



SOCIALISM RISING

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Sawant
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**Sanders' Message
Reaches Millions**

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. Black Lives Matter.
- ✦ 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

Sandy Arias Brooklyn, New York

Participating in the massive People's Climate March in New York City in 2014 was the final experience that convinced me to join Socialist Alternative. Leading up to the September 21 march, I could no longer ignore how inextricably linked the fight for a healthy planet was from the fight for a socialist society. I realized that nothing less than a socialist society will be able to both meet the needs of all and also reverse all the destructive effects of capitalism.

I was politically apathetic until my mid-twenties, but there were several personal experiences that eventually led me to socialism. Both my parents immigrated from Mexico, and both have always worked in low-wage jobs. Growing up, I was aware of the unequal job opportunities, unequal access to health care, education, and housing many of my family members faced because of their immigrant status. As immigrants, we took for granted that that's what we were supposed to do: work hard, make do, and get by. The next



generation would reap the benefits of the sacrifices of their parents' generation. The economic crash and housing crisis of 2008 disproved the myth of the American Dream. Many of my family members never recovered financially after that, and I've seen family and social ties erode under that kind of economic stress.

As an adult, 15 Now was the campaign that first attracted me to Socialist Alternative. When I initially got involved with 15 Now, I did it for my mother, a fast-food worker for over two decades, but soon I understood the need to rebuild a strong workers' movement to pave the way for struggling against all forms of oppression. ✦

The World Awaits

The Grand Jury Decision in the Tamir Rice Case

Eljeer Hawkins

The grand jury in Cleveland, Ohio, is currently deliberating over evidence in the police killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice by then-rookie Officer Timothy Loehmann on November 22, 2014. Tamir Rice was playing with an airsoft gun that shoots nonlethal pellets outside of a recreational center when a police car pulled up.

Within seconds of arriving on the scene, Officer Loehmann fatally shot Tamir.

This brutal incident, captured on security camera footage, quickly became national news. Tamir's tragic death joined the multitude of black and brown victims of police violence in the United States in 2014.

Not one law enforcement officer in Cleveland has been convicted of killing an unarmed citizen. Why? The political and judicial relationship between the prosecutor's office and law enforcement: the cops collect the evidence for the state's attorney that is used during trial to secure a conviction. This is the same Cleveland Police Department that was cited by the Department of Justice with numerous cases of police violence that



violated citizens' human and civil rights.

The Rice family and supporters are calling for a special prosecutor to oversee the case. Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Tim McGinty has received justified criticism for delays in presenting the evidence to the grand jury, as well as lack of communication between his office and the Rice family.

Can we rightly have confidence in a system to police itself?

As we await the decision of the grand jury, we must continue to agitate, organize, and protest outside the courtroom and build a sustained protest movement to demand justice for Tamir and all victims of police terror, linking it to the broader struggle against institutional racism, poverty, and capitalism. ✦

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

• info@SocialistAlternative.org
• PO Box 150457, Brooklyn, NY 11215

Sanders' Socialist Message Resonates

The Change Socialist Alternative is Fighting For



Twitter: @cmkshama

A specter is haunting the U.S. presidential election – the specter of socialism. Before he even opened up his mouth to speak at the first Democratic Party presidential debate on October 13, Bernie Sanders' impact on the presidential race was clear.

The debate marked another step forward in the re-emergence of socialist ideas as a legitimate force in U.S. politics. Google reported that Sanders was the most searched candidate online throughout the debate. Merriam Webster reported a spike in searches for "socialism."

The most important thing about the Sanders campaign is the enthusiasm it is building for the idea of a political revolution against the billionaire class and the popularizing of socialism. We in Socialist Alternative have argued that Sanders needs to draw as sharp a contrast as possible with Hillary Clinton who is now pretending to be a progressive and hide her long history of service to corporate interests.

The Democratic Party is tied by a thousand threads to the billionaire class. It is therefore increasingly urgent to take steps through, and around, Sanders' campaign to create a new political force that will serve the interests of the 99% and therefore must be independent of the Democrats.

The article below by **Kshama Sawant**, Seattle's recently re-elected socialist city councilmember, is a contribution to the necessary discussion of how we achieve democratic socialist change.

For extensive coverage of Sanders' campaign and the presidential race in general, go to [Socialist Alternative.org](http://SocialistAlternative.org).

We want to live in a society where ordinary people have full control over the key decisions that affect their lives. A society based on social justice where discrimination based on gender and race is relegated to the history books. A society based on full employment where all workers receive a living wage; with high-quality and free health care for everyone; free education from kindergarten to college; decent pensions and good housing accessible for all. A society where communities are based on solidarity and cooperation rather than plagued with fear and alienation. A society where we have ended the threat of climate catastrophe by rebuilding our infrastructure on a green basis and agreed to leave the remaining fossil fuels permanently in the ground. These democratic socialist changes are both necessary and achievable.

Capitalism Has Failed the 99%

However, as Bernie Sanders points out, we



currently live in a society dominated by the oligarchy of the super-rich. Income inequality and exploitation are driving millions into desperation and bitterness. That's why his call for a "political revolution" against the billionaire class has had such an electric effect on hundreds of thousands of young and working people.

At the first Democratic presidential debate, Sanders declared: "what democratic socialism is about is saying that it is immoral and wrong that the top one-tenth of one percent in this country...own almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent."

Sanders is giving voice to the enormous desire for change after a decade of economic crisis where millions lost their jobs and homes while the "recovery" has overwhelmingly benefited the 1%. There is deep anger because the political process is completely dominated by corporate interests; cuts to social programs and attacks on the rights of workers are endless; structural racism and sexism remain entrenched; and because no decisive measures are being taken to address global warming.

Underlying all of this is a diseased and decaying social system. But how does one take on the "casino capitalist" process, as Sanders describes it? And how does one create a society where all people do well, not just a handful of billionaires?

Socialism Goes Mainstream

Poll after poll show that people under 30 support "socialism" and "capitalism"

in roughly equal numbers. The increased acceptance of socialism is the product of the unmasking of capitalism over the past eight years, during and after the "great recession," and the new wave of social struggle that has broken out nationally and internationally. From the Wisconsin uprising in 2011 to Occupy, and the Fight for \$15 to Black Lives Matter, we have seen working people, young people, and people of color standing up against the rule of the 1%. Sanders has correctly stressed the role of mass movements in changing society.

In the wake of my election two years ago as Seattle's first socialist city council member in 100 years, we built a grassroots campaign with union support and won a citywide \$15 an hour minimum wage, the first in the country and the biggest victory for working people in a very long time. This helped inspire activists in other cities, including San Francisco and Los Angeles, to fight and win \$15. We are currently leading the fight for rent control and affordable housing in Seattle which also has major national significance.

The social power of working people is the key force that can unite all the strands of struggle and can push back decisively against the corporate agenda and in favor of the needs of ordinary people.

But social struggle needs to be combined with building a new political force for the 99%. Bernie Sanders' campaign, which raised \$28 million in the past three months and has refused corporate donations, shows the potential for independent working-class

politics. This is ultimately incompatible with the framework of the Democratic Party which is dominated by corporate money and a neoliberal apparatus. We need an independent mass party of and for working class people to fight for our own interests here and now, linking it to a socialist transformation of society.

Breaking the Stranglehold of Wall Street

A government acting in the interests of the 99% would, as Sanders has advocated, enact progressive taxation to create a massive jobs program and rebuild the nation's infrastructure on green lines.

But even to carry through these basic measures means completely breaking the stranglehold of Wall Street and the biggest corporations over society. This requires more than breaking up the big banks or restoring the Glass-Steagall Act, although such measures would certainly be positive steps. It would entail bringing the big banks into public ownership, along with the big energy companies and other key parts of the economy. Why is this necessary? Consider that around 90 companies are responsible for around two-thirds of carbon emission in human history. They have wielded an effective veto on any serious attempt to end global warming.

Of course, entrenched corporate interests will resist the fundamental change that is necessary and they have massive resources. This is why working people need to rebuild a fighting labor movement which stands in solidarity with all those oppressed under this system. We need a powerful mass movement in the streets, workplaces, and campuses with an independent political voice in the halls of power.

And, for such a movement to succeed, it must be linked to the movements of working people and young people across the world. Capitalism is a global system in decline. This is expressed not just in the climate crisis but in the collapse of societies across the Middle East and North Africa after decades of imperialist intervention, leading to the biggest wave of refugees ever seen in history.

Global crisis must be faced through global solidarity. Creating a viable socialist future for the people of the planet based on the utmost democratic participation of ordinary people is the paramount challenge of our era. Join the socialists, build Socialist Alternative. ✪

Paris Climate Summit

Save Our Planet From Capitalism!

George Martin Fell Brown

From November 29 to December 12, world leaders will gather in Paris for the 21st UN Conference on Climate Change, or Conference of the Parties (COP 21). The gathering has the objective of achieving a legally binding and universal agreement on climate policy to replace the expired Kyoto Protocol and, for the first time, to include all nations – in particular the U.S., which never ratified the Kyoto Protocol. But environmental activists are understandably skeptical. Over the past twenty years, international climate talks of this sort have become an empty ritual, allowing world governments to flaunt their environmental credentials without accomplishing any practical results.

In particular, the Paris talks come in the aftermath of the Copenhagen fiasco of 2009. The COP 15 talks in Copenhagen made similar promises to achieve a legally binding treaty. But the talks fell into disarray. Despite its lofty aims, there's little to convince most environmentalists that Paris will be anything other than Copenhagen II.

The failure of capitalist leaders everywhere to effectively tackle global warming and other environmental problems is an expression of the underlying contradictions of capitalism. Scientists have warned time and again that urgent action is needed to take on climate change. They have calculated our "atmospheric carbon budget," how much fossil fuel we can burn and limit the total warming to



Environmental activists have serious doubts about the UN climate summit in Paris.

just two degrees. The calculations indicate that we have roughly 30 years left, at current rates of carbon emissions, to transition to renewables and adapt to the changes already underway.

Growing Struggle

Regardless of the outcome of the Paris talks, we cannot rely on the capitalist world leaders to solve the climate crisis. That task is up to us. The failed climate talks in Kyoto, Copenhagen, and Paris are only one side of the fight against climate change. On the

other side are mass movements against the Keystone XL pipeline, against fracking, and against the destruction of indigenous communities by the encroachment of big business. The battle to stop Keystone XL, which has delayed the construction for four years and forced TransCanada to rescind its proposal, shows the effectiveness of mass resistance.

This side of the environmental struggle will also be seen in Paris, just not in the conference itself. Concurrently with the talks, environmental activists from across the world will be gathering in Paris to make their voices heard. Protests across France will kick off the

talks, and regular actions will be held, culminating in a mass direct action on December 12. Socialist Alternative's European sister organizations in the Committee for a Workers International will be actively involved in these protests, putting forward a slogan of "Save our planet from capitalism!"

From soaring temperatures to big agriculture's farming techniques – stripping the soils of vital nutrients and threatening our ability to feed ourselves – capitalism is driving society back into barbarism. A profit-based economy is not capable of rapidly transitioning away from fossil fuels. On the contrary, it's hell-bent on squeezing every last drop of cheap fuel from the Earth.

The only way forward for humanity, to secure an ecologically balanced future, is to bring the economy into the hands of working people and democratically map out a production plan that begins to slow global warming, dramatically reduce pollution and toxic chemicals, and lessen the intensity by which we interact with the natural world, all while working to raise living standards globally.

Socialist ideas have been gaining in popularity. And among environmental activists, system change is gaining support as the guiding aim of struggle. By building these environmental protests into a sustained and organized mass movement, we can make that change happen. Left in the hands of the capitalist world leaders gathering for COP 21, the prospects are far gloomier. ☸

TPP Spells Attacks on Workers and Climate Ruin

Daniel Kroop

Trade ministers representing twelve nations reached an agreement on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) on October 5, advancing to the final stages a deal that, if passed, will deepen inequality and climate change while boosting the power of multinational corporations over working people.

The deal will come up for final approval in Congress in the next few months. Congress voted in July to give TPP "fast-track" authority, meaning that no amendments will be allowed on the massive, 30-chapter trade deal.

TPP: How Bad Is It?

The TPP, which has been a bipartisan project, represents the extent to which the leaderships of both major parties are beholden to the interests of their corporate and Wall Street donors. As Americans remember, promises of growth from trade agreements often fall short – NAFTA, for example, was a boon for corporate interests but a catastrophe for working people, with millions displaced,

massive job losses, escalating privatizations, and shredded environmental protections.

President Obama has promoted the TPP as "the most progressive trade bill in history" by inking into the document basic principles recognized by the International Labor Organization such as freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, and abolition of child labor.

The reality is that the U.S. systematically fails to monitor and enforce compliance with the labor provisions included in existing trade deals. As Dan DiMaggio describes in a recent *Labor Notes* article, Guatemalan unions, together with the AFL-CIO, have been waiting for seven years for their Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) case to be heard by the Department of Labor. In the meantime, 72 Guatemalan unionists have been murdered, and union density in Guatemala sits at just 2 percent. The rosy promises of justice have fallen flat when "employers often ignore court orders, and the government stands by."

But, as we have said before, the TPP will be even worse. The big corporations and multinationals will benefit, while average

workers are decimated. Reports about the final text of the TPP raise questions about food safety, Internet freedom, financial stability, and affordable access to life-saving medicines.

For example, Big Pharma will be able to withhold data required to produce generic drugs for at least five years, with no maximum across countries. This will lengthen pharmaceutical monopolies and decrease access to drugs that treat cancer, HIV/AIDS, and more.

Corporate Greed Over What People Need

Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders has been consistently opposed to the TPP, calling the agreement "Part of a global race to the bottom to boost the profits of large corporations" (12/29/2014). Sanders has attacked the TPP's special "corporate tribunals," which give corporations the ability to sue nations for lost profits due to laws or regulations.

Fossil fuel companies could use the corporate tribunals to their advantage by ensuring

that efforts to cut carbon are tied up in private courts. 350.org's Karthik Ganapathy called TPP a "disaster for climate change" (*Think-Progress*, 10/05/15).

While American unions should be commended for rallying some opposition to the TPP, it was not enough to stop fast-track authority from passing. To halt TPP will take a full mobilization of union membership, including through workplace action.

Nationally, over 2,000 unions and progressive organizations "who spanned the base of the Democratic Party," according to *The Guardian*, oppose the legislation. Yet the corporate leadership of the Democratic Party was able to ignore this opposition because there was no real threat that they could be challenged by left-wing independent candidates at the ballot. This must change.

In October, over 250,000 people turned out in Berlin for a rally against a parallel European-American free trade agreement, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). If trade unions, socialists, environmental activists, and anti-globalization groups unite in a mass movement, it is still possible to defeat the TPP. ☸

Seattle Tenants Force Notorious Slumlord to Cancel Rent Increases

Jess Spear

Tenants of Seattle slumlords are standing up and fighting back. For years, they've been forced to live with rats, roaches, black mold, and broken appliances. Any time they requested repairs and maintenance of the units, the landlord refused or illegally forced them to pay the bill. But when they were presented with 120% rent increases, the tenants refused to give up and leave. They got organized with the Tenants Union of Washington, called Socialist Alternative Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant, fought back, and won.

Seattle is experiencing an economic boom. Yet for many workers, college students, and retired residents, the city is becoming increasingly unaffordable, as big developers are building luxury units that are completely out of reach for nearly half of Seattle's workers. The construction boom has landlords and property owners looking to cash in on increased property values by price gouging their current tenants. The tenants of the Charles Apartments would have



Photo Credit: Clay Snowwater

Osman, an immigrant and renter, speaks at a rally in South Seattle.

been the next victims of economic eviction, but they chose to fight back.

“This Is Gentrification”

“Sahro’s kids have the same dreams of those who are working in Amazon and Microsoft. Their financial status should not determine their future. This is gentrification in action,” said Somali community organizer Abdi Mohamed.

After the property was purchased by the notorious slumlord Carl Haglund, rents on units left unrepaired for decades were increased from about \$500 a month to \$1100. One of the tenants, Sahro Farah, a Somali immigrant, single mother of five children, and 10-year Seattle resident, appealed to the landlord but was told, “You are low people, not needed. Go out. Rich people, Amazon and Microsoft workers, are

moving here.”

Farah also made numerous attempts to enlist the aid of her district city councilmember, Bruce Harrell, but never heard back. Farah and others then contacted the office of Socialist Alternative City Councilmember Kshama Sawant, who quickly responded, visited the house, and was shocked about the conditions Haglund was trying to exploit. Mold, cockroaches, children on permanent allergy medication – no one should be forced to live under such conditions. Kshama organized a press conference along with the Tenants Union.

It was this press conference – and the subsequent extensive TV and print news coverage – that galvanized the community behind the tenants of Charles Apartments and forced city officials to act. The Seattle Department of Planning and Development visited the apartment complex the next day and cited the landlord for numerous housing code violations, including units without working heat.

The pressure from tenants and the bright media spotlight were unrelenting. Carl Haglund was forced to back down from

implementing the rent increases, pledged to bring the building up to code, and offered one-month free rent for tenants who wanted to leave.

Step Up the Fight

About 100 people gathered on a rainy morning, the day after Haglund announced he was backing down, to step up the protests on one of Seattle’s most notorious slumlords.

Seattle is currently debating rent control to stop economic evictions. Winning rent control is necessary to stop price gouging, generally, and it’s a vital tool to wipe out slumlords completely.

This victory is also an illustration of how the balance of power can shift in favor of working people when we have our own working-class representatives in city hall. Kshama Sawant used her access to the media, her platform, and the resources of her office to help these tenants get organized and fight back. Imagine what would be possible if we had more representatives like Kshama Sawant in office all across the country. ✪

Teachers, Students, and Community Fight School Privatization Plan in Milwaukee

Workers around the U.S. breathed a sigh of relief following the announcement that Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker had ended his presidential campaign. For the people of Wisconsin, the announcement was bittersweet, as Walker has launched increasingly arrogant attacks against workers and students. The latest of these is a forced takeover of the Milwaukee Public Schools, in which struggling public schools will be closed and handed over to private owners.

The privatization of public education is not new to Milwaukee. It has been a project over 25 years in the making. The voucher school system in Milwaukee is home to over 100 schools and a student body of 26,000. The schools compete for students, who are valued at \$7,210 each. Local residents pay one-third of this cost.

Initially, the charter school movement attempted to co-opt the legitimate anger of the Black, Latino, and Hmong communities in the city at the lack of resources and staffing to meet students’ most basic needs.

Yet the charter school movement in Milwaukee has not met the needs of students of color, nor is it even obligated to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The history of charter schools in Milwaukee thus far has been plagued with fraud, abuse, and waste.

The Takeover

The takeover plan was announced at the end of the 2014-2015 school year and passed during summer break, while the majority of teachers were out on vacation. The state legislature has given authority to the Democratic Milwaukee County Executive to choose a “takeover czar.” The czar can identify up to five “failing” schools each year to give away. Staff at the public school would all be fired. They would then have to reapply for their old jobs, and – as a condition of further employment, if they were lucky enough to get rehired – they would waive their right to be represented by a union. In addition, students with disabilities and English-language Learners could be pushed out of a takeover school, as charter and voucher schools are not required to provide these services. As 55 schools are currently targeted for takeover, the staff, students, and families are stuck in limbo, unsure of who will be the first victims.

Despite teachers and other public employees losing their collective bargaining rights following the implementation of Act 10, Scott Walker’s anti-union legislation, the Milwaukee Teachers’ Education Association (MTEA) has expanded its membership. The MTEA has gone on the

offensive, combining public protest, coalition-building, and forging grassroots leadership to confront low wages, large class sizes, lack of prep time, and other issues facing students and teachers alike. They began staging protests at school board meetings to win demands, including pay increases, clear salary schedules, and more time for lunch, which many teachers had been foregoing.

With the start of a new school year, the union put out a call for leaders in each school to organize walk-ins as a means to raise community awareness about the takeover and to begin building the structures of a member-driven defense committee for each school. The response was tremendous. On Friday, September 18, over 100 schools participated in the walk-in, with teachers, students, parents, and community members rallying outside of schools, giving impassioned speeches, and signing up more organizers. On December 5, 2015, there will be an all-city summit of school defense committees to determine how to proceed.

While the Wisconsin workers have suffered historic defeats, the actions of the Milwaukee teachers’ union point the way forward for both public and private sector unions in Wisconsin and beyond. ✪

Seattle Show

“There has never been a better time to become a socialist.”

Patrick Ayers

Not only can socialists get elected, we can get re-elected. At the time of writing, and with about 75% of the votes counted, 54.9% of voters in Seattle’s District 3 have chosen Kshama Sawant to serve another four years on the City Council. Since late votes tend to trend in our favor, we can safely claim victory.

In Seattle’s Capitol Hill neighborhood tonight, hundreds of campaign supporters are celebrating at our election night party. People arrived confident due to Kshama’s outstanding work in the council and our ferocious ground game.

The night before, on Monday, Jeremy Prickett, member of Socialist Alternative and Boeing International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM), addressed volunteers gathered for the last doorknocking effort of the campaign. “Brothers and sisters,” he began, “it’s a privilege for us to be here today because for so long politics have been out of the hands of working people. Socialist Alternative and Kshama Sawant are changing that.”

Over 600 volunteers, more than 30 unions, and dozens of progressive organizations had Kshama’s back against our opponent, who had the support of CEOs, the Chamber of Commerce, the real estate lobby, the landlord lobby, Amazon.com, slumlords, six conservative members of the City Council, and even a handful of Republican millionaires, who created their own PAC to attack us and support our Democratic Party opponent in the final weeks.

Against this powerful establishment opposition, with its echo chamber of vitriolic attacks and its exorbitant bank accounts, we knocked on 90,000 doors and made 170,000 phone calls. We talked to thousands of people about affordable housing, inequality, taxing the rich, and working-class politics. It was an unprecedented grassroots effort for local Seattle politics.

A New Kind of Politics

As Jeremy’s words above suggest, for many people, this campaign was about far more than re-electing Kshama. It was about building a whole new kind of politics that fights unapologetically for working families and not corporations. It was about showing what was possible if working people get organized.

In the age of Citizens United and in a year when corporations in Seattle spent five times more than ever before on the City Council elections, we shattered fundraising records for a Seattle City Council race and defeated corporate cash. We raised nearly \$500,000 from

“The degree to which [Kshama Sawant] blows everyone out of the water in some funding categories, and her ability to rely on many small donors, is this election’s clearest sign that the old guard is being shaken.” – Crosscut.com

almost 3,500 individual donors. Our median donation was merely \$50, and more people donated to our campaign from Seattle and our district than for any other candidate running for City Council across the city. Like Bernie Sanders’ campaign, which also refuses corporate money and raised \$28 million in three months, Kshama’s campaign is a demonstration of the huge potential for independent working-class politics in the U.S.

Movement Building

Nobody in Seattle has caused more headaches for the political establishment over the past two years than Kshama Sawant. “I wear the badge of socialist with pride,” she declared in her January 2014 inauguration speech after upsetting a 13-year incumbent. At that time, she promised: “There will be no backroom deals with corporations or their political servants. There will be no rotten sell-out of the people I represent.”

And Kshama delivered. Her office became a center for working-class resistance, helping tenants, workers, people of color, LGBTQ people, immigrants, and indigenous people. Kshama pushed the political debate in Seattle to the left. “Affordability” has become one of the most repeated buzzwords. Nevertheless, she was blocked many times by a conservative majority on the Council that was tied by a thousand threads to the corporate establishment. But Kshama never relented in her unapologetic fight for the interests of working people, explaining again and again that what could be won inside City Hall largely depended on the strength of movements outside – while actively doing everything she could to help build those movements.

This same spirit imbued the election campaign. While we knew we were in a strong position with a visible sea of red posters and yard signs blanketing the district, we nonetheless took nothing for granted given the way democracy is warped by capitalism, where cash buys votes and the corporate media narrow and distort the discussion.

Instead, we relied on building up our own independent force that could reach thousands of voters by activating working and young people to talk with thousands of people on their doorsteps.

When \$60,000 was dumped into the race by three different corporate PACs in the last weeks of the campaign, our grassroots movement was prepared. Within days, we were able to get a leaflet to thousands of doors across the

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What We Have Accomplished

In two years on the City Council, Kshama – together with working people getting involved, organized labor, 15 Now, tenants rising up – won significant victories:

- ✦ Passed historic \$15 minimum wage, build a movement to increase the minimum wage;
- ✦ Defeated 400% rent hike for 7,000 tenants at the Seattle Housing Authority;
- ✦ Passed funding to enable a year-round women’s shelter;
- ✦ Won millions of dollars in additional funding for social services;
- ✦ Passed Indigenous People’s Day;
- ✦ Opened up city hall: hundreds came to town halls on housing solutions, the people’s budget, the fight against LGBTQ hate crimes
- ✦ Turned Socialist Alternative into Seattle’s “second party” and a real force challenging the corporate establishment.

Kshama’s re-election campaign was a grassroots effort, on a scale Seattle has not seen in a long time:

- ✦ Over 600 active volunteers;

- ✦ Over 178,000
- ✦ Knocked on 90,000 doors, resulting in 170,000 doors knocked
- ✦ Over \$440,000 in donations, many corporate donations about triple the median donation of \$120;
- ✦ Support from n

Next Steps

- ✦ Building labor and nationally. Seattle example and new political party building a socialist political revolution
- ✦ January 4: Inauguration council member this into a rally broadband, and for by making b
- ✦ February 27: Climate environmentalists more together ward a working

ant Re-elected

ows the Way!

ialist and join Socialist Alternative.” – Kshama Sawant



photo: alex garland

phone calls;
0,000+ doors throughout the cam-
g in over 16,000 Voter IDs; 9,236
on in the final weekend;
0 in donations – while not accepting
cash; almost 3,500 different donors,
at of any other council candidate; the
on was \$50 and the average donation
more than 30 unions.

and the socialist movement in Seattle
Socialist Alternative will use the Seat-
d work with others toward creating a
arty to represent the 99%. As well as
ialist force of thousands to fight for a
ion against the billionaire class;
uguration of re-elected socialist city
er Kshama Sawant: We want to turn
ly for affordable housing, municipal
d expanding transit - all of that paid
big developers pay and tax the rich;
Conference in Seattle to bring labor,
sts, community activists and many
to discuss and plan how to push for-
class agenda in Seattle. ✪

Giving Working People a Taste of Power

Sasha Somer

Building a Grassroots Campaign

People get involved in something if they feel like it is relevant to their lives – and that it is worth it. Housing affordability is the key question today in Seattle. We aren't trying to get Kshama re-elected because she is a nice person and will listen to people (she is nice and does listen, but that's not the point). We want her re-elected to fight for real change that improves working people's lives. We want her re-elected to create a platform for movements and to amplify the voices of those in struggles.

The other reason people get involved in something is if they feel like they can actually make a difference. People are busy just trying to make it day to day; why should they sacrifice their precious free time unless it will yield results? Can we actually win \$15? Can we get a socialist elected? Can we win rent control? That's exactly why the corporate media – *The Seattle Times*, in this case – spend so much time and energy saying that is isn't possible. They said you couldn't get elected if you didn't take corporate money, if you ran outside the Democratic Party. They said \$15 was impossible.

But when Kshama ran for the City Council two years ago, it was centered on the call for a \$15 an hour minimum wage. The corporate media said it was impossible, it wasn't reasonable, and if it did happen it would ruin the economy. They launched attack after attack in the media to scare people away. We responded to the attacks at the doors, convincing people that they are worth more than \$15 an hour, that it's actually better for the local economy when people have money to spend, and that we *could* win it – if they got involved.

When Kshama was elected, that was a referendum on the idea of raising the minimum wage. So, to build on that momentum, we launched 15 Now to get people involved. There were action groups across the city meeting, leafleting, organizing protests, etc.

As a result of the mass pressure we created and with the help of key unions, we won a huge victory for working people. 100,000 people in Seattle will benefit from the \$15 minimum

wage. The first step was achieved this past April. On January 1, the next step will kick in with workers at McDonalds – and many others! – going to \$13 before reaching \$15 per hour a year later.

In the course of the last two years, we showed working people that, through struggle and grassroots organizing, we actually can win.

And when they now say rent control isn't possible, it does not sound very convincing anymore. Let's keep proving them wrong.

Which Side Are You On?

Our political starting point is simple: You can't represent big business and working people at the same time. It's always a choice. Big business, the real-estate developers, etc. are all profiting off of the status quo. They are happy with the way things are.

We need candidates and elected officials who clearly take sides, as Kshama does: Unapologetically defending working families' interests – that's what it is about.

That's why Kshama did not and will not accept a dime of corporate cash and why she only takes an average Seattle worker's wage of \$40,000, donating the rest of her \$120,000 salary to supporting the struggles of working people.

We win by getting as many people as possible involved. And when we say "involved," we mean the full spectrum: door-knocking, talking to neighbors, calling people, agitating your family, and bringing your friends with you. Only if working-class people themselves are the backbone of such campaigns can we build the type of force that can win fundamental change.

Socialists, of course, don't think that getting one person elected is the answer to all the crises we are facing: income inequality, environmental destruction, structural racism, sexism, and homophobia. The real engine for achieving the fundamental change we need is mass movements linked to a new mass political force with a socialist program representing the interests of the 99%.

And yet, it has been invaluable having Kshama to argue our case in the City Council and use the resources of her office to help working people.



I know I have learned so much over the last two years of working on Kshama Sawant's campaigns: the campaign when she got elected, winning more than 90,000 votes in 2013; the 15 Now movement we built afterwards in every corner of the city; and now the powerful re-election campaign.

As the volunteer coordinator, I have watched people come out for their first session of door-knocking because they are excited about what Kshama stands for, and end up being part of our much bigger efforts to fundamentally change how things are run in this society. It will take millions on the streets, and it will take thousands of activists, for that to happen. Fighting to build grassroots campaigns and an independent working-class political challenge in Seattle has been a fantastic way to learn how to fight for bigger change.

And it all starts with encouraging and engaging working-class people.

We organized an affordable housing town hall meeting. We filled City Hall, and the overflow room, and the overflow for the overflow room. 600 people showed up to talk about their experiences with rent increases of 50%, of 100%. We organized a debate about rent control with Kshama and Councilmember Nick Licata taking on a Republican and a realtor lobbyist – and 1,000 people showed up. Kshama and Socialist Alternative brought things to the open, opened up City Hall and activated people.

When the Seattle teachers went on strike, we were there – every morning at the picket lines. This was our chance to connect to thousands of educators all over Seattle in the effort to fund education and argue for our program of making the rich and the developers pay for the needs of the vast majority.

From launching the movement to win \$15 to bringing thousands together in town halls to give voice to the mass anger at the lack of affordable housing, forcing a citywide debate around rent control; from pushing back against violence directed at LGBTQ people to winning Indigenous People's Day, Kshama and our grassroots organizing have made a serious difference.

That's why we needed to defend Kshama's seat – but that's why our campaign will not stop here. This is just the beginning. ✪

No End in Sight After Four Years of Civil War

Imperialism Worsens Disaster Facing Syrian People

Four years into a brutal civil war, Syria is back in the headlines because of the massive refugee crisis that has swept the region and Europe. The U.N. has estimated that half of Syria's population have left their homes, three million of them fleeing the country.

Besides the U.S., a series of Western and regional imperialist powers are now militarily engaged in Syria – either to support the regime, or fight ISIS, or both – including France, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. The intervention of these powers, each pursuing its own interests, has not brought peace any closer but, in fact, has deepened the conflict at every step. The war is now also contributing to the destabilization of neighboring countries, including Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.

But the war in Syria is also part of a much larger regional catastrophe with numerous flash points. This disaster was created first and foremost by U.S. imperialism, which has sought – with decreasing effectiveness due to its declining power – to maintain control of this politically and economically vital area:

- ✦ In Iraq, the reckless U.S.-led invasion in 2003 led to the purging of Sunnis from the state and the creation of a sectarian and oppressive Shiite regime, also backed by Iran. This opened the road to ISIS and led to the country's de facto dismemberment.
- ✦ In Afghanistan, President Obama has recently agreed to maintain 10,000 troops through 2017 due to the advance of Taliban forces and the weakening of the corrupt U.S.-backed Afghan government after 14 years of military intervention.
- ✦ In Libya, imperialist intervention to oust former dictator Muammar Qaddafi resulted in complete destabilization and the rise of Islamist forces, who are now fighting for control.
- ✦ In Yemen, upheaval following a popular revolt ousted the 22-years-long dictatorship of Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011, resulting in the Iranian-backed Shia Houthis taking over the capital, Sana'a. Saudi Arabia and other U.S. allies, backed by Obama, have launched a brutal bombing campaign in order to restore a president more to their liking, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.



Yarmouk refugees in Syria gathered to wait for food aid in January 2014.

Meanwhile, the United States' most trusted ally in the region, the Israeli state, is faced with another wave of popular Palestinian revolt. In a meeting between Prime Minister Netanyahu and Secretary of State Kerry, they decided to try and bring things back to "normality." Normality means the continuation of the Israeli occupation, land theft, and ongoing attacks on the Palestinian masses.

The Middle East today is perhaps the most dramatic example of the complete dead end facing human society under capitalism. As world and regional imperialist powers vie for control, the mass of ordinary people in the region face impoverishment and endless conflict, while millions are forced to escape the horror.

Imperialism's long history in the region, from French control of Syria and Lebanon to British control of Egypt, Palestine, and Iraq, through the years of the Cold War and today's "War on Terrorism," has always used the tactic of "divide and conquer," mostly relying on ethnic and religious sentiments. It is no surprise, then, that it has created nothing but sectarian conflicts and rivers of blood.

The burning question is: what is the way out of this endless horror?

Below is an edited article by The Socialist, the paper of the Socialist

Party of England and Wales, with which Socialist Alternative is in political solidarity through the Committee for a Workers International.

After four and a half long, bloody years of civil war in Syria – with over a quarter of a million dead and eleven million displaced – there is still no end in sight. On the contrary, the entire region faces being drawn into a sectarian civil war.

While there is a widespread desire among ordinary people to see something done to bring peace to Syria and to defeat the reactionary thugs of ISIS, there is also a deep-rooted scepticism over what further military intervention will achieve.

No wonder, after the disastrous invasion of Iraq by the U.S., which laid the basis for the current quagmire, and then the 2012 onslaught on Libya, which has led directly to the anarchy which now exists there.

As Patrick Cockburn put it in the British *Independent*: "The U.S.-led air campaign against ISIS has not worked. The Islamic militants have not collapsed under the weight of airstrikes, but, across the Syrian and Iraqi Kurdish regions, either hold the same ground or are expanding" (10/03/2015).

After just over a year of airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, at a cost of more than \$2.7 billion and the killing of

many civilians, ISIS still controls at least half of Syria and a third of Iraq. In May of this year, for example, the Iraqi city of Ramadi fell to ISIS. The U.S. Air Force carried out 165 strikes against ISIS positions in the month before it fell, but they did not alter the outcome. At the time of writing, five months on, ISIS still holds Ramadi despite a prolonged attempt by the Iraqi government to retake it.

In desperation to retake the city, the predominantly Shia Iraqi government has deployed the Shia militias. Given that Ramadi is the capital of Anbar province, both predominantly Sunni, this will do nothing to undermine support for ISIS among the Sunni population, who fear mass reprisals against all Sunnis if Ramadi falls.

These fears are not without foundation; earlier in the year, the Shia militia were central to the campaign to retake Tikrit from ISIS. After the city's recapture, mass executions of Sunnis – all wrongly written off as ISIS supporters – forced thousands to flee.

Ramadi is an example of imperialism's utter failure – not just because of the events of the last year, but because of everything that has happened since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion and occupation.

Confirmation

The events in Syria confirm the analysis *The Socialist* made at the start of the conflict. At the time, there were widespread predictions that President Assad would rapidly be defeated.

We argued that, unlike in Libya, this would not be the case. Assad had greater reserves of support from ethnic and religious minorities within the country, with the increasingly sectarian character of the rebels driving them toward the regime.

At the start the uprising was part of the Arab Spring – a genuine popular revolt against the Assad dictatorship. But this changed with the outside intervention of reactionary forces opposed to revolution in the region – in particular, the brutal dictatorial regimes of Saudi Arabia and Qatar – backed up by imperialist forces. The result has been the unleashing of a dangerous battle between the Sunnis and the Shias on a regional scale. ISIS is the horrendous consequence of this process.

U.S. imperialism – initially, at least – turned a blind eye to the growth of ISIS while attempting to create and fund a pro-Western Free Syrian Army (FSA) to fight Assad.

Senator John McCain was even photographed posing – supposedly with the FSA, but in reality with ISIS commanders! U.S. weaponry sent into Syria ended up in the hands of ISIS.

However, ISIS's aggressive and accelerating role in tearing apart Iraq and Syria, as well as its contempt toward the world powers has forced the U.S. to act against it.

Imperialism

In reality, U.S. imperialism has no forces it can rely on in Syria. As Robert Fisk explained, "Washington admitted their [the FSA's] disappearance, bemoaned their fate, concluded that new 'moderates' were required, persuaded the CIA to arm and train 70 fighters, and this summer packed them off across the Turkish border to fight – whereupon all but ten were captured by Nusrah [the Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria] and at least two of them were executed by their captors" (*Independent*, 10/04/2015).

In reality, there are 20 or more

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Obama Halts Withdrawal as Taliban Advances

Tom Barnard

On October 15, President Obama approved a new \$15-billion-a-year plan under which the U.S. will maintain its current force of 9,800 troops in Afghanistan through most of 2016, then drawing down to 5,500 in early 2017 to remain at bases in Kabul, Bagram, Jalalabad, and Kandahar. The president had originally planned to maintain only a small embassy-based force of 1,000, but in Obama's own words, "in key areas of the country, the security situation is still very fragile, and in some places there is risk of deterioration. Afghan forces are still not as strong as they need to be."

That all-too-obvious assessment comes on the heels of the fall of Kunduz to the Taliban, its largest strategic victory in years. The victory was accomplished in a matter of hours, as 500-700 insurgent fighters sent 7,000 government troops fleeing. Only after 15 days was a combined force of Afghan army and U.S. Special Forces, supposedly only used in Afghanistan for training and counterterrorism missions, able to retake the city, with massive air support.

U.S. War Crime

But not before the U.S. used that air support to commit a war crime, bombing a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders (MSF), the only facility of its kind in northeastern Afghanistan. Many staff members and patients were killed and wounded, and the facility was destroyed, as the hospital was hit by precise aerial raids for over an hour,



An MSF staff member walks through the grounds of the hospital in Kunduz.

destroying the intensive care unit, emergency rooms, and the physiotherapy ward, while frantic calls to Coalition forces went unanswered.

This despite the fact that MSF had provided the GPS coordinates of the hospital to Coalition and Afghan forces as recently as September 29. After several attempts in as many days to point the blame elsewhere, the U.S. finally admitted that U.S. Special Forces on the ground called in the strike.

The fall of Kunduz, one of the centers of the American troop surge five years ago,

exposes the bogus assurances about progress in the War in Afghanistan often given by American and Afghan officials. U.S. claims notwithstanding, recent data compiled by the United Nations show that the Taliban insurgency has spread through more of Afghanistan than at any point since 2001. Amid a corresponding sharp rise in Afghan military casualties, local officials describe a pattern of worsening morale and reluctance by troops and policemen to leave their posts. In February, the Afghan intelligence service said it was investigating dozens of police officers

in Kunduz for cooperating with the Taliban, sometimes even selling their ammunition. Even in districts that are nominally under government control, government forces hold only the government buildings in the district center and are under constant attack by insurgents.

Regime Cannot Defeat the Taliban

Afghan Local Police installed by the American Special Forces extort protection money from farmers, while Afghan commanders use soldiers' pay for their own sordid purposes, including the widespread practice of raping local boys. And Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani is widely regarded as unable to rein in the corrupt warlords who hold key posts in his regime.

Socialist Alternative opposed this war from the beginning because we knew that the U.S. invasion had nothing to do with bringing democracy and alleviating poverty in Afghanistan. It was based on U.S. imperialism reasserting itself after 9/11 and controlling energy resources in the region through an alliance with compliant feudal allies.

Though we are completely opposed to the brutal and reactionary Taliban, we are also clear on the nature of the gangster warlords who are the force behind the current regime, and Karzai's before it. The only way forward is the independent mobilization of the workers and peasants of Afghanistan in their own interests, allied to workers and peasants across the region. ☸

Syrian Civil War Continues

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opposition groups fighting Assad, funded by Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the UAE – all with a sectarian Sunni Islamist character.

The United States remains the most powerful imperialist country on the planet, but it is a declining world power. Its complete inability to "police the world" as it did in the past is graphically demonstrated in Syria.

Russian President Vladimir Putin feeling confident to launch airstrikes in support of Assad is only one indication of this.

It is also shown in how U.S. imperialism has been left as "piggy in the middle" between the Sunni regimes funding the fighters against Assad and Shia Iran, which has sent 15,000 troops to back the Assad regime.

That is not to suggest that ISIS cannot be defeated. On the contrary, its underlying weakness has been shown by the military successes won by the predominantly Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ), who have established a territorial base in Northern Syria.

Within limits, it has shown that, when

anti-ISIS fighters link their military struggles to appeals for national liberation and social change, it is possible to win victories.

However, these successes rely on the heroic action of guerrilla units rather than on the democratic, mass, multi-ethnic mobilization of the people themselves.

There is a danger that this can lead to the driving out of non-Kurds, in some cases, as has been reported to have taken place by Amnesty International and Patrick Cockburn, although this has been denied by the YPG.

Even if these incidents are rare and not widely endorsed, they are a potentially very dangerous development. In addition, the political leadership of the YPG/YPJ still express hopes that Western imperialism will act in their interests. However, imperialism has shown again and again that it has no interest in the genuine aspirations for self-determination for any national or ethnic grouping.

However, it has repeatedly leaned on one group to try and defeat another, creating the sectarian nightmare that now exists.

Working-Class Alternative

The working class and poor farmers of Iraq and Syria and the Kurdish people can only rely on their own self-organization to put an end to this nightmare.

United nonsectarian self-defence of threatened communities and minorities is vital and can be an important lever through which a grassroots movement fighting for socialist change can be rebuilt.

By standing uncompromisingly against all imperialist forces, local reactionary regimes, and sectarian death squads, and supporting the rights of self-determination for all communities, such a movement could find mass support among the regional and international working class.

In turn, workers' organizations internationally need to spearhead movements against imperialist intervention in the Middle East.

In order to seek a real end to sectarianism and bloodbath, ordinary workers and farmers must demand a complete end to imperialist intervention, as well as open and free

elections, to elect a government of representatives of workers and the poor. We call for the building of united, nonsectarian defense committees to defend workers and the poor. This can be the basis of a movement to fight for independent trade unions and mass workers' parties with a program of land to the masses and factories to the workers, implemented through a program for a socialist democratically planned economy.

The Syrian workers must fight in solidarity with the Kurds for the recognition of the right of the Kurdish people to self-determination – including, if they so wish, full autonomous democratic rights within the state they live in or the establishment of a common state of the Kurds themselves.

But the movement has to go beyond that and link their struggle with those of all oppressed workers and farmers in the region. Imperialism and capitalism have devastated the Middle East. There's no solution under capitalism, but only under a democratic socialist confederation of the Middle East and North Africa. ☸

The Retirement Crisis

Step Up the Fight to Defend Pensions

Steve Edwards

The ability to retire with dignity is under further attack. This is part of the 40-year assault on the economic security of workers in the U.S. and throughout the world. With millions of workers reaching retirement age, these problems are beginning to explode.

Wages and benefits have been under attack for decades. Frequently, these attacks were framed as a temporary setback – “a little sacrifice now will allow us to build a stronger economy for everyone in the future” – a variant on trickle-down economics: make the rich richer now, and their financial wizardry will make millionaires of all of us down the road. Underlying this deception was the idea that each worker’s sacrifice was only “temporary.” Survive until retirement, so the story went, and you’ll be ok in your “golden years.” That was the dream.

But while workers worked harder for less, Congress enabled private employers to transform most “defined pension plans” into savings accounts which could then be gambled on the stock exchange. Defined benefit plans meant that the amount of monthly retirement income was guaranteed. The percentage of private sector workers getting defined benefit pensions plummeted from 62% in 1979 to a pitiful 7% in 2009. Today, less than half of U.S. workers have any kind of pension plan other than Social Security, which itself is under attack and covers only about 40 percent of what a person needs to retire on. Also, fifty percent of workers have less than \$10,000 dollars in savings.

Private Sector Pensions

In the private sector, most nonunion employers simply stopped paying into existing defined benefit funds and switched to 401Ks or other investment schemes.

Multiemployer pension funds, often won through labor unions, have been seriously



Teamsters gather in Washington to protest pension cuts with Sen. Bernie Sanders.

eroded by deregulation and employers dropping out.

Late in 2014, major corporations, including UPS and Kroger, lobbied successfully for a new federal law, which was tacked onto the 2015 Federal omnibus appropriations bill at the last minute. This legislation allows a multiemployer pension fund that is projected to run out of money in 15 to 20 years, to cut benefits to existing retirees. In some instances, the cuts could be more than 60%.

The Central States Pension Fund, which covers hundreds of thousands of Teamsters, is now using this reactionary law to threaten massive cuts to the benefits of existing retirees, which could lead to people losing their homes and not being able to pay for medicine or support their families. Central States pensioners are organizing to fight back, and Senator Bernie Sanders and Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur of Ohio have submitted a bill that would rescue this and similar funds through tax increases on the wealthy.

Public Sector Pensions Under Attack

Public sector pensions were theoretically protected by various laws that unions fought for on a state-by-state basis. But they were eroded in a different way: while most public sector workers made pension payments out of every paycheck, governments that were cutting taxes on the rich “borrowed” from these funds to pay for other things – including handouts to big business. Both political parties participated fully in this process, which has now developed into a full-blown crisis of underfunding.

The situation in Greece gives us a hint of what can lie ahead if we don’t build an effective resistance. Pensions there have already been cut since 2010, on a scale ranging from a 15% cut for those getting the very lowest pensions (under €500 a month) to as bad as 44% for the highest (more than €3,000) so that, today, 45% of Greek pensioners are already below the poverty line. And with a jobless rate of about 26% (50% for youth),

pensions are now the main source of income for almost half of Greek families.

The U.S. Commonwealth of Puerto Rico owes \$72 billion to Wall Street. Additionally, its public employee pension fund, with an estimated \$30 billion shortfall, is set to go broke in five years.

In New Jersey, Republican Governor Chris Christie’s budget, with bipartisan support, cut \$1.57 billion dollars from the state’s public pension and benefit system.

Illinois has the most underfunded pension system in the country. The main state employee system is funded at around 40% of future needs, and the shortfall is now at an eye-popping \$100 billion.

Yet transactions on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME), Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT), and Chicago Board of Options Exchange (CBOE) generate \$900 trillion each year. A tax of \$1-\$2 per transaction would raise over \$10 billion annually, abolishing both city and state budget crises. Sparked by left-wing activists and publicized by Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis, a movement is building around this demand, but it is at present led mainly by social movements.

The unions need to embrace this movement. The CTU, which stood up to Rahm Emmanuel, Mayor 1%, when they went on strike in 2012, could play a decisive role in galvanizing opposition.

Bernie Sanders is galvanizing huge support with a platform of no cuts, a \$15 minimum wage, free college education, increasing Social Security benefits, and a massive jobs programs to be paid for by taxing the rich. By linking up ongoing social movements with a fight to preserve pensions and social programs – and raising the demand that all workers have the right to a decent pension – labor unions could not only help build a powerful fight-back but also help rebuild a fighting labor movement.✪

Auto Workers Reach Deal at Fiat Chrysler

Please see our earlier, longer piece entitled “Rebuild Auto Workers’ Power” on SocialistAlternative.org.

After auto workers decisively rejected a sellout deal negotiated by their United Auto Workers (UAW) union leaders at Fiat Chrysler, a second agreement passed with over 77% voting “yes.” In order to secure this compromise, union leaders hired a PR firm to sell the deal and also made it harder for workers to vote by not allowing ballots to be handed in on the job.

Due to the organized revolt against the first deal, Fiat Chrysler did agree to some improvements in the second

one. However, the two-tier system of second-class status for new hires was kept in place. While health care benefits were not slashed like they were in the contract that was voted down and second-tier workers were given wage increases, many workers were unhappy with the final agreement but saw no alternative than to vote “yes.”

Many new hires remain anxious about the fact that they are promised equal wages with first-tier workers after eight years, but the contract only lasts for four years. The auto bosses have a history of asking for big concessions in every contract negotiation, and the UAW leaders do not have a recent history of organizing to resist those attacks. Contract struggles at GM and Ford could set the tone for the next

contract negotiation at Fiat Chrysler.

To win better agreements, workers will need to get organized at the factory level and link up with other workers in other factories willing to fight back. Credible threats of job action, including strikes, are the key method to stopping the attacks on auto workers’ livelihoods. As more and more of manufacturing is concentrated in nonunion plants in the South, the UAW and the unions generally need to get serious about building the labor movement in the South. The vote against the first contract at Fiat Chrysler shows that working people have had enough of the endless retreat and have the will to fight the assault on our rights, benefits, and wages. The key is to get organized.✪

Seattle Shows the Way!

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district alerting voters to the flood of PAC money. And when our opponent sent two negative attack mailers in the last week, we again got another leaflet out to thousands of doors exposing the dishonesty of the attacks.

Kshama united labor behind our campaign. Other candidates challenged the establishment – encouraged by Kshama – but unfortunately they were not independent of the Democratic Party. Despite that, their support indicated the much broader shift to the left and the raised expectations of working people all over Seattle.

Unfortunately, too many union leaders remained in their anxious support of those in power and endorsed or supported corporate incumbents. As we go to print, at least two races are too close to call. United, labor had the chance to take corporate politicians out. We should not miss such opportunities in the future!

An Example to Build On

As the first elected socialist in Seattle in a century, Kshama's re-election campaign took on far more significance than the average local election. Al Jazeera called it one of seven elections in the whole U.S. to watch this year. The campaign took place against the national background of surging support for Bernie Sanders' run for president as a socialist and his call for "a political revolution against the billionaire class."

Undoubtedly, the experience of the last two years in Seattle has provided a wealth of lessons for socialists and working people everywhere. Kshama would be the first to say that what has made the key difference in Seattle has been the existence of an organized socialist movement, and Socialist Alternative in particular.



We have provided key political support to Kshama to help navigate the pressures of elected office and movement building. Together, we were able to give a successful lead and turn the growing anger at inequality, skyrocketing rent, and out-of-touch establishment politicians into a movement that relies on its own strength, its own organizations, and its own resources.

The opportunities to build the socialist movement across the U.S. are only getting bigger. Capitalism has completely failed working families. People are fed up with the corporate establishment, and there is a growing interest in socialist ideas, reflected in the intense interest when, in the debate with Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders explained why he considers himself a democratic socialist. The movement for a \$15 an hour minimum wage has won a number of key victories around the country, students are beginning to fight back against student debt, and a whole new generation

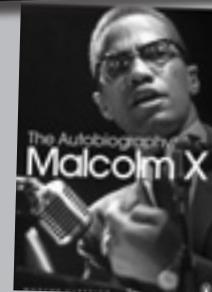
of young activists has been activated by Black Lives Matter. The world is changing, and there has never been a better time to join the socialists.

By no means does our work end tonight. We need to use this opportunity to build on our victory. First of all, that means we need to get even more organized. It has been movement building that has gotten us this far. People should join Socialist Alternative and help us build an even stronger movement that can win more victories over the next years.

And tonight in Seattle, now that Kshama's seat is safe, our hard-working volunteers are enjoying a well-deserved celebration that will likely last late into the night. We're proud to know that many people around the country and the world are celebrating with us. This victory belongs to socialists and working-class people everywhere. Together, we have a world to win. ✪

10 Books That Shook the World

The Autobiography of Malcolm X



Domino Lamarr

My Uncle, a total jock that ran yards for touchdowns instead of studying to get through high school, told me once the only book he ever read was *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. I used to think that was crazy and maybe I still think it a bit. But if there is just one book that my uncle, a black man fighting to save his home from foreclosure, ever reads, the personal story of such a self aware revolutionary couldn't have been a better choice.

The media and Hollywood have done their duty in keeping the spirit of Malcolm alive, making his face an almost "cool" image to display. But only by reading his words can one begin to understand the process of his revolutionary mindset, one that went through many changes in his short life. As a Marxist, I understand that the material conditions in which we live are what shape our understanding of the world. One of Malcolm's greatest contributions to working class struggle was his travels to Africa that served to unite in his mind the struggles of all oppressed people, regardless of color. But that was not always the case. His first instincts were towards black nationalism. But only through reading the story of his life can one understand why he drew those conclusions.

The *Autobiography of Malcolm X* is an essential read for not only revolutionaries but ALL members of the working class. It begins with colorful examples on how capitalism has failed our most vulnerable i.e. the un-educated, the mentally ill, the jobless, the black youth, and evolves into an inspiring account of a man learning in the struggle the path to true black and brown liberation.

The lessons Malcolm learned are particularly relevant in the current Black Lives Matter movement. It serves to arm us with the ability to explain why black nationalism will not serve as a means to black liberation and how we need to fight capitalism instead. He may not say this in so many words but the key is understanding Malcolm's process. Workers and youth should listen the speeches of Malcolm but not fetishize his fervor. Workers and youth must read his writings about his life but not dwell on the excitement of his vibrant life. For what makes Malcolm so great is that he was forever learning, adapting and evolving his program to make himself a true, effective leader. ✪

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PO Box 150457
Brooklyn, NY 11215
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CANADA (604) 738-1653
contact@socialistalternative.ca
www.socialistalternative.ca
QUÉBEC info@AlternativeSocialiste.org
www.AlternativeSocialiste.org

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Issue #18 - November 2015

#MillionStudentMarch

Education should
not be a **debt**
Sentence.

Campaign for Free Education Grows

Keely Mullen

There is a growing crisis in the United States, created by unsustainable levels of student debt and the corporate model of higher education. Tuition at private and public universities nationwide is skyrocketing, and huge numbers of students are graduating terrified, with empty hands, wondering where to go with their new degrees. There is currently over \$1.2 trillion in outstanding student debt nationwide, with 40 million borrowers and their families struggling in unison – wondering how, and whether, they'll ever catch up to this debt.

The corporate model of higher education is evident not only in its abuse of learning persons, but in its inability to provide for its faculty and staff. Universities are pooling money at the very top, providing their highest paid administrators with unreasonable salaries while denying campus workers and adjunct faculty access to even their most basic rights. Many campus workers earn less than \$15 an hour. A significant population of part-time faculty members is on some form of government assistance, and this comes at no small cost to taxpayers. The American people are subsidizing the predatory policies of corporate

universities by spending half a billion dollars every year on government assistance for part-time faculty.

The student debt crisis bears eerie similarities to the housing crisis of 2008. Big banks are issuing high-risk loans to students and are getting fat off of exorbitant interest rates. In 2008, after the devastating financial collapse, people began to vent about things like wealth inequality, things like the 99% and the 1%. This anger was harnessed by a group of people who decided to Occupy Wall Street, which exploded into an international movement against the big banks and

corporate immunity, calling into question the very nature of capitalism.

Now people are beginning to vent about the crisis of higher education. People are seeing colleges and universities squeezing their students for tens of thousands of dollars and failing to provide for their faculty and staff. The students behind the Million Student March seek to harness the anger around the crisis of student debt and corporate higher education. This could be one of the sparks for the next stage of the struggle in America for a more just and equitable society.

Since Bernie Sanders declared his candidacy for president of the United States, he has played a crucial role in popularizing the call for free higher education. When discussing the need for a movement against student debt, Sanders said: "If a million young people march on Washington, [and] they say ... you better vote to deal with student debt, you better vote to make public universities and colleges tuition free, that's when it will happen." Socialist Alternative wholeheartedly agrees with Bernie on this, and – like Bernie – we know that free college won't be won through a polite conversation with the establishment; it'll be won in the streets.

November 12

The Million Student March is a national day of action for free college that was launched by a group of students in early August and has since caught fire – leading to the organizing of over 100 protests nationwide. The demands of the Million Student March are:

1. Free public college;
2. Cancellation of outstanding student debt;
3. \$15 an hour minimum wage for all campus workers.

These demands have been taken up by students, former students, and workers across the country and have gotten the attention and endorsements of organizations like the United States Student Association, Student Labor Action Project, National People's Action, Flood the System, College Students for Bernie – and, most recently, the National Nurses United.

The national day of action on November 12 is an important first step in a process of ultimately winning free college for students in the U.S. In order to win, the movement will have to build toward bigger mass mobilizations. It will also need to become more deeply linked to the struggles of working people, including campus workers, against cuts to education and social services.

The fight for free education is a fight against the corporate model of education which both the Republicans and the Democrats have supported. It is, therefore, also pointing in the direction of the need for a new independent political force for the 99%. Young people are increasingly rejecting neoliberal capitalism and open to socialist answers. The only way we will truly achieve high-quality, free education for all is by getting rid of this rotten capitalist system. ☘