



We Need a Party of the 99%

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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. 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

Theresa Powers Chicago, IL



I used to live in a small, predominantly white, liberal-arts-college bubble. I spent \$100K to learn about all of the social problems in the world, with slim concrete solutions offered except for "go into politics and work within the system." My free time consisted of delivering sandwiches to folks who slept outside on the street because that was the best I knew to do. When I graduated and moved to Chicago from Massachusetts, my whole world changed.

Embarking on a year of service at a homeless shelter, I quickly learned that many of the problems the nonprofit world is trying so hard to fix clearly stem from a broken system. Homelessness and poverty would have no reason to exist if everyone was granted the basic human rights of housing, a living wage, health care, etc. When people work full-time and cannot pay their rent, are not receiving adequate mental health services, or are forced out of a home due to domestic violence, it's obvious that something isn't

working. The more I thought about the cycles of poverty and homelessness, the more I connected those to the failures of capitalism. Regardless of the paradigm that's hammered into our heads, there's no such thing as pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. And charities are just band-aids meant to perpetuate the broken system we live in: they rely on the very class that creates many of the problems they claim to try and solve.

I am a socialist because I know that, when we come together and fight, we can win. Socialism offers clear solutions to the overwhelming amount of problems our world currently faces. I'm fighting for equality for all humans, an end to poverty and homelessness, and a world that serves the interests of the majority, not just a select few. ✦

Appearing on SocialistAlternative.org in March

Supreme Court Battle Heats Up



After Justice Scalia's sudden death, the battle to replace him rages between the Republican-controlled Senate and President Obama. This fight will likely become a focal point for debate about the country's political direction. Indeed, there are significant implications for cases affecting women's rights, labor rights, and environmental protections. This raises the question of how meaningful change to improve the lives of working people is achieved.

The Further Rise of Donald Trump: A Socialist View



The prospect of Trump winning the Republican nomination is of deep concern to that party's establishment. But it is also, for very different reasons, a major issue for progressive workers and young people, who are rightly repelled by his noxious racism and xenophobia. Many say he is a fascist: is that a correct description? How do we fight back against the growing threat from the right?

Bernie's Socialism and Ours

Bernie Sanders has popularized the idea of democratic socialism to an audience of millions. His program for a \$15 minimum wage, free higher education, and single-payer health care speaks to the interests of working-class people. But his vision of socialism is of a reformed and regulated capitalism. We, on the other hand, believe the lives of ordinary people here and around the world cannot be decisively changed for the better until the capitalist social order is overturned. Now is the time for a wider discussion of how we achieve real socialist change. ✦

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Seattle Workers and Youth Push Back

Capitalism Creates Homelessness

Rebekah Liebermann

While Seattle's economy booms and corporations like Amazon make super-profits, an acute shortage of affordable housing is forcing more and more people into homelessness. The 2016 One Night Count found 2,942 people sleeping unsheltered across Seattle, with another 1,500 living on the streets or in their cars in nearby suburbs. This is a 40% increase from just two years before.

However, Seattle's situation is not unique. New York City is experiencing the highest level of homelessness since the Great Depression, with nearly 110,000 people – including 42,000 children – sleeping in the city's homeless shelters at some point during 2015. In San Francisco, homeless people were cleared out for the Super Bowl, leading to protests.

Meanwhile in Seattle, police are being sent to systematically sweep homeless people off public land, dismantling tents, confiscating personal belongings, and pushing people from one precarious location to another.

The homelessness crisis is the most glaring effect of the massive wealth inequality that has been undoing Seattle's neighborhoods for decades. Rents skyrocket while social service programs are chronically starved for resources. The political establishment has responded to this crisis by essentially declaring homelessness as unsolvable – yet, over and over again, they have refused to allocate resources matching the scale of the problem.

Last November, the mayor of Seattle formally declared a state of emergency over homelessness. Yet, that same month, he and seven Democratic members of the City Council – all but Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant and one other councilmember – shot down a proposal to support the bare-bones \$10



A homeless encampment in Seattle's University District.

million additional funding for additional shelter beds and basic services called for by homeless advocates.

The failure to act on this urgent issue reflects an ideology pushed by the corporate establishment that homelessness is just unsolvable and should not be prioritized for funding. It ignores the root of the crisis and, all too often, it attempts to blame the victims. In reality, homelessness cannot be separated from the crisis of inequality facing the city. There is no doubt that we need to massively increase funding for additional shelter space, human services, and safe encampments as an emergency option. At the same time, we cannot neglect the dire need for affordable housing, rent control, and living-wage jobs so that people are not forced out of their homes.

In a study by the *Journal of Urban Affairs*, researchers found that around the country, an increase of \$100 in median rent corresponds to a 15% increase in the homeless population. If we are to end homelessness in Seattle, then we will need to address the fact that the majority of our residents are “rent burdened” and spending well over the 30% of income on housing that is considered affordable. Nationally, it's been found that a person living on the federal minimum wage would not be able to afford a one-bedroom apartment in any city across the U.S.

As a first and immediate step, we need to fully fund homeless services by utilizing the city's

emergency resources for the emergency we have right now. While establishment politicians argue over the “devil in the details,” as one councilmember put it, the fact is that there is no shortage of good ideas for addressing homelessness. What is lacking is a commitment from the city establishment to prioritize these essential programs.

Funding housing and human services at the scale the problem requires means decisive action. Washington State has the most regressive tax system in the entire country, with the tax burden falling overwhelmingly on ordinary working people. How can we address the root causes of homelessness when we do not have the tax revenue to fund basic human services? To build the tens of thousands of city-owned, quality, affordable housing units needed, we must demand that big developers pay; we will need to tax the rich and big business.

As long as capitalism exists, vast inequality is inevitable. Whole communities will continue to be displaced, and people will continue to be pushed onto the streets. It will require fundamental socialist change – ending corporate domination and putting people's needs first – to eradicate the roots of homelessness.

On February 27, Kshama Sawant will host a People's Assembly at City Hall, where we will fight for an end to the sweeps, \$10 million in emergency funding, and an end to homelessness. ✪

Puerto Rico – A Spiraling Crisis of Debt, Austerity, and Colonialism



Teddy Shibabaw

A U.S. colony in all but name, Puerto Rico faces a debt crisis which is the byproduct of over a century of subjection by U.S. imperialism combined with the wreckage caused by contemporary casino capitalism. Widely compared to Greece, Puerto Rico is facing unending cuts to social services, mass unemployment, and a privatization bonanza carried out under duress. \$70 billion of unpayable debt has accumulated – owed to Wall Street investors, retirement funds, banks, and individuals.

Puerto Rico's status as a U.S. territory without statehood or independence means it can neither seek relief from international lending institutions nor seek bankruptcy protection. There are severe restrictions on who the island can trade with, as well as limited taxing authority – denying it income from its role as an important shipping terminal and making consumer products very expensive. To make matters worse, the U.S. government is stalling on providing a lifeline in this crisis, lecturing Puerto Rican leaders about their profligate spending even though the crisis is largely a creation of U.S. colonial policy.

The U.S. Congress made the island a tax haven for multinational corporations in 1976. Having denied Puerto Rico those taxes for decades, U.S. corporations abruptly left the island in 1996, when the tax exemption ended due to U.S. legislative horse-trading – ensuring another dramatic loss in tax receipts.

Politicians have implemented severe austerity so that debt service payments to Wall Street bondholders and others can be continued. They laid off over 30,000 public sector workers in 2009 and raised the sales tax from 7.5 to 11%. Official

unemployment is at 12.5%, with poverty at 41% overall and 56% for children. The multinational corporations that treated Puerto Rico like a playground are relatively unscathed.

There is growing anger and despair among the Puerto Rican people, with some protests and strikes by students and workers. However, there have not been mass strikes and political resistance on the scale of Greece, which had over 30 general strikes against austerity.

Part of the reason is that over 300,000 people – nearly one-tenth of the island's population – have fled to the mainland in the last decade. Historically, emigration – made easier because Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens – has created an escape valve. Who can blame them? The jobs have disappeared and what remains is largely temporary, part-time, and low-wage. Yet Puerto Rico's creditors demand more austerity for the poor and none for themselves.

The “solution” that some legislators in the U.S. Congress are proposing, S. 2381, is to create a Financial Control Authority that will eliminate all democratic pretenses and “unilaterally restructure the workforce of the Commonwealth government,” freeze public pensions, and ensure “the payment of debt obligations” (*LatinoRebels.com*, 2/4/16).

We join with workers and youth in Puerto Rico demanding a cancellation of the debt and a reinvestment to create jobs and fund services for Puerto Rican workers and poor. No new bailouts for the banks and vulture fund bondholders. Let the Puerto Rican people decide their own fate. US workers should stand in solidarity with their Puerto Rican brothers and sisters as they demand a reversal of all the austerity, privatization and anti-democratic measures. ✪

Rebuffing Clinton's Attacks on Single-Payer Health Care

Sarah White, Nurse Practitioner

Single-payer health care, according to presidential candidate Hillary Clinton "will never, ever come to pass." With that sort of wet blanket approach during campaign season, it's no wonder Sanders' support has surged. But it's what we've come to expect from Clinton; whether it's a \$15 an hour minimum wage or free college tuition, we're told bold measures to improve working people's lives just aren't feasible.

With rising premiums and out-of-pocket costs, voters in both major parties want to know what candidates plan to do to reduce health care costs (*Reuters*, 12/21/2015). But despite the establishment economists deriding Sanders' plan as "puppies and rainbows," multiple studies have shown single-payer health care – also called expanded Medicare, or Medicare for All – is the only strategy to curb growth in health care costs while improving patient outcomes.

Unsurprisingly, Bernie Sanders' call for single-payer health care has come under fierce attack from the Clinton campaign. Yet Clinton leads *all* presidential candidates – both Democrat and Republican – in money received from drug companies, so her opposition to single-payer is unsurprising (*CNN*, 2/11/2016). From her time as a U.S. Senator from New York up to her current bid for president, Clinton has received roughly \$13.2 million from sources in the health sector, according to data compiled by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics (*International Business Times*, 1/13/2016). She talks tough about characters like "pharma bro" Martin Shkreli – the former hedge fund manager who jacked up the price of a life-saving medicine by 5,000% – but based on their campaign donations, pharmaceutical companies don't see her as a threat to their profits.

Single-Payer / Medicare for All

Clinton has made wildly exaggerated claims about the cost of a single-payer system. But drastically reducing administrative costs by closing insurance companies and eliminating their profit is one of the strategies to fund the system.

As Dr. Steffie Woolhandler, professor in public health at City University of New York and co-founder of Physicians for a National Health Program, recently stated, "It's indisputable that single-payer systems in other countries cover everyone for virtually everything, and at a much lower cost than our health care system. Experience in countries with single-payer systems, such as Canada, Scotland, and Taiwan, proves that we can have more, better and cheaper care" (*Accuracy.org*, 2/12/2016).

She stated, "If the U.S. moved to a single-payer system as efficient as Canada's,



Students for a National Health Program (SNaHP) summit.

we'd save \$430 billion on useless paperwork and insurance companies' outrageous profits, more than enough to cover the 31 million Americans who remain uninsured, and to eliminate co-payments and deductibles for everyone" (*Accuracy.org*, 20/12/2016).

The Clinton campaign has shown no shame in its attacks on Sanders' health care plan, relying on half-truths, saying Sanders would eliminate Medicaid, Medicare, and the Veterans' Administration as well as the Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP). On the contrary, under Sanders' plan these programs would not only be preserved but consolidated into one single-payer program, yielding millions of dollars in efficiencies.

As working-class people gain more experience with Obamacare, seeing costs they didn't expect, many have been fired up about Sanders' call for a more efficient system that is high quality and accessible to all. They don't believe Clinton's argument that the massive donations she has received from big pharma and the health insurance industry make no difference to policy. They are inspired by Sanders' refusal to accept corporate donations. It is the ability of Sanders to address the real issues that working people face – especially young people who see no chance of affording health care, nor paying off student debts or gaining a living-wage job – that is driving support for his "political revolution."

The Realities of Obamacare

While Obamacare did increase the number of people with health insurance, a welcome gain for many, it left the for-profit health care system intact. And, still, 29 million remain without any coverage at all, and 31 million

Also, no out-of-pocket expenses, no unexpected health care bills, and no curbs on access to essential treatments. No wonder Sanders is tapping into a broad swath of support though his determination to fight for single payer.

How to Win Medicare for All

Clinton's final answer has been that Sanders won't be able to get anything done because Republicans control Congress. Based on that argument, nothing would ever change. Yet it has, repeatedly. That's because changes that benefit the 99% don't come from establishment politicians. From the eight-hour day to Social Security, from the gains of the Civil Rights Movement to ending the Vietnam War – and, most recently, winning marriage equality – these victories came as a result of public anger and powerful social movements that changed the political landscape and forced politicians of all stripes to respond or be replaced.

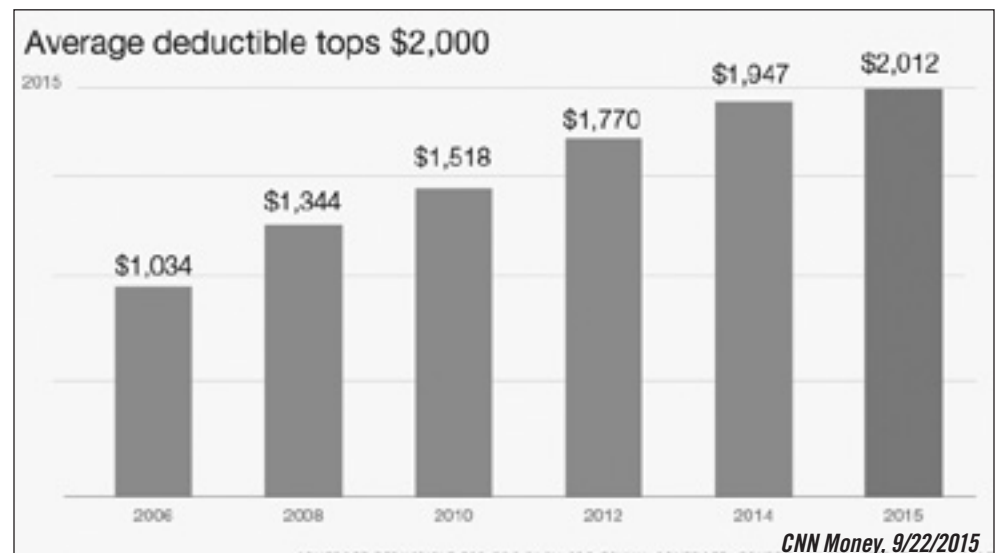
If working people organize to demand single-payer health care, then we can win it – along with many of Sanders' other demands. That's what Sanders means when he says we need a political revolution. He's opening up a discussion about what working people really need, not what they should settle for based on "what's feasible." It's this discussion that's behind his momentum, and it's what scares the hell out of the political establishment.

The Sanders campaign has brought the issue of a single-payer back onto the political agenda. He's also given voice to the anger of the 99% at Wall Street, and that's why Socialist Alternative calls for a tax on the super-rich and corporations to provide high-quality health care for everyone. We support single-payer health care as a first step toward fully socialized medicine, including public ownership of the pharmaceutical industry. Until profit is banished from health care, patients will continue battling corporations to stay healthy. ✪

are underinsured, meaning they can't afford to go to the doctor or fill their prescriptions (*CommonWealthFund.org*, 5/20/15). Over half of people with medical debt actually have health insurance. Obamacare has insured more people, but it continues to subordinate patients' needs to profit. By shifting more of the costs of care onto people, health care is prohibitively expensive for many and has allowed the health insurance industry to pull in tremendous profits (*PNHP.org*, 9/16/15).

A single-payer system would eliminate all the various insurance companies, resulting in an expanded Medicare system, which would be the single payer. The savings afforded to the U.S. economy from this process would allow for those people employed by insurance giants to be rehired in other areas.

Most importantly, it would guarantee everyone health care. No qualification exams, no limitations – nothing. Everyone is covered.



Fighting for the Change We Need

Parental Leave: A Human Right

Emily McArthur

Paid parental leave has been part of the debate for working women since the 1960s, and most countries across the world have passed some form of leave for families with new babies.

In the United States, the wealthiest country in the history of the world, we still don't have even a minimal 12 weeks mandated leave for new parents. This glaring exception has become a major talking point in the presidential election cycle.

"Not Feasible"

Hillary Clinton claims she wants it, but – like so many things we need – she says it isn't politically feasible. Time and time again, the vital programs that working people – and especially working women – need, like universal healthcare a \$15 an hour minimum wage and free higher education, are pushed off as politically unfeasible. Despite studies showing how less access to education, health care, and time off contribute to keeping women as second class citizens, we are told we should wait or accept far less – except that's not how progress has ever been won!

Bernie Sanders has tirelessly brought many of these issues to the forefront, pointing out the shameful lack of paid parental leave in the U.S. at every televised debate. He points to the many international examples and rejects the notion that the things we need can't happen because they aren't popular with Wall Street.

His website features a petition for paid parental leave. Many mass movements start with petitions – though, of course, clicktivism is not enough.

In Seattle, socialist Councilmember Kshama Sawant has put forward various paid parental leave initiatives with mass public support. During a recent budget hearing, union members and activists packed the room demanding that Seattle lead the way on parental leave by setting a major precedent with progressive legislation. Disgracefully, this was defeated with the assistance of wealthy, self-identified feminists on the City Council who voted down the proposals because they weren't "politically feasible" (*The Seattle Times*, 11/23/2015).

If legislation is massively popular and



People pack a Seattle City Council meeting in support of parental leave.

even conservative news outlets like *Bloomberg* and *Forbes* declare that paid parental leave is a logical, efficient way to approach a predictable life event for working people, why do politicians keep telling us the time isn't right?

Profit Versus Need

Capitalism aims to pit workers against one another, rather than arranging the economy in a way that is functional. Time off has been demonized in the highly competitive corporate world because it does not reflect a deep enough commitment to the company's profit margin, so workers who take this time are judged poorly on their performance reviews and less likely to become eligible for raises and promotions.

Women are encouraged to "lean in" to their careers – or, in the case of tech giant Google – offered egg-freezing services for some hopeful future date when they might be offered time off. By forcing parents who crave bonding time with their newborns to either leave their jobs or take extensive unpaid time off, bosses are able to justify paying some workers – typically women – less. By not having paid parental leave, many new parents are put into financial straits by the exorbitant cost of child care.

To win what working women truly need – including universal health care, free college education, parental leave, and defending and extending reproductive rights – we have to build a mass movement. Unions who represent millions of working women can play a critical role in building this movement.

By building a mass movement with clear demands, we can leave behind spineless corporate politicians who don't stand up for the things we need. We can push for independent working-class candidates who challenge the status quo and fight for a world where decisions are based on human need not corporate greed – a socialist world! ☺

Kshama Sawant Column

Bernie Versus Hillary: What's a Feminist to Do?

*America's Only Elected
Female Socialist on Women
and the Presidential Race*

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Throughout the Democratic Primary, Hillary Clinton and her supporters have sought to portray her ascendance to the presidency as the next logical step toward gender equality in America. And, as recently as last fall, her nomination as the first female Democratic nominee seemed all but assured.

Yet instead of the expected coronation, Hillary Clinton has had a real fight on her hands from the self-proclaimed socialist from Vermont, and that turn of events has perhaps been most clearly reflected in young women's enthusiastic support for Sanders.

The Democratic Party establishment has been utterly dumbfounded at young women rejecting Hillary – 84% in New Hampshire – and has made various ham-fisted efforts to turn back the tide.

Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, the Democratic National Committee chair, helped kick things off by suggesting that young women were "complacent" about women's rights in not supporting Hillary, leading to a backlash on social media.

The firestorm hit in February with Gloria Steinem and Madeleine Albright's widely discussed comments. Steinem's remarks about young women supporting Bernie because "that's where the boys are" particularly hit a nerve, as young women who had long looked up to Steinem were stunned to hear what sounded more than a little like a demeaning sexist put-down.

Feminism and Identity

Why are establishment feminist icons on the defensive with young women?

At the heart of the matter is the deep divide between the substance of women's rights and the identity question of gender in this race. And the insoluble problem facing Clinton defenders is the undeniable fact that Sanders' platform and record are far more pro-woman.

When you look at Sanders' commitment to women's issues – from the Paycheck Fairness Act to the Equal Rights Amendment, from the \$15 minimum wage to single-payer health care or a dozen other issues – ordinary women stand to gain greatly from what Bernie is campaigning for.

Hillary's own political history reveals the hollowness of her expressed oneness with ordinary women. She helped champion Bill Clinton's gutting of welfare funding in the 1990s, which plunged hundreds of thousands of women – particularly black women – into a deadly spiral of intergenerational poverty.

Clinton's position on abortion has long been that it ought to be "safe, legal, and rare." Safe and legal, yes, but her addition of "rare" is a frightening backtracking on the hard-fought battle for reproductive rights and only serves as bait to encourage right-wing

attacks. As recently as September last year, Clinton made overtures to anti-choice Republicans, saying, "if there's a way to structure some kind of constitutional restriction [on abortion] that takes into account the life of the mother and her health, then I'm open to that."

Her support for NAFTA and later TPP – which of course she's done an election-campaign backflip on – again underlines her willingness to sell out working people – and particularly working women, who have been deeply affected by corporate trade deals.

Sanders, in contrast, has been a consistent advocate of reproductive rights and a leading opponent of Clinton's welfare "reform," NAFTA, and TPP.

If the question is one of policy and not of identity, can there be any doubt that Bernie Sanders is the real feminist in this race?

Which Side Are You On?

Perhaps young women have been most offended by the implicit assumption that they should set aside their own political views – and, along with them, the interests of the vast majority of women – in an act of "solidarity" with ruling-class women like Hillary.

Instead, they are demanding someone who will fight for their rights. They are correctly angry at the corporate domination of politics, at inequality, and at the failure of the Democratic Party establishment – not least of all the Clinton Administration – to even effectively defend women's past gains.

Under such "leadership," women have had to keep fighting the same battles that their mothers and grandmothers did – and losing ground.

Bernie's campaign is the opposite: it has served as a lightning rod against the domination of the establishment's anti-worker and anti-woman politics over our lives and our bodies.

As oppressed people, we face the question of how and with whom to build the solidarity necessary to win. The solidarity we need is with the 99% against the 1%, not with ruling-class women against the rest of us.

It is our task to build that solidarity – to fight for the needs of working women and men, of black people, of immigrants, of labor, of the LGBTQ community – of all the 99%. That means building a #Movement4Bernie now, and, most importantly, using this campaign to build a new independent force that can continue the fight after the presidential election.

Solidarity, socialism, and feminism are all interconnected and inseparable. Let's fight for them – together. ☺

DEFEAT THE CORPORATE ESTABLISHMENT

Sanders' Campaign Faces Key Challenges

Editorial Statement

As we go to press, the Democratic presidential primaries are heading into a key phase with Super Tuesday primaries. In a number of these states, Clinton has the advantage and Sanders will be confronted with the power of the economic, political, and media establishment.

After his five-point loss in Nevada, the corporate media was predictably already writing Bernie Sanders' obituary when, in fact, he had won more actual votes in the first three caucuses and primaries than Hillary. In the course of February, several national polls showed Sanders ahead of Clinton for the first time. This is an astonishing development considering he was 40 points behind in most polls as recently as July.

The establishment of the Democratic Party are, indeed, very anxious to be done with Sanders' challenge, which has posed an increasingly sharp threat to their interests. Sanders' campaign is raising the expectations of working and especially young people.

As Socialist Alternative has pointed out, Sanders' call for a "political revolution" against the billionaire class has tapped into the enormous anger of young people and workers against massive social inequality and a rigged political system. His demands for a \$15 minimum wage, for single-payer health care, for free college education and to end mass incarceration speak directly to the needs of working people. Perhaps most importantly, Sanders' campaign has popularized the idea of democratic socialism for millions.

Sanders' challenge has shone a spotlight on the corporate establishment, of which Hillary is a consummate representative. Her record of serving the interests of Walmart and Goldman Sachs is the real story, not the shape-shifting attempts to present herself as a "progressive who gets things done." Hillary's record shows that she is certainly not a consistent defender of women's rights or the interests of black people. This is the inevitable result of being a defender of the system, which is the source of institutional racism and sexism.

Obstacles Ahead

Nevertheless, despite the enormous enthusiasm Sanders' campaign has created, we cannot blind ourselves to the serious obstacles ahead. Clearly, Sanders has so far failed to win the type of support in the black working class that he has among white workers and youth. On the other hand, it is significant that it appears he won the majority of Latino votes in Nevada.

The Democratic primaries are clearly a

hostile terrain for a radical candidate. The electorate tends to be older and more conservative than in a general election. Massive resources are deployed by the corporate media. The DNC has used and will use all sorts of undemocratic maneuvers. For Sanders to win will require a massive political upheaval – and, indeed, this electoral season has seen an unprecedented challenge to the establishment of both corporate parties. We cannot exclude further twists, especially given Clinton's serious weaknesses as a candidate. But we must also prepare for the real possibility that Clinton will establish a commanding lead in the delegate count in the weeks ahead.

Build A New Party!

Sanders has said that he will run all the way to the convention no matter what. But the question must be posed clearly: what does he intend to do at the end of the process? If he doesn't win, he has said he would back the Democratic nominee. Backing Hillary would be to mislead millions of radicalized workers and youth back into the trap of the Democratic Party and to demoralize large numbers of them.

The real face of the Democratic Party are politicians like Obama's former Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel who, with Hillary's continued support, has covered up cop killings in Chicago while attacking public education and the teachers' union (see p. 10). While not all Democratic elected officials are the same, the party fundamentally exists to serve the interests of the corporate elite, and that is why big business has invested heavily in Hillary's campaign.

We understand that, out of fear of Rubio or Trump, millions might vote for the "lesser evil" in November if Sanders loses the primaries. But there exists a huge opportunity right now to overcome the endless bad choices of American politics and, by organizing independently of the Democrats, offer a real, democratic socialist alternative on a mass scale. We say, regardless of who wins the primaries, Sanders should keep running all the way to November.

When #Movement4Bernie, launched by socialist Seattle Councilmember Kshama Sawant, has raised the call for a "new party of the 99%" at March for Bernie rallies around the country, we have received overwhelming support. All those who see the necessity of moving in this direction must keep working to build movements on the streets, and build independently of corporate cash and of the Democratic Party. ☘



Why Black People Shouldn't Support Hillary

Darletta Scruggs, Chicago

For anyone who has been following Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, you may have caught wind of her newly found progressive ideas, pro-LGBTQ stances, and vague critique of Wall Street – which is funding her campaign. Hillary, like any experienced politician, has transformed into a political chameleon, every day becoming more and more like her opponent, Bernie Sanders, at least in words. Hillary has been faced with a huge challenge that she and the DNC are trying to get in front of: the hundreds of thousands of people, particularly the youth, being energized by Bernie's call for a political revolution against the billionaire class! Hillary has now turned her chameleonic tendencies in the direction of firming up black support.

Hillary's Record

Like many politicians, Hillary is relying on the corporate-media-driven historical amnesia and misinformation to win black voters over, but anyone familiar with the true history of the Clinton dynasty – which has molded and supported candidates like Chicago's Mayor Rahm Emanuel – knows very well why Clinton doesn't deserve the black vote or any working-class vote. During the first Clinton presidency, the War on Drugs and the Violent Crime Control

and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 devastated black communities by providing for 100,000 new police officers and \$9.7 billion in funding for prisons.

This was the ramping up of mass incarceration, which has more black people in prison today than were enslaved in 1850! Not only did we see generations of black youth being funneled into the prison system but also the attack on welfare reforms, slashing funding to crucial social services and crippling single-mother-led households that were being created due to the masses of black men being incarcerated. We also must not forget the "three strikes" rule that Hillary adamantly supported against repeat offenders, saying in August: "We need more police, we need more and tougher prison sentences for repeat offenders. The three strikes and you're out for violent offenders has to be part of the plan. We need more prisons to keep violent offenders for as long as it takes to keep them off the streets" (*Salon.com*, 4/13/2015).

In the words of Michelle Alexander, in a recent article written in *The Nation* titled "Why Hillary Clinton Doesn't Deserve The Black Vote," Clinton "has mastered the art of sending mixed cultural messages," (2/10/2016). For years, Bill and Hillary publicly called out "violent offenders," which is often coded language since the actual policies carried out contradict that. The United States leads the

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y Test



Growing Revolt in Labor Movement

Bryan Watson

In a coup for the Bernie Sanders campaign, the AFL-CIO, the largest federation of unions in the U.S., has decided to remain neutral during the primaries – at least for now. This surprising announcement reflects the growing political division within the labor movement between large sections of the rank and file and the leadership of many unions on who to endorse.

Bernie Sanders has won the endorsement of nearly 100 union locals, the National Nurses Union – which has been barnstorming across primary states to get out the vote for him – the American Postal Workers Union, as well as the 500,000-member-strong Communications Workers of America (CWA).

Shamefully, despite Hillary Clinton's record of supporting anti-union legislation like NAFTA and receiving millions in speaking fees and campaign contributions from the likes of Goldman Sachs, the executive boards of many of the largest unions have endorsed Clinton. SEIU, ASCME, UFCW, IAM, and both major teachers unions, the AFT and NEA – in all, representing nearly 10 million workers – are trudging the same worn path to the dead end of the Democratic Party establishment. In the case of SEIU and AFT, for example, their endorsements of Clinton have been met with staunch resistance from some locals.

This situation exposes the crisis facing the labor movement. While unions overall continue to be pushed back with “right to work” legislation now passed in over 25 states, most of the leadership is afraid to separate itself from the Democratic Party establishment and get behind Sanders. This is despite the failure of the Democrats to meaningfully do anything to support the unions when they last controlled Congress between 2008 and 2010, as well as the willingness of the Democrats to support numerous attacks on union rights, workers' benefits, and social services for working people at state and local level.

Sanders' campaign is the best opportunity in decades to galvanize working people behind a pro-worker program. But this requires moving in the direction of political independence. The unions representing nearly two million unionized workers standing with Sanders are the tip of the spear, pointing the way forward for labor.

Additional Reporting from Seattle

On Sunday, February 21, two hundred labor activists gathered in the Seattle Labor Temple for an inspiring Labor for Bernie event hosted by Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant. Speakers included Larry Cohen, former president of the CWA, as well as Claude Burfert of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, among others.

Rank-and-file representatives of WFSE 1488 (a local affiliate of AFSCME) and AFT 1789 were there, both of whom went against their international unions' endorsements of Hillary Clinton in inspiring examples of how locals can resist the undemocratic endorsement process.

When Kshama Sawant concluded her comments, saying, “we need to use the momentum from this year to begin building a new political party of the 99%,” the hall erupted into a standing ovation. ✪



Photo Credit: Bob Simpson

#Movement4Bernie Is on the March!

“Bernie Sanders' campaign has proven we can build a new political party of the 99% that refuses corporate money and fights for real issues like a \$15 an hour minimum wage, police accountability, reproductive rights for women, and an end to the mass deportations. We can fight back and win!”

- Darletta Scruggs speaking at January 23 March for Bernie in Chicago

Andy Moxley, Boston

On January 23, thousands of people in major cities across the U.S. hit the streets to support the political revolution in the first-ever national march to support a presidential candidate. Socialist Alternative played a key role in organizing these marches in Boston, Seattle, Chicago, and several others. In cities where the marches were organized under the #Movement4Bernie (M4B) banner initiated by Socialist Alternative, marchers received the message put forward of a the need for a new party of the 99% with enthusiasm.

Since those marches, the call for building an independent grassroots movement around Sanders has continued to gain steam. Hundreds have attended meetings across the country discussing the need to build an alternative to the corporate politics of the Democratic Party establishment. A recent Seattle Labor for Bernie meeting, headlined by socialist City Councilmember Kshama Sawant, saw 200 labor activists pack into the city's Labor Temple in response to the call for unions to support Bernie Sanders and a new, independent party of the

99%. Recent Women for Bernie meetups in Boston and New York City had animated discussions about how working-class feminism provides a clear alternative to the corporate identity politics of Hillary Clinton.

The social earthquake that has driven the Sanders campaigns continues to rumble on further into the primaries, shaking the ground of the big-business-backed Democratic Party. As we go to press, M4B and Socialist Alternative have been campaigning for a second round of Marches for Bernie ahead of Super Tuesday. Most of the events will be held on February 27. On February 20, an SA-initiated march in Cincinnati saw over 750 in attendance, with similar results expected across the country due to the great echo our call has been receiving on social media.

The Democratic Party establishment is repeatedly attacking the Sanders campaign. We cannot rely on the apparatus of a party that wants to destroy its own candidate; we have to continue to build a grassroots movement independent from the big parties and, ultimately, a new party of the 99%. Join the #Movement4Bernie today! ✪

Support Hillary

world in the number of people incarcerated in federal and state correctional facilities. There are currently more than 2 million people in American prisons or jails. Approximately one-quarter of those people held in U.S. prisons or jails have been convicted of a drug offense. Another example of Clinton sending mixed cultural messages is her comment on gangs in 1994: “They are not just gangs of kids anymore. They are often the kinds of kids that are called superpredators. No conscience, no empathy. We can talk about why they ended up that way, but first we have to bring them to heel,” (*Fair.org*, 2/27/2016). Do black folks want a president who views black children in gangs as “superpredators”?

We Need Real Candidates of the 99%

Hillary's pseudo-progressive speeches and public comments often contradict the actual policies she supports. She often talks about helping address economic inequality and the enormous wage gap between the wealthy and the poor, but when it came to the question of supporting a \$15 minimum wage, her response was, “I'm comfortable with \$12.” For years she sat for years on the

continued on p. 11

Sanders and the Left

What Is the Role of Socialists?

Bryan Koulouris

Bernie Sanders' campaign has excited millions and brought a discussion about socialism into the mainstream of U.S. society. In addition to getting record donations from working-class people, Sanders has unprecedented support among youth. This is an important indicator for the future of social movements and politics. Yet the contradiction remains that Sanders is running as a Democratic Party candidate, a party that has been "the graveyard of social movements."

The organized left has reacted to this historic yet complex situation in a variety of ways, which raises critical questions. How do socialists relate to broader movements without falling into the trap of abandoning their principles and politics, while working in a nonsectarian fashion? What is the role of socialists in relation to the Sanders campaign?

Some groups on the far left have done nothing but denounce Sanders without realizing the opportunities inherent in the situation, with millions of newly radicalizing young people and workers. Socialist Alternative has gotten involved in the Sanders campaign while pointing toward the corporate-controlled nature of the Democratic Party, the need for a politicized movement from below, and a new party of the 99% to fight against the right wing and Wall Street.

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is the largest left group in the U.S. – albeit loosely organized – and they have also gotten involved in Bernie's campaign. Yet important differences in strategy, method, and approach exist between Socialist Alternative and DSA on how to relate to Sanders.

Building Movements to Win

DSA, in its 40-year existence, has always been explicit about its goal of reforming the Democrats to the left. We believe the Democratic Party fundamentally serves the interests of the corporate elite and that the obstacles to it being "captured" by the left are far greater than the challenges of building a new mass working-class party. Likewise, many of the leading lights in DSA believe that capitalism can be reformed step by step and does not need to be replaced root and branch. We are for every reform that improves the position of working people, but we do not believe that capitalism can be defanged and made harmless.

The DSA's approach to Sanders' campaign reflects their social-democratic politics. They have provided people with a range of material to use to support the campaign. Their



Bernie Sanders walks a picket line.

leaflets contain a lot of useful information about positive aspects of Sanders' record. They reference the massive interest in socialist ideas and the need to build the campaign to win Bernie's program. This is good, but their material provides little in terms of how to fight against the billionaire-backed leadership of the Democratic Party or how to build movements for social change.

For instance, DSA's material never states what Sanders is up against in the Democratic primaries, from corporate cash to media bashing to superdelegates and DNC sabotage. Meanwhile, they reference promising poll numbers for Bernie and point to the significance of his support. This gives the reader the impression that the nomination can be relatively easily won. However, in our view, it will require a massive political upheaval to defeat Clinton and the Democratic Party establishment. This requires politicizing Bernie's supporters and connecting the campaign to building social movements.

Our experience has been that there is a combative mood to fight back against corporate domination among Sanders supporters and that this mood can be transformed into building for struggles and a movement. That's why Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative member and Seattle City Councilmember, initiated #Movement4Bernie.

In Chicago, Socialist Alternative members helped to initiate the "march for Bernie" in January, with 4,000 people participating. Marchers heard speeches from union activists and Black Lives Matter organizers calling for the resignation of "Mayor 1%" Rahm

Emanuel. This helped to bring together social movements in the struggle for economic equality and racial justice. SA speakers pointed out that it is the Democratic Party that runs Chicago and is responsible for overseeing a racist police force and attacking public education. We argue we need a mass movement against economic inequality and institutional racism. This will require independent struggle from below, with clear demands, coordinated actions, and democratic structures, along with building a new political party to represent working people out of the Sanders campaign.

DSA's material often highlights the fight against racism and Bernie's program to benefit communities of color, but there isn't a word in their leaflets on the need to build protests and direct action against police violence. DSA's material on the Sanders campaign and racism seems to imply that electing Bernie would fix most problems of racism in this country.

We Need a New Party for the 99%!

While groups like "Bernie or Bust" and "Progressives Against Hillary Clinton" reflect the unease with Sanders' promise to endorse whoever becomes the Democratic Party nominee, DSA is silent on this issue. We think it would be a tragedy if the enthusiastic support for Sanders ends up being funneled into the campaign of a Wall Street politician. While socialists need to recognize the fears of workers, women, and people of color

of the reactionaries in the Republican race, they have a political responsibility to politically expose Hillary Clinton's service to the interests of Walmart and Wall Street. Socialist Alternative will not support Hillary Clinton, and we think Bernie should run all the way to November as an independent if he doesn't get the Democratic nomination.

Socialist Alternative stands for building the type of independent movement necessary not only for Sanders to win but also for ongoing struggle against the billionaire class. This necessary strategy includes political representation for working-class people against the reactionary Republicans and the corporate-backed Democrats. In doing so, we are also critical of Sanders, particularly on foreign policy ("Sanders' Foreign Policy Falls Short: Socialism Means Internationalism," 1/28/2016). DSA is silent on this issue. Genuine socialism means united international struggle and political clarity on issues facing working-class people worldwide.

We hope that this article can provoke more discussion as part of the ongoing debate in the organized left on the Sanders campaign. The widely read *Jacobin* magazine edited by Baskhar Sunkara, for example, takes a position not terribly different to the DSA.

DSA, unfortunately, largely echoes the current mood to support Sanders while failing in pushing the debate further about the nature of the Democratic Party and the need for a wider political upheaval to defeat Clinton. Socialist Alternative's approach of getting involved with the Sanders campaign to point the way forward to win by building independent social movements and calling for a new party will be proven correct by the coming tumultuous events and mass struggles in months and years to come. ✪

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Break with Capitalism

Venezuela: Major Defeat for Chavistas

Tony Saunois

In the first electoral defeat suffered by the Chavistas since Hugo Chávez was first elected president in 1998, the right-wing coalition Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD) scored a landslide victory in parliamentary elections in December 2015. Winning 7.7 million votes against 5.6 million for the coalition led by Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV), it won 112 of the 167-seat parliament – 67% of the seats. The PSUV lost in six major states comprising over 50% of the population.

This election result unfortunately vindicates the warnings consistently raised by the Committee for a Workers International, with which Socialist Alternative is in political solidarity, of the consequences of the failure to take the revolutionary process forward. Since the death of Hugo Chávez, the government led by Nicolás Maduro has seen its support undermined by worsening economic and social crises. Even before Chávez's death, these tendencies were developing. However, they have accelerated rapidly as the economic situation worsened dramatically. The failure to replace the capitalist economy with a democratic socialist system resulted in the regime being left ground between two contradictory tendencies. On the one side, it enraged the ruling class. On the other, it failed to satisfy the needs of the masses.

That allowed the capitalist ruling class to conduct a systematic campaign of economic sabotage and destabilization. Shortages of many basic foodstuffs and other commodities were partly a consequence of their actions. This was compounded by the growth of a massive state bureaucracy and corruption and mismanagement in state-controlled sectors. This saw the emergence of a "new rich" of party and state bureaucrats, along with company owners, who enriched themselves on the backs of the Chavista movement – dubbed the "boli-bourgeoisie" after the Chavistas' hero, Simón Bolívar.

These features accelerated recently due to the collapse in the price of oil – down from \$120 a barrel at the time of the global financial crash in 2008 to approximately \$30, and still falling. Inflation has been running in triple digits, the highest in the world.



Venezuelans wait in line to vote beneath a mural of deceased president Hugo Chavez.

Prospects for the coming year are even worse as the economy is anticipated to contract by another 7%. The economic chaos is reflected in the existence of three official exchange rates for the national currency – fuelling a thriving black market.

Enormous queues for everything from toilet paper to rice and beans have been the daily grind for millions of Venezuelans. The disillusionment which developed allowed the right-wing MUD coalition to score this electoral victory. It is a similar process to that which took place in Nicaragua in the 1980s and led to the eventual defeat of the Sandinistas in 1989. MUD learned from the failed attempts at a right-wing counterrevolution, which pushed the masses to the left. Its most extreme sections were reined in and the naked neoliberal policies many of them defend were not openly advocated.

The scale of the recent electoral victory has raised the hopes of right-wingers that they could immediately roll back the remaining social gains implemented by the Chavistas and directly challenge Maduro, removing him from the presidency. However, the Chavista forces are not prepared to simply pack up and go. Many have their own vested interests in maintaining their positions within the state machine.

The outgoing parliament rushed through proposals to appoint thirteen new Supreme Court judges. The court, in turn, has barred three of the newly elected deputies from taking their seats on the basis of allegations of electoral fraud. In doing so, they have

deprived MUD of its super-majority in the congress, which would allow it to challenge Maduro, dismiss government ministers, and even reduce the presidential term due to end in 2018.

However, this does not mean the end of the crisis or of the conflict between the Chavistas and the right-wing opposition. The dire economic situation and ongoing political power struggle are likely to deepen in the coming period. A clash between the Chavistas around Maduro and the right wing remains a serious prospect. MUD has already presented its legislative agenda, which includes reversing "expropriations" of private businesses and freeing its supporters from prison. Leopoldo López, the imprisoned opposition leader, has already warned that, if Maduro and his supporters "try to torpedo change by way of ignoring the result, they will have to be removed."

A crucial challenge is now posed for the Chavista movement, and to workers and young people. That is to draw the lessons from this defeat and begin to build an independent socialist party of the working class with a program to break with capitalism and introduce a democratic, socialist planned economy. The right wing in Latin America and internationally are already attempting to argue that the result represents an example of the "failure of socialism." This is not true. It is a failure of only taking partial measures encroaching on capitalist interests, while leaving their class in power socially and economically.

This is a shortened version of an article that can be read on SocialistWorld.net. ✪

Read news from the Committee for a Workers International

SocialistWorld.net



World Congress of the CWI

Kelly Bellin

Members of Socialist Alternative attended the 11th World Congress of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) in January, 2016, which brought together socialists from 34 countries including Brazil, South Africa, Britain, Pakistan, Greece, and many others. Socialist Alternative stands in political solidarity with the CWI. Around 130 socialists from all across the globe attended the week-long event to discuss the global situation and tasks for socialists and the labor movement. SocialistWorld.net has extensive coverage of the World Congress discussion, including key documents.

The congress opened with a discussion of the world situation, against the backdrop of a looming global economic crisis. Driven by the slowdown in China and the drop in oil prices, export-driven economies across the globe face economic slump and social upheaval. And working people across the globe, faced with bearing the brunt of yet another crisis, are fed up with politics as usual.

Capitalism has no way out of worldwide economic turmoil and environmental devastation. In many countries, the political establishment is in disarray and working people are looking for an alternative to fight back. The forthcoming elections in southern Ireland, for example, will likely see the election of several deputies from the Socialist Party, affiliated to the CWI.

Other sessions at the congress included the U.S. presidential elections, the situation in Europe, Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and the special oppression of women. All of these discussions demonstrated the huge role that socialists have to play and that the struggles of working people on one continent can inspire people on others.

Here in the U.S., a joyless economic recovery has even further exposed income inequality and brought enormous anger to the surface. The Bernie Sanders campaign has inspired millions to support his call for a political revolution against the billionaire class. A number of speakers noted that progressive workers in many countries are closely following the developments here.

The congress held a session on the special oppression of women under capitalism. Even though many countries have seen a shift in attitudes and a general recognition that women deserve equal rights, the living conditions of women are still marked by sexism. Today, there is an increase in the struggle for women's right to their own bodies. Mass demonstrations in India and Turkey against rape, as well as the movement for abortion rights in Ireland, are just a few examples.

This World Congress brought together socialists who play roles in incredible social movements globally: for minimum wage increases, against racism, for workers rights, to fight national oppression, and to establish our own independent parties of the 99%. There is tremendous potential to build the socialist movement all over the world! Join Socialist Alternative and build a socialist future. ✪

Struggle Over Chicago Teacher Contract Heats Up

Steve Edwards, Chicago

The ongoing fight between the Chicago Teachers Union and “Mayor 1%” Rahm Emanuel may be heading toward the second teachers’ strike in four years. What is driving the current phase of this fight is the attempt by corporate politicians to deal with the fiscal crisis caused by systematic, longterm underfunding of public-sector workers’ pension funds by state and local government through cutting benefits or, in this case making workers take an effective 7% pay cut.

Last December, CTU members voted overwhelmingly to authorize a strike unless Emanuel and the school board deliver a contract that meets the needs of teachers and that will improve public schools in the city.

Negotiations between the CTU and the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Board of Education are now effectively stalled. The most recent offer from the Board, initially described by CTU leaders as a “serious offer,” was unanimously voted down by the union’s 40-person “Big Bargaining Team” after seeing the details. Even the apparently good aspects of the offer began to smell bad when, at the eleventh hour, the Board indicated that they would not apply unless more than 2,000 teachers took early retirement within the first year of the contract.

The Board’s response to the bargaining team’s rejection of the offer was to announce that it would unilaterally cease to pay its portion of the pension payments – equivalent to 7% of each employee’s salary.

This vindictive response, correctly described by CTU president Karen Lewis as an “act of war,” was a tactical mistake on the part of newly-appointed Board Superintendent, Forrest Claypool. As a result, the union may have legal grounds for an unfair labor practice strike, in which case it would not need to wait for the normal “fact-finding” process to be complete. It is hard to see why Rahm – already facing record-low popularity due to the suppression of the video recording of the police murder of Laquan McDonald in the run-up to his reelection – would want to take on the CTU at this point in time.

The situation has stoked an already-angry mood among teachers. This is because of their experience of living with the last contract. Many of the gains that were won through strike action in 2012 ended up being unenforceable. Also, the last contract failed to prevent the closure of almost 50 schools – a massacre of public education that fell hardest on the most deprived communities and cost thousands of jobs. The membership and the bargaining team are justifiably suspicious of anything the Board is offering them.

Into the Streets

On February 4, the union called a mass rally in Chicago’s financial district. Five thousand teachers and supporters filled downtown streets. They protested not only Rahm Emanuel’s policies, but also Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner’s recent announcement that he is considering declaring the Chicago schools as “failing,” which would



The 2012 CTU strike shook Chicago and weakened Mayor Emanuel.

allow the state to take them over. This is an ominous threat by a right-wing governor who is cut from the same cloth as Wisconsin’s Scott Walker.

The union is building community outreach in preparation for serious struggle. Parents and community members joined students and teachers for “walk-in” protests – part of a national day of action against attacks on education

happening outside schools before the school day began on Wednesday, February 17. Over 200 Chicago schools participated. This type of mobilization must continue and be spread to all city schools and communities.

Other unions need to join this fight. Only by actively supporting each others’ struggles can the unions hope to stop the corporate assault. Unfortunately, AFSCME,

another major public-sector union that is threatened by Rahm’s billionaire friend Rauner, did not turn out in support of the teachers’ rally. Rank-and-file members need to build links to start to overcome this failure of leadership.

Defeating Rahm and Rauner requires an industrial and a political strategy. The CTU should actively seek to bring all Rahm’s opponents onto the streets in the coming weeks in support of workers’ rights and public education. If it comes to a strike, the CTU and Karen Lewis clearly have the capacity to galvanize the enormous anger at inequality and structural racism in Chicago into mass support and, if they win, strike a decisive blow for working people across the whole country. Such a victory would also pose sharply the question of launching a new political force of the 99% in Chicago, with the CTU playing a key role, which could truly challenge the domination of the 1% in the years ahead. ☘



Genevieve Morse, Administrative Assistant, UMass Boston

Working in a public university has given me a crash course in how to function with limited resources. For the past eight years, I have worked as an administrative assistant at University of Massachusetts Boston. As the only public four-year institution in Boston, it’s often competing with some of the biggest and wealthiest schools in the U.S.: Harvard, MIT, and Northeastern have billions of dollars at their disposal. The original idea for UMass Boston was to be a place for working-class and poor people, to serve the “urban mission.” Now, that mission has been turned into a mission for more money. UMass Boston has now been marketed as the “urban research” university. This means bringing in the maximum private dollars to fund what big business wants rather than what the community needs.

Most days, I have a sense of purpose

Workers’ Lives

How to Do More With Less: A Lesson From Public Higher Education

helping students navigate the college experience. Many of them are first-generation college students and don’t have the network needed to get through college. The reality is that, for most of us, we are operating with bare minimum staffing, many of us work two or three jobs, we pay \$6.00 a day to just come to work for parking, and environmental health and safety are always questionable – especially with low levels of asbestos flying around in the air. To top it off, we’re constantly blamed for budget shortfalls. Our raises are considered unreasonable and it’s argued that we should be willing to sacrifice during tough economic climates.

The administration of UMass Boston and the UMass system generally are some of the highest-paid public-sector employees in Massachusetts. The former president of UMass made \$500,000 a year, with a guaranteed 5% annual raise of 25,000 per year and a possible \$90,000 performance bonus. With benefits, he received over \$762,300 a year! The annual salary for a new administrative assistant, after

benefits, is \$34,000. Tell me again how we’re to blame for the new nine million dollar shortfall? The students faced further tuition hikes this past year; tuition has been raised close to 10% since I started with the university. Where is that money going? The Chancellor has his own private drivers to get to and from campus. Tell me again why we need to cut money for graduate students!

The administration tells us how we’re the front lines and the backbone of the university. Yet during our last contract negotiations, they wanted to put a cap on our earned sick time, fought us on our minimal 3% raises, and wanted to raise parking fees to \$10 a day. They want to make every cent they can off of our hard work but won’t lift a finger to help us. The unions and students have united against such poor conditions over the years. We’re determined to keep the university working for us and not for the benefit of corporations and administration bonuses. UMass works because we do! ☘

Book Review

Eugene V. Debs: *The Bending Cross*

Ginger Jentzen

From labor leader to five-time Socialist Party candidate for president, Eugene V. Debs was the voice of American workers in revolt. Like Bernie Sanders today, he inspired millions of working-class and young people looking for an alternative to corporate politics and capitalism.

Debs' life continues to offer valuable lessons about how the left can build its own strength independently of the political establishment.

Of the several biographies about Debs, the one that best illustrates his ideas and political evolution is *The Bending Cross* by Ray Ginger.

Debs' story demonstrates how working-class consciousness is shaped through the experience of struggle.

Victories are won when workers organize the strongest possible movements and fight with clear strategy and tactics. As a labor leader, Debs had to struggle against the tactics of conservative trade union leaders who undercut workers' power by seeking to appease big business and avoided strikes at all costs.

Debs himself was initially skeptical of the effectiveness of strike actions. One profound lesson came from the 1894 Pullman Strike in Chicago. Workers staged a wildcat strike, against the recommendation of the American Railway Union (ARU). Debs was sent to talk the workers down from the strike. After seeing the "company town" conditions facing Pullman workers, he instead led the ARU into backing the strike and organizing a massive nationwide

boycott of Pullman cars, with over 100,000 workers walking off the job in solidarity.

Federal officials broke the strike while the American Federation of Labor (AFL) leadership remained silent. The defeat of the strike by the power of railroad management working intimately with federal authorities led Debs to draw broader conclusions.

As Debs learned the lessons of class struggle, he argued that workers would build more power by organizing industry-wide rather than narrowly by job class. As *The Bending Cross* explains, the failures of the populist movement and the bureaucratized AFL leadership under Samuel Gompers led him to ultimately break with both. Instead, he helped form the radical union Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and later to become a leading figure in the Socialist Party.

Bernie Sanders has named Debs as one of his heroes, prompting major newspapers like *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* to write articles introducing Debs to a new generation.

But, unlike Sanders, Debs had come to recognize clearly that the Democratic Party was controlled by the capitalist class and that the key challenge was to build a working-class party independent of big business.

Debs won millions of votes but never the



presidency – he never expected to. Yet his legacy in helping build the Socialist Party, and in bringing genuine socialist ideas to millions of people, had a historic impact. It helped create the basis from which major victories could later won by the U.S. working class. The existence of an organized socialist movement was vital in the struggles to unionize workplaces, fight Jim Crow racism, and win the concessions of the New Deal.

Eugene Debs' life continues to provide a powerful example for workers and youth in the U.S. and internationally. He showed that, even in the "belly of the beast" of global capitalism, working people can organize themselves independently of big business, build their own power, and challenge the capitalist system. ☘

Hillary and the Black Vote

continued from p. 7

board of Walmart, which is one of the largest poverty-wage employers in the country and has fought tooth and nail to keep unions out of its stores. How can someone claim they are for addressing poverty but support having workers continue to work for poverty wages?

Hillary often claims she is a candidate of the people, but in the first presidential debate she openly said, "I represented Wall Street as a senator from New York," (*Politico.com*, 10/13/2015). The same Wall Street during the economic crash of 2007-08 caused economic devastation in large sections of the black working class due to the effects of the subprime loan crisis and the massive number of foreclosures that followed.

Hillary Clinton does not support the black community! From her campaign donations from private prison lobbyists and Wall Street banks like JPMorgan Chase to her support for closing public schools largely in communities of color and her continued loyalty to corporate hacks like Rahm Emanuel in Chicago, Hillary's flip-flops and pseudo-progressive rhetoric should not fool the hundred of thousands of black working and poor families that are struggling to survive under policies that she supported and attacks from a greedy billionaire class that she represents. We should see Hillary for what she truly is: a loyal servant of Wall Street and the billionaire class.

Working people and black folks need a candidate who will stand up to Wall Street and to corporate candidates like Hillary. We need a candidate for the 99%, not the billionaire class! This is why Cornell West, Killer Mike, and Erica Garner as well as many others, have come out in support of Bernie Sanders, whose program really opposes corporate interests. Beyond this election, we need to continue to develop a mass movement for black freedom, linked to the fight to end the whole racist capitalist system. And right now, we need to build a political force that truly represents the interests of black workers and all workers. ☘

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SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Issue #21 - March 2016

Ballot Initiative Launched in Minneapolis

Fight for \$15 Continues!

Eva Metz, 15 Now Minnesota

Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges won a tight 2013 race promising to fight the racial and economic disparities plaguing the city. But two years later, instead of the mayor's election slogan of "One Minneapolis," the city's political establishment presides over a "Tale of Two Cities."

The Twin Cities are home to 17 Fortune 500 companies – the highest concentration in the country – yet also the worst racial inequities in the nation. A staggering 48% of black people in Minneapolis live in poverty, compared to 13% of white people. It's become clear that wealthy corporations like US Bank and Target pull the strings at City Hall.

In the face of official inaction, workers of color have been at the forefront of struggle in Minneapolis this past year, linking the fight against police racism to demands for a \$15 an hour minimum wage, paid sick days, and fair scheduling. A \$15 an hour minimum wage is projected to result in a \$900 million transfer of wealth from rich corporations to the pockets of low-wage workers in Minneapolis *every year*, most heavily impacting communities of color.

Despite a year of escalating protests and strikes for \$15, as well as a poll showing 82% support for a \$15 an hour minimum wage, the mayor and city council majority refuse to raise wages.

That's why 15 Now is putting a \$15 ballot initiative to voters this November, to place the decision into the hands of working people and those most affected by poverty wages. "The \$15 ballot initiative is an opportunity to take the lead and fight against the racial and economic disparities tearing our city apart,"

said Claire Thiele, a low-wage worker and 15 Now volunteer. "If the Council won't act, we will."

A Fight for Racial Justice

Our fight is greatly strengthened by our partnerships with Neighborhoods Organizing for Change (NOC), an organization rooted in the predominantly black North Minneapolis community, and Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL), an organization dedicated to organizing low-wage workers. NOC and CTUL have led the way in mobilizing hundreds of low-wage workers to energetic mass actions and strikes for \$15 and a wider workers' rights, racial equity agenda.

The local chapters of Black Lives Matter and the NAACP, as well as the Minnesota Nurses Association, are also backing 15 Now's ballot initiative, and more unions appear set to endorse. By tapping into widespread popular anger at City Hall, the fight for \$15 is emerging as a key struggle against both racial and economic inequality in Minneapolis.

Socialist Alternative led the way in popularizing the demand for \$15 in Minneapolis through our close race for City Council in 2013. That year in Seattle, where Kshama Sawant won international attention as an outspoken socialist elected to a major city council, we launched 15 Now and led the fight to make Seattle the first big city to pass \$15 in June 2014.

Here in Minneapolis, we built on the momentum from our election successes to launch 15 Now in March 2014. While virtually no labor unions or big community groups initially backed \$15, by the summer of 2015, through tenacious organizing, we'd won over

important allies and most of the local labor movement.

Business Opposition

Despite broad support, a victory for \$15 will be an uphill fight. To understand the challenges we'll face, we can look to lessons from #MPLSWorks, which formed last spring around a wider slate of demands for workers' rights. The broad coalition included the most powerful labor and community nonprofits, groups that had been instrumental in electing the mayor and many city council members.

15 Now was fully involved in the #MPLSWorks effort to win sick days, fair scheduling, and an end to wage theft, but we argued against over-reliance on an insider lobbying strategy. Our warnings were borne out when the mayor retreated following the firestorm of opposition unleashed by big business.

As Socialist Alternative and 15 Now argued from the start, workers can't rely on politicians who promise to support workers' rights while also promising to promote business interests. Going forward, instead of orienting our fight toward lobbying City Hall, we aim to build a powerful, independent movement that can challenge the corporate establishment head-on.

Big businesses will unleash floods of money to protect their profits and use the corporate media to propagate doomsday claims that \$15 would tank the economy and destroy jobs. To win, we must transform the latent support for \$15 into a broad, fighting movement.

We're building up a massive base of volunteers to prepare a signature collection campaign this spring to get \$15 on the ballot. We'll organize big rallies and protests

Retail Cleaners Strike Demands \$15



Culminating a week of action for workers' rights, nonunion contract workers who clean Macy's in Minneapolis went on strike February 17, demanding union rights, fair wages, and a \$15 an hour minimum wage. Organized by the Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL), which is backing 15 Now's ballot initiative, the strike is part of a planned escalation against both low-wage employers and city officials in Minneapolis. ✪

targeting City Hall and low-wage employers, linking up with low-wage worker strikes for a \$15 minimum wage. Through deep community outreach, we can counter the lies and fear tactics wielded by big business. ✪