on Selma. It forced open divisions in the ruling class and exposed the brutality of U.S. racism to a national and international audience. But, more importantly, it raised the hopes, expectations, and combativity of blacks workers and youth.

The movement soon had to adjust its strategy and tactics to address the resistance of the ruling elite. Particularly instructive is the evolution of Martin Luther King, Jr. Today, establishment figures quote his earlier speeches,

especially the “I Have A Dream” speech, to serve their purpose. But in his last years King began to grapple with how to fight the wider aspects of structural racism.

King saw the link between poor workers of all races and the issue of class as a lever to build a more powerful movement to win major concessions. In the last year of his life, he launched the multiracial Poor People’s March on Washington and linked up with striking sanitation workers in Memphis. He was assassinated before this new direction could be implemented. While more radical forces, like the Black Panthers, picked up where King left off, mainstream civil rights leaders rejected King’s strategy. Instead, they signed on to the emerging strategy of the Democratic Party leadership: give limited concessions while targeting and repressing the most radical wing of the movement. Reliance on the Democratic Party to deliver reforms was devastating for the Civil Rights movement which, under the leadership of more moderate leaders, lost its independent power and dwindled into a pressure group of the Democratic Party. This is the same Democratic Party that linked up with Republicans to dismantle the gains of social movements over the last 35 years.

Socialists support the basic conclusion drawn by King and other radicals, including the Black Panthers, that to seriously challenge institutional racism, as well as racist attitudes, will involve building a movement that embraces all those oppressed by capitalism – and that the Democratic Party cannot be a reliable ally.

n?

# Against Racism



## Fighting for Reforms and Building a Mass Movement.

Socialists see class exploitation as an essential unifying aspect of the experience of the vast majority of all oppressed sections of society. Capitalism exploits workers by paying them less than the amount of value they create through their labor. Black people, Latinos, women, immigrants, and LGBTQ people are disproportionately concentrated in low-wage jobs. Their exploitation as workers is a common factor that can unite their struggles against all forms of oppression under capitalism. Also, as part of the broader working class, they have enormous potential power through their ability to withdraw their labor and stop the flow of profits to the bosses.

In the fight to end oppression, the role of a united working class is essential, since it can shut down the economy through major industry-wide strikes and general strikes. By mounting powerful struggles, it can bring together the vast majority of the population into a movement, not only to demand major reforms, but also to end capitalism. But in order to do this, the working class needs to be mobilized into fighting organizations around a program that speaks to the needs of those facing special oppression, as well as to their needs as workers.

This task of uniting working people is linked to the need to raise the

understanding of white workers about racism and the affects of divide-and-rule tactics by those in power. This is a task that the labor movement must take up.

The lack of an independent political party that represents and fights for workers and the poor seriously weakens the fight against low wages, oppression, and racist ideas within the working class. This has allowed big business and the 0.1% to dominate politics. Also, the labor movement is in a vastly weaker position compared to the past and is saddled with a leadership that has systematically avoided social struggle and mistakenly seen the Democrats as their friends.

Yet working-class struggles are emerging around low wages and the demand for a \$15 an hour minimum wage. By uniting the struggles against low wages with the movement against police brutality and racism, we can bring more people into the struggle and raise consciousness on both issues. The Fight For \$15 national day of action on April 15 was the largest and most dynamic yet, exactly because it brought together activists from both movements.

## Socialism: An Alternative to Capitalism

It should be increasingly clear that capitalism and the ruling class cannot tolerate major reforms. In fact, compared to the 1960s, when the U.S. economy was growing rapidly, there is a much narrower scope for serious reform within the framework of the profit system. And even when we won major reforms in the past, the ruling elite aggressively sought to take them back at the earliest opportunity. The narrow desire for profit that drives capitalism can only benefit a minority of society. The task is to redistribute power in society away from the billionaire class and the 200 massive banks and corporations that dominate our society and to put power into the hands of the vast majority. This is called socialism.

When the vast majority of society – the working class – runs society through democratic control and management of workplaces and communities, when they have a say on all the important decisions that affect them, and when the control of the media and other institutions is taken out of the hands of the owners of mega-corporations – the elite 0.01% – then the policies of society will be made in the interests of the vast majority.

When power is taken out of the hands of

continued on p. 11

# 2016 Elections Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Party Trap

Teddy Shibabaw

As we head toward 2016, the presidential election will increasingly dominate U.S. politics, drawing in millions to political discussion. Inevitably, it will stir debate within the Black Lives Matter movement about who to support and what political strategy is needed for advancing the movement.

Hillary Clinton has, on several occasions, clearly declared that “Black Lives Matter.” At a speech in South Carolina, she added, “This is not just a slogan, this should be a guiding principle.” Fair enough! But has that been a guiding principle for her? Has it been for the Democratic Party, which she and her husband Bill have dominated since the 1990s?

In fact, as Michelle Alexander writes in *The New Jim Crow*, “More than any other president, [Bill Clinton] created the current racial under-caste.” His 1994 Crime Bill included all sorts of policies that worsened institutional racism in housing, social programs, and policing. Hillary provided full-throated support for these policies at the time and has at various points since.

## Forgive Them Their Trespases?

Even if we were to forgive her and Bill’s trespases from yesterday, why should we trust that she would do better as president? Barack Obama also made many wonderful promises to fight for ordinary people against the super-rich, to create a rising tide that lifts all boats, to end the “dumb wars” of George W. Bush. Obama has recently been making the rounds with proclamations on the need to end mass incarceration, while Bill Clinton has also made a halfhearted acknowledgment that his policies contributed to damaging and “excessive” mass incarceration. Yet Obama has waited until the third year of his second term to make such pronouncements, while the situation has been worsening for the last six years, including as a result of his own policies.

There are two reasons why Obama and Bill Clinton appear to have seen the light. First, Hillary Clinton – the corporate establishment’s candidate – is running for president and desperately needs the black vote. Second, there is powerful new black freedom struggle that is on a collision course with the Democrats, and the Democrats are working to do what they do best: absorb and neutralize mass movements that threaten the system.

Although Hillary has made some good blanket statements on the need to fight “systemic racism,” details are sorely lacking. This is no accident because, as the accompanying piece explains, while some reforms are possible, capitalism – the system she represents – cannot and will not give up institutional racism.

## Bernie Sanders

Bernie Sanders has been creating

much-needed excitement around the idea of a “political revolution” against the billionaire class, whose policies have been especially damaging to black and brown workers and poor. Unfortunately, until recently he made a strategic mistake in focusing almost exclusively on issues of class and economic justice, while largely avoiding directly addressing the Black Lives Matter movement and the issue of racist police brutality, despite the fact that his record on racial justice is far better than Clinton’s.

Sanders came under pressure, including from Black Lives Matter activists who interrupted him and Martin O’Malley at the Netroots Convention, bringing attention to black people killed by police violence. Partly because of this, Bernie’s more recent speeches have been much better. He became the first candidate to decry the injustice of Sandra Bland’s death in Texas and has produced a relatively strong program on racial justice.

However, while making many correct points and correctly attacking the Republicans, who pander to overt racism, Sanders does not directly address the role of the Democratic Party. This is not just a question of the role of the Democrats at the national level in supporting the policies that led to mass incarceration, including the War on Drugs, or Obama’s avoidance of a range of issues until recently.

The Democrats have entirely controlled politics in most big U.S. cities and many smaller cities with large black populations for decades – and, specifically, in many of the places where racist police violence has sparked outrage, and they have completely failed to offer real solutions. Many of these same cities have also implemented accelerated pro-big-developer policies on the Democrats’ watch, which have worsened gentrification and racialized housing inequality.

Baltimore, Washington, DC, Chicago, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Los Angeles, Seattle, and New York all have Democratic Party mayors. Ferguson’s mayor is a Democrat. The Missouri governor who mobilized the National Guard against protesters is also a Democrat.

We need to build a politically independent movement that not only calls out state violence in general but also points to the responsibility of both the Democratic and Republican parties in administering this system. The success of our movements depends on building a political challenge to the two-party status quo of institutional racism. In addition to redoubling our efforts to build in the streets, campuses, and neighborhoods, we must look to run our own independent candidates from the Black Lives Matter movement, the labor movement, the environmental movement, and other social justice movements on a left-wing, working-class program of economic and racial justice, rejecting all corporate cash. Socialist Alternative proposes to link these campaigns to the struggle for fundamental change toward a democratic, socialist society. ✪

## Sanders Campaign Reaches Millions

# Organize Against the Billionaire Class!

Since Bernie Sanders announced his presidential bid on April 29, his campaign has galvanized hundreds of thousands of people with the call for a “political revolution” against the billionaire class. From Minneapolis to Texas, tens of thousands have attended mass rallies. Over 4,500 came out in Kenner, Louisiana – where four days earlier in the same place, Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal announced his bid for presidency, attracting less than a quarter of what Sanders brought. It is estimated that 100,000 people participated in the July 29 “mega-grassroots” event, where people in all 50 states met together to discuss and organize the campaign. And he has raised \$15 million, mostly from small donations of \$200 or less.

Below is the text of a leaflet distributed by Socialist Alternative outside Sanders’ 15,000-strong rally in Seattle on August 8:



Bernie Sanders’ call for a “political revolution against the billionaire class” is gaining a huge response from millions of working Americans fed up with rising rents, student debt, low-wage jobs, racism, and environmental destruction. His campaign has given voice to the desire for an alternative to business-as-usual politicians who are bought off by the same big banks and corporations that are causing these problems.

Sanders’ campaign, like Occupy before it, can be an important step to getting organized for fundamental change. To win this election, much less fundamental change, the movement behind Sanders will need to rely on its own strength and build a political force independent from the corporate-controlled Democratic Party establishment.

## The Democratic Primaries

To build movements that can win, we need to understand what we’re up against. Budget cuts to education and services throughout the country have been severe under Republican politicians, but the establishment Democrats are also carrying out many of the attacks.

We should remember that Democratic President Bill Clinton dismantled welfare, pushed through free trade agreements, and doubled the prison population. Hillary Clinton has the backing of the billionaires, was on the Board of Directors of union-busting Walmart for many years, and voted for George Bush’s disastrous invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan as well as for the

Patriot Act.

Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden, and the leaders of the Democratic Party won’t help us win the pro-worker demands that Bernie Sanders stands for. Over 30 Democratic senators have endorsed Hillary Clinton, and not a single one has endorsed Sanders. Yet ordinary people are electrified by the Sanders campaign in a way that no other presidential candidate could dream of.

Socialist Alternative fully agrees with Sanders that we need a political revolution against the billionaire class. But let’s have no illusions: the giant corporations will not just sit idly by and allow Sanders to win the Democratic nomination. Corporate America will fight every attempt by working people to win progressive change. We will only

be able to counter and defeat their efforts by building our own movements and organizations that are independent of the super-rich.

If Bernie is unable to win the Democratic Party primary – which is a rigged system dominated by corporate cash – it would be a fundamental mistake to support Hillary Clinton or other corporate Democrats for president.

How can we build a movement against the billionaire class and endorse pro-corporate politicians who oppose single-payer health care while supporting the Trans-Pacific Partnership? That is why Socialist Alternative argues that, if corporate interests block Bernie in the primaries, he should run as an independent all the way to the general election in November 2016 and help to build an independent

political voice for the 99%.

## We Need a New Party

On the other hand, if Bernie Sanders actually wins the Democratic Party primaries, would the party establishment and its overseers on Wall Street ever allow their party to be used to elect a socialist president campaigning for single-payer health care, taxing the rich, and to make education free, from childcare to higher education? Sanders would face a revolt from the pro-business Democratic Party establishment.

The only chance Sanders would have to overcome this resistance would be by appealing to the millions of working people supporting him to get organized and giving them power and ownership over this campaign. And what would this be if not the beginnings of a new political party that is independent of corporate cash?

To build on this campaign and to stop the onslaught of the billionaire class, we need stronger unions, new fighting organizations, and a party that genuinely stands for and is run by working people.

As socialists, we recognize that the capitalist system inevitably breeds inequality and the concentration of power in the hands of a tiny ruling elite of billionaires. Alongside fighting for \$15, rent control, and other immediate improvements, Socialist Alternative stands for fundamental systemic change, a democratic socialist society that puts the needs of working people, youth, and the planet ahead of the current drive for super-profits. There has never been a better time to get involved with Socialist Alternative. Join today! 🗳️

## Olympics: Boston Says No

Andy Moxley

Following protests, plans to bring the 2024 Summer Olympics to Boston have been laid to rest.

On July 28, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh conceded defeat on a plan he had initially championed: After six months, the public pressure and opposition to the neoliberal, gentrifying plans of big developers and the United States Olympic Committee (USOC)

triumphed!

Contrary to the fanfare, hosting the Olympics is a nightmare for the working class. In London, \$37.5 billion was spent on the 2012 Olympic Games, but the majority of regular Londoners could not even afford to attend. Civil liberties were restricted and landlords used the opportunity to raise rents, resulting in the eviction of many working-class people.

The Boston 2024 plan used a familiar idea: Put taxpaying working people on the

hook for any overages, but privatize all profits. Despite claims to the contrary by the pro-Olympics group, the plan would use tax money in “land acquisition” for Olympic sites and “post-Olympic development and infrastructure” – read, “gentrification.”

Relatively small protests gained a huge echo in the city. Polls showed massive public opposition to the games, growing from around 33% against in January 2015 to over half of the city by July.

Boston is the first city to outright defeat the USOC in a battle over Olympic-style privatization. This victory shows the massive potential to build a fight-back against the assault on working-class people in the city and the possibility of using such a force to not only repel the attacks of the big-business interests but also to win offensive victories, such as rent control, jobs programs, and high-quality, affordable housing. 🗳️

Read the full report at [SocialistAlternative.org](http://SocialistAlternative.org).



## Greece

# “The Working Class Showed It Will Return to Struggle”

Interview with a Greek socialist, Andros Payiatsos.

On July 9, just four days after 61.5% of the Greek working class voted overwhelmingly to reject the austerity policies of the Troika – the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Union leadership – Alexis Tsipras, Greek prime minister and leader of Syriza, capitulated to the economic terrorism of the Troika and signed a humiliating deal to implement further austerity measures in exchange for more bailout funds. Immediately after Tsipras signed the memorandum, Socialist Alternative's Greek sister organization, Xekinima, put out an urgent call for the emergence of a new mass left force to provide an answer to the huge vacuum on the left, which was created by the fact that Syriza sold out the “No” vote in the referendum.

## What is the mood among Greek workers and youth?

On the question of the mood, we have to differentiate between the mood of the mass of the population and the mood of a more advanced layer of activists in the social movements, the class struggles, and the left rank and file within Syriza. The mass of the population have not yet understood the effects of the new memorandum because these measures are not yet implemented and people have not gone through this experience. That is why there is a kind of “wait-and-see” attitude and the feeling that Tsipras “tried his best” to fight against the Troika. However, Syriza's support is already falling in the polls. One poll, two weeks after the memorandum was signed, showed a drop of nearly 5% in its support.

At the same time, within the left wing of Syriza and amongst activists, there is tremendous shock. Thousands of rank-and-file members who never thought that Syriza would go as far as signing the new memorandum had always assured their coworkers, colleagues, and their periphery that Syriza would never sign anything similar to what Pasok and New Democracy did when they were in government. After Tsipras' retreat, thousands of activists felt betrayed and ashamed. Many of them did not dare to go out of their houses for many days or face their friends. There are thousands of rank-and-file activists who cried for days.



Anti-austerity protest in Syntagma Square in Athens, Greece, June 2015.

## Did your call for a “new left” find an echo amongst activists?

With other groups on the left, we took the initiative to call for a public assembly in Athens on the 17th of July. Despite the short-term mobilization, it was a very successful assembly, with 250 to 300 people present. At least a dozen different groups of the left and the main left tendencies inside Syriza attended. This initiative is now called the “July 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly.”

## What is the program of the initiative?

There is widespread basic agreement about the following points:

- ✪ The sovereign debt must not be paid.
- ✪ Banks must be nationalized.
- ✪ Capital controls and public control of foreign trade must be established.
- ✪ Exit from the euro and establish a national currency.
- ✪ Nationalize all companies which have closed down or have sabotaged the economy and put them under workers' management.
- ✪ Nationalize the commanding heights of the economy and put them under the control and management of workers and society.
- ✪ Link the struggle of Greek workers to workers' struggles against austerity and capitalism across the whole of Europe.

## In what way is the “July 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly”

## initiative linked to developments taking place within the Syriza left?

Through the “July 17<sup>th</sup>” initiative, we try to establish a bridge between the left inside Syriza, big sections of Antarsya [an anti-capitalist left organization], and other forces on the left – including ourselves in Xekinima – and the “Initiative of the 1,000” (in which a number of groups are active). We hold “common meetings” and discussions, which aim at preparing the ground for a new mass left formation.

At this point in time, a pre-congress debate is opening up within Syriza. The left – and particularly the Left Platform of Syriza – asked the Syriza leadership for an urgent congress to be called. Tsipras, under pressure from the Syriza rank and file, called a congress for September.

We think that Syriza is heading for a split. The left inside Syriza is currently fighting to win a majority of the party to its view. This is correct. However, the possibilities of achieving this are extremely weak. We call for the left in Syriza to link the struggle for a majority at the coming Syriza congress with the demand of leadership change, which they have not done yet.

If the Syriza left loses, we think they should leave the party and join with the forces outside Syriza to create a new party of the left. Such a new left party would immediately have enough strength to enter parliament.

Read news from the Committee for a Workers International

SocialistWorld.net



## British Labour Party in Turmoil



Jeremy Corbyn and supporters in London.

The election for the leadership of the British Labour Party has become sharply polarized after the nomination of Jeremy Corbyn, a longstanding left Member of Parliament (MP). Corbyn stands against the policies of endless austerity imposed by the Conservatives and largely supported by Labour. The Labour Party – which moved sharply to the right beginning in the 1980s, accelerating under Tony Blair in the 1990s – performed disastrously in the recent British general election, setting the stage for the current leadership election.

After having forced out the bulk of the left in the Labour Party – including the Militant Tendency, forerunner of our British sister organization, the Socialist Party of England and Wales – the neoliberals at the head of the party are facing an ironic turnaround. Thousands are signing up to join the Labour Party for three pounds – around \$5 – just so they can vote for Corbyn.

It is possible that Corbyn could win – in which case, there will be a sharp conflict, with most of the Labour MPs seeking to sabotage and get rid of him at the first opportunity. This could bring to a head the question of building a new party of the working class, which the Socialist Party and the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition have advocated for years.

For ongoing coverage of this extremely important political development, go to [www.SocialistWorld.net](http://www.SocialistWorld.net).

## Is there reason to be optimistic after the latest defeat?

The potential to fight back is still on the table. The Greek working class has shown that it can return to struggle again and again. This was shown also by the recent developments around the referendum. Nobody expected this magnificent result of 61.5% voting “No!”

If we are able, in next period, to build a new mass left in Greece on the basis of the program mentioned above, which is now on the table and has some serious possibilities of success, then we can be entirely certain that the Greek working class will return and can actually make an astonishing comeback.

For the full interview, visit [SocialistAlternative.org](http://SocialistAlternative.org).

*Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*

# “Right-to-Work” Threat in Public Sector

## For a Mass Mobilization to Stop This Attack and Rebuild Labor!

Tom Crean, New York

In late June, while millions celebrated the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling on marriage equality, the Court also agreed to hear *Friedrichs v. California Teachers’ Association* (CTA), a potentially ominous development for public sector unions and unions generally.

If the Supreme Court were to uphold *Friedrichs*, it would effectively mean that the entire public sector in the U.S. would go “right to work.” The case revolves around the question of “agency” or “fair share” fees which non-union members in many unionized workplaces are required to pay instead of dues because they benefit from the union contract. For unions, the consequences of losing the right to collect agency fees are, in the immediate sense, the potential for significantly reduced income, which means a reduced ability to represent members. Many individuals might stop paying dues on the basis that benefits are now “free.” There would also be a blow to workplace solidarity, with union members paying their dues and working alongside others paying nothing and getting a free ride.

The threat of *Friedrichs* comes on top of a whole series of attacks on union rights by corporate America and its political servants over recent years. This offensive has been concentrated in the public sector, in part because it retains a much higher union density than the private sector. Teachers’ unions have been particularly targeted under the cover of “education reform.”

Earlier this year, under its odious Governor Scott Walker, Wisconsin became the 25th state to adopt “right-to-work” legislation for the workforce as a whole. Historically, “right-to-work” states were concentrated in the “anti-union” South. Four years ago, Walker had already forced through – despite mass opposition – legislation severely restricting collective bargaining in the public sector. The results are instructive for the potential effects of *Friedrichs*. AFSCME has lost two-thirds of its membership in Wisconsin, while the Wisconsin Education Association has lost 30%. Even before *Friedrichs*, therefore, we had reached a tipping point.

## Is This the End for Public Sector Unions?

There has been a range of responses to the threat of *Friedrichs*, as well as a lot of commentary, some of it a bit apocalyptic. Of course, we can’t be sure what the response of the Supreme Court will be in this case or how far it will go in its ruling. But remember that this is the “1% court” that allowed unlimited corporate money into the political process in the *Citizens United* decision. And other recent rulings, such as *Harris v. Quinn* – which removed the right of unions to have fair share in the home health care sector – are not promising.

Some have argued that a defeat in the *Friedrichs* case could force public sector unions to pay more attention to the needs of their members and be more democratic in order to motivate them to

remain members and pay dues. It is also pointed out that fair share did not exist in the public sector until 1975, when the Supreme Court ruled it was legal. The key public sector unions were built, and won recognition and contracts in many workplaces in the 1960s and early ‘70s, without this protection.

This is all true, but the gains of the ‘60s and ‘70s were achieved by an ascendant labor movement. There have been profound changes in the past 40 years. The American labor movement began a long and devastating retreat in the ‘80s. Union density in the private sector is now less than 7%. Recent years have seen record low numbers of strikes.

Unions still represent 14.6 million workers, but the problem facing those who would rebuild a fighting labor movement is not simply an out-of-touch, conservative leadership, but the loss of traditions and culture in the base of the unions. The fast-food workers’ strikes over the past two-and-a-half years show that, while there are hundreds of thousands of unorganized workers prepared to fight and sacrifice for better wages and working conditions, there are huge challenges ahead.

There is no doubt that a section of corporate America sees the increasing weakness of the public sector unions and wants to deliver a killing blow to organized labor. Another section is leery of the longer-term consequences of devastating the remaining strength of unions, which can act as a safety valve for potentially explosive discontent.

Unions with large public sector memberships – like AFSCME, the SEIU, and the NEA – are not of course ignoring the threat of *Friedrichs* and are focusing on recruiting agency fee payers to the unions. This is an important step, but far more is needed to meet this challenge.

First of all, defeat should not be accepted beforehand. A fighting trade union leadership would develop a serious strategy to confront this latest threat to the democratic rights of working people by mobilizing union members, their families, and the wider public to put mass pressure on the Supreme Court. It would link the fight to defend union rights to the fight against devastating budget cuts and the degrading of social services and education for working-class people, and for a national \$15 an hour minimum wage. It would place no reliance on Democratic Party leaders who mouth words of support but are, in many cases, the same politicians who have voted through one set of cuts after another.

The AFL-CIO and the other key unions outside the federation should issue a joint call for meetings in every unionized workplace in the country, followed by informational pickets and local rallies. However, union activists who see the need to mobilize to stop *Friedrichs* should not wait for such a call and should begin to show the way now through local mobilizations, days of action coordinated between cities and regions to encourage the labor movement to take bolder steps and overcome the acceptance of defeat by right-wing leaders. ✪



Workers rally against a “right-to-work” bill outside the Wisconsin State Capitol in February.

## Workers Under Attack in Illinois

Steve Edwards, Chicago

Workers in Illinois are confronted with a concerted effort by the political establishment to destroy workers’ rights and standards of living, beginning with the \$100 billion “pension crisis” that was created through decades of bipartisan agreements not to fund public pension systems. Now, the Republican Governor Bruce Rauner is making his “Turnaround Agenda” a precondition to signing any state budget sent to him by the Democratic legislature. This agenda includes an end to prevailing-wage agreements and the gutting of workers’ comp, unemployment benefits, and liability lawsuits. Rauner has also tried to create local “right-to-work” zones, but this initiative was brought down by union-led protests in every area where hearings were held.

Instead of building from that success, the response of the union leaders has been to assemble the latest in a long line of weak, top-down coalitions of public sector unions and nonprofits aimed at lobbying the same politicians that have consistently voted to gut pensions and maintain corporate tax avoidance. By his approach to bargaining new contracts, Rauner, who promised during his election campaign that he was ready to shut down the state government if he didn’t get his way, appears to be trying to force the unions into all-out confrontation, setting up the possibility of a strike or lockout. Evidently doubting its ability to run a successful strike, the major public sector union, AFSCME, successfully lobbied the state legislature to take away the right of state employees to strike, and the governor’s right to lock them out, from now until July 1, 2019. This was done without consultation with other unions, despite the very dangerous precedent it sets.

In the meantime, the state budget crisis threatens mass layoffs in private agencies that care for the disabled, mentally ill, and other exceptionally vulnerable groups, who depend on more than \$3 billion annually from state funds.

A straightforward tax of \$1-\$2 on each transaction in the financial services industry – particularly the futures exchanges, in which Chicago is the world leader – would raise from \$10-\$12 billion annually, solving all of Illinois’ and Chicago’s budget problems. ✪

# Socialism and the Struggle Against Racism

continued from p. 7

the tiny minority, then there will be no need to discriminate based on race and gender. This way, we can create a society without oppression based on race, gender, and sexuality, ensuring that everyone receives a living-wage job, quality housing and health care, and the other essential needs of life while, at the same time, tackling climate change by redirecting the economy away from carbon-based production.

In the most militant phases of the black freedom movement, as with the labor movement, the vision of a socialist alternative to capitalism has been a huge motivating force for tens of thousands of activists who played a key role in taking the struggle forward. It raised their sights to see that the hard struggle to win reforms is also an integral part of a broader struggle: to create a new society that can end poverty and discrimination.

## Taking the Movement Forward Today

Socialist Alternative sees building support for a broad, fighting program as a key ingredient in organizing powerful and successful struggles. This program must speak to the real needs of the movement and not be limited to what is acceptable to the Democratic Party or what is thought possible under capitalism.

To address mass incarceration and institutionalized racism, Socialist Alternative calls for:

- ✦ An end to the racist War on Drugs. Decriminalization and legalization of marijuana use. Treat drug addiction through rehabilitation, not criminalization. Release from jail and strike clean the criminal record, including reinstatement of voting rights, for all those arrested for



Unions, pushed by African-American members, are taking stances and participating in Black Lives Matter.

minor nonviolent drug offenses.

- ✦ Community control of all aspects of policing. Local policing to be overseen by elected community oversight boards with full powers over the police, including department policies and procedures. Independent, anti-racist candidates from community organizations and unions should run for these boards.

But we also put forward demands that can bring wider sections of the poor and workers into the movement. For example, we call for guaranteed quality jobs with a \$15 an hour minimum wage, as well as a massive investment in public education, transit, health care, and other economic services paid for by taxes on the super-rich and corporations.

And, in order to take the new black freedom movement forward, we call for coordinated national protests against racism, police violence, and economic inequality.

The ability to unite around clear, attainable demands, which can bring together the struggles of the 99% on all aspects of oppression, is key to winning real gains. Our ability to fight for and win reforms is essential, not only for the gains won, but because it gives ordinary people a sense of their collective power and raises their sights to fight for more. These struggles will also help to create a coherent political organization and leadership, which will lead the decisive struggles to come against the entire system of capitalism and the structural racism which is built into its foundations. ✦

## 10 Books That Shook the World

### *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* by Leon Trotsky

Katie Quarles, Minneapolis

Leon Trotsky, the Marxist who co-led the Russian Revolution of 1917 alongside Lenin, and in whose tradition Socialist Alternative stands, spent his entire adult life fighting for a better world.

*My Life* begins with Trotsky's youth and continues with the major historical events he was part of: the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the period after 1917 when he led the Red Army in the Civil War and participated in the building of post-revolution Russia, through to his fight against Stalin and his expulsion from the Communist Party and the USSR.

Trotsky wrote his attempt at an autobiography while he was living in Turkey, exiled there by Stalin.

Not only does the book tell us a lot about Trotsky as a person, it also gives a great overview of important historical events. It is written in a way that is understandable and explanatory for people who have not read much about that period.

But this book is more than just an overview of the important role Trotsky played in history. It is also a shining example of a person living a life dedicated to the revolution who had the tenacity not only to stand up to the Tsar and the old world and to win, but then to stand up again to Stalin in defense of the true meaning and goals of the October Revolution.

Trotsky's life not only shows the importance of being a tireless fighter for revolutionary change, it also shows the importance of analyzing the current situation and developing perspectives in order to gain theoretical and political clarity as to what revolutionaries should do in a given situation.

Although as revolutionaries we fight against the trend of viewing history as a series of events that were caused by "great men," which tends to ignore the role of broader social forces in shaping history, it is clear that the individual characteristics of some people do make a difference in history. It seems likely that the Russian Revolution would have happened without Trotsky, but the fight against Stalin and the traditions of Marx, Engels, and Lenin would not have had their banner held high without Trotsky playing the role he did. ✦

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### INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

Socialist Alternative is also in political solidarity with the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), a worldwide socialist organization in 47 countries, on every continent. Join us!  
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# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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To Limit Climate Change, We Need a Political Revolution Against the Power of Exxon, Chevron, and Shell!

## End the Domination of Big Oil

**Jess Spear**

We've known about climate change for over 20 years. And for over 20 years, world leaders have come together to "talk" about how to deal with the insurmountable evidence that carbon emissions threaten massive climate disruption. They will come together to talk again in Paris at the end of the year, to once again discuss a global treaty aimed at keeping global temperature rise to no more than another degree Celsius – 2 degrees Celsius, total.

Despite what the media would have you believe, a solid majority – more than 60% of Americans – want something done to protect future generations from climate change (Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, 2015). From Keystone XL to Shell No!, a growing movement of climate justice activists is literally putting bodies on the line to stop the construction of fossil fuel projects. Hundreds of thousands marched in last year's People's Climate March, and thousands of students have joined the fossil fuel divestment campaigns on college campuses.

### A Tiny Minority Deciding Our Fate

All the resources and technology needed to transition to a renewable energy economy exist. What stands in the way are giant corporations that have billions in profit at stake, as well as their political representatives. A

recent study showed that just 90 companies are responsible for two-thirds of all emissions since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution – and, more importantly, that who decides the fate of these giant polluting industries, "the decision makers, the CEOs... they could all fit on a Greyhound bus or two," (*The Guardian*, 11/9/2013).

This tiny minority uses its power to make massive profits at the expense of the safety of working people, the health of communities, and the future of the planet. They've spent billions to purchase pliable career politicians. The Republicans are by far the biggest donor recipients. And while it's completely understandable that people feel the need to support the Democratic Party against the climate-change-denial politics of the Republicans, we cannot forget that the leadership of Democratic Party also receives massive contributions from the fossil fuel industry.

Recall how, just three months ago, the Democratic Party leadership, led by Obama, forced through fast-track authority for the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, disappointing labor unions as well as environmentalists and social justice activists. Recall how Obama just gave permission to Shell Oil to drill in the Arctic – again.

### A Party for the 99%

We can't block trains and pipelines indefinitely, and we can't allow ourselves to be blocked politically anymore. Like Bernie Sanders says, we need a political revolution,

mobilizing millions of people to challenge Big Oil and the establishment politicians that stand in the way.

Disgust for both parties has reached record levels. Nearly 60% of Americans want to see a third party. Bernie Sanders' challenge to the billionaire class and his bold pro-worker and pro-environment program to create 13 million jobs "to modernize our country's physical infrastructure" has attracted crowds of thousands, including 28,000 in Portland. Though he is running for the Democratic Party nomination, at his rallies and events Socialist Alternative's call for a new party of the 99% has received big applause.

If Sanders loses the primaries, he should not endorse a corporate Democrat with links to fossil fuel corporations like Hillary Clinton. He should continue running as an independent as a step toward organizing all those who support him into a new independent political movement. In the unlikely case that he wins the Democratic Party primaries, which are dominated by corporate cash already, the corporate leadership of the Democratic Party - tied by a million strings to Big Oil and Wall Street – could not be relied on to support him. We need an independent, organized force to win: a

party of the 99%.

Unbought and independent, this mass workers' party could offer a vision of what's possible if the working class made the decisions. We could harness the resources and technology to meet our energy needs with renewable sources, employing millions in good-paying union jobs. Our party representatives and candidates could use their positions to win working people to an alternative, helping to organize and strengthen mass movements – the real motor force for change. ✪

### Join the Struggle Join Socialist Alternative, Today!

Capitalism is addicted to fossil fuels, and Big Oil is determined to drill, frack, and mine every last bit of dirty fossil fuel in the ground. To stop them, we need an alternative. We must fight for every reform possible that helps start a fundamental transition away from fossil fuel production, providing a just transition for workers in these industries and creating millions of jobs. Ultimately, Socialist Alternative argues that we need to build a movement powerful enough to take the vast resources controlled by Big Oil out of their hands and into public ownership under the democratic control of working people. This would be a decisive and necessary first step toward a society where a tiny minority is unable to completely block the climate and economic solutions we urgently need. Join us and help us fight for a socialist future! ✪