

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



Issue #26 - September 2016



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Join the Socialists

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WHAT WE STAND FOR

Fighting for the 99%

- ✦ Raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour, as a step toward a living wage for all.
- ✦ Free, high quality public education for all from pre-school through college. Full funding for schools to dramatically lower student-teacher 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 towards fully socialized medicine.
- ✦ 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.
- ✦ Create living-wage union jobs for all the unemployed through public works programs to develop mass transit, renewable energy, infrastructure, healthcare, education, and affordable housing.
- ✦ For rent control combined with massive public investment in affordable housing.
- ✦ A guaranteed decent pension for all. No cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid!
- ✦ 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.
- ✦ Break the power of Wall Street! For public ownership and democratic control of the major banks.
- ✦ 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. Massive public investment in renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies to rapidly replace fossil fuels.
- ✦ A major expansion of public transportation to provide low fare, high-speed, and accessible transit.
- ✦ Democratic public ownership of the big energy companies, retooling them for socially necessary green production. A "Just Transition" for all workers in polluting industries with guaranteed re-training and new living-wage jobs.

Equal Rights for All

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

- ✦ Defend immigrant rights! Immediate, unconditional legalization and equal rights for all undocumented immigrants.
- ✦ 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. At least 12 weeks of paid family leave for all. For universal, high quality, affordable and publicly run child care.
- ✦ Fight discrimination and, violence against the LGBTQ community, and all forms of homophobia and transphobia.

Money for Jobs and Education, Not War

- ✦ End the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. Bring all the troops home now!
- ✦ Slash the military budget. No drones. Shut down Guantanamo.
- ✦ Repeal the Patriot Act, 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 environmental, civil rights, and women's campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the corporate parties.
- ✦ Unions and other 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 failed system. No to 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

Gabe Shelton-Jenck Student and Restaurant Worker Seattle, WA

For most of my life, I believed in many of the same things as socialists without being one myself. I have known that workers need rights, that the environment needs protection, that college is too expensive, that the wealth gap is wrong, and that oppression of all forms must be fought whether it is sexism, racism, homophobia, or transphobia. Perhaps my awareness came from growing up queer in a very conservative region with a public school teacher mother. I saw how my mom's job was always under attack from the right, but also how, through organized labor, they managed to win material victories.

Moving to Seattle from a small town made real many issues I had only read about beforehand. I saw how those issues were built into the system we live in. In Seattle, as in many major cities, the gap between the 1% and the 99% is highly visible. Thousands of homeless folks sleep, and starve, on the streets among luxury high rise condos. I go to Seattle Central College where many students are forced to take out crushing loans to pay for community college. Just a few blocks down the same street at Seattle University, an expensive private college, a few students are paying full tuition completely out of pocket. This disparity, I came to realize, was not merely the fault of right-wing politicians, but rather the system of capitalism itself which is set up to

benefit the 1% and the massive corporations, and divide the rest of us.

At first I believed that the Democrats were the best way to fight the world's problems. But, through following city politics and the Bernie Sanders campaign, I saw how the Democratic Party is too indebted to big business and too dedicated maintaining their establishment to take the lead on real change. In fact, it was at a Bernie rally that I first met a Socialist Alternative organizer and saw Kshama Sawant speak. Before, I felt like socialism was only a vague ideal and that third parties couldn't get anything done. The truth, however, is that socialism is a viable alternative to capitalism and millions of people are ready for it. Now, the anti-slumlord law, and recently the fight for paid family leave have shown me when the people unite they can win real victories over big business.

Socialist Alternative is leading the charge on these issues, overcoming roadblocks set by Democrats. I am a socialist because socialism is a future worth fighting for, and because when we fight, we win! ✦



Time To Care - For Paid Parental and Family Leave in Seattle

Kailyn Nicholson

Despite being the most powerful economy in the world, the U.S. is one of only four countries that does not mandate some form of paid parental and family leave. On July 30, over 200 people packed Seattle's City Hall to kick off a movement to win paid family and parental leave. Those in attendance represent a potential coalition of state and city unions, women's organizations, LGBTQ activists, social justice organizations, faith groups, and working people. The rally was hosted by Seattle's socialist City Councilmember Kshama Sawant and the head of the King County Labor Council, Nicole Grant, who believe we can win paid family and parental leave in Seattle.

Paid family leave provides indispensable support and stability to working class families during some of the most important and trying periods of life, such as the birth of a new child or the illness of a parent or spouse. It is crucial to people who are underemployed and working in low paying jobs - particularly women, people of color, and LGBTQ people. Adequate paid leave increases long-term mental and

physical health of both children and parents. According to the Seattle Women's Commission, it is the single most effective policy the City of Seattle can implement to close the gender pay gap!

The emerging coalition plans to draft legislation for a family and parental leave policy that includes all workers in the city of Seattle. Unlike other cities, we hope to place the burden of funding on Seattle's big businesses which are currently making record profits. We do not want to put the cost on working families that are already struggling to make ends meet.

The most important task facing the coalition is to build a grassroots movement - because big business and their politicians will come up with excuses for opposing it. Just last fall, paid parental leave for city employees was shockingly voted down by the Seattle City Council. Now, employees of the City of Seattle are fighting for the strongest possible paid family and parental leave in their new contract. We stand with them in their struggle. The strength of our movement will determine our ability to prevent future betrayals. Join us in fighting for the right of all workers to care for their families! ✦

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Trump in Trouble

Political Polarization Sharpens

Tom Crean

The presidential election campaign is heading into its final phase now that the Democratic and Republican conventions are over. The result was the anointing of the two most unpopular major party nominees in living memory although Trump is right now definitely winning the unpopularity competition. Progressive workers, women, black people, Muslims and immigrants are legitimately afraid about what an unhinged Trump presidency would mean. But millions of people are also sickened by the choice at the top which is contributing to significant support for both Jill Stein of the Greens and Gary Johnson of the Libertarians.

This presidential cycle has witnessed an upheaval against the political establishment of both parties not seen in decades. In particular there was the mass support for Bernie Sanders' call for a "political revolution against the billionaire class" fueled by pent-up anger at unprecedented inequality and the neo-liberal attacks against working people over the past 30 years. The more than \$200 million raised by his campaign from ordinary people proved once and for all the potential for a new political force representing the 99% independent of corporate control.

Donald Trump's campaign in a distorted way has also channeled anti-establishment and working class anger but is using that to further a nationalist and racist right populist agenda which is in reality deeply hostile to the interests of working people and the oppressed.

Trump and the Ghost of Nixon

At the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Trump focused on a "law and order" message playing on fears of racial strife and terrorism, consciously modeled on the odious Richard Nixon. But he also demagogically talked of standing up for the "forgotten men and women" in working class communities devastated by the loss of good paying industrial jobs. Since then he has come out in favor of changes to the tax code that would represent a further shift of wealth to the 0.01% showing how hollow the "I feel your pain" rhetoric really is.

The liberal media have focused on Trump's white working-class supporters as motivated centrally by "racial insecurity" caused in part by the country's changing demographics. It is undoubtedly true that xenophobia is a key part of Trump's appeal for a section of the Republican base. But the frequently crude attempts to dismiss the white working-class as one reactionary mass are fundamentally



photo credit: Eli Smith
Socialist Alternative on the streets of Philadelphia during the DNC.

wrong.

For one thing a large section of the white working class rejects Trump, for various reasons including being repelled by his nauseating misogyny, anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant tirades or simply because they don't believe a billionaire blowhard actually has their interests at heart. Many of the poorest white Americans are completely alienated from the political process and will not vote. And of those inclined to support Trump there is more than one motivation. Besides those actually attracted to the xenophobia there are many looking to punish the establishment of which Hillary is such a consummate representative.

There is a reason why Bernie Sanders crushed Donald Trump in every poll for months and that is because a section of the people prepared to consider Trump, given a choice, would have opted for a clear pro-working class and anti-racist candidate. This shows the danger of trying to oppose right populism with a candidate of the status quo like Clinton. There should be no illusion on this score: whether Trump wins or loses, a right-wing force is emerging in the US which can only be defeated by a mass movement of working people and the oppressed.

The Establishment Goes After Trump

In the weeks since the convention, we have seen a full court press in large parts of the corporate media to damage Trump. Significant sections of the ruling elite have their own reasons for going after him. First

of all they are not happy with Trump's isolationist position in foreign affairs including his opposition to trade deals or talk of pulling back from NATO commitments. Secondly they have concluded that Trump is incapable of "pivoting" after the primaries to be more "presidential". They see his attacks on one group after another and his completely unscripted and undisciplined approach as potentially seriously damaging the institution of the presidency which they value greatly and further undermining the credibility of the political system. They worry – not without reason – that a President Trump could unleash civil unrest on a scale not seen since the 60s and 70s.

Of course Trump still has his ruling class backers but it is striking how wide the elite coalition against him has become: Republican generals and intelligence agents as well as a slew of prominent Republican political operatives and a number of prominent Republican capitalists like Meg Whitman, the CEO of Hewlett Packard, who says she's supporting Clinton. Even reactionary figures like the Koch brothers who have played a key role in bankrolling the right in the last period are steering clear of Trump. More Republican elected officials might join this chorus if it wasn't for the fear of losing their own jobs due to the wrath of Trump's supporters.

As long as Hillary, clearly now the favored candidate of Wall Street and the corporate elite, can keep the focus on him her position strengthens. The danger for Hillary is if the focus returns to her. After the FBI report on her use of a private email server during her time as Secretary of State – which confirmed

that she had been less than truthful in her public explanations – the polls showed her neck and neck with Trump.

It is also open to question what Clinton's message is besides "stop Trump". At the convention she and her surrogates presented an argument about the threat of Trump as a "strongman" ruler which demanded an alliance of left and right to stop him at all costs. But she also talked about inequality and reigning in Wall Street to appeal to Sanders supporters. In reality the Democrats were forced in their platform to make some verbal concessions to the Sanders base. But none of that is binding on the Democrats if they win and there is no guarantee how far Hillary will go to even pretend to be "left" in the remainder of this campaign. The ruling class would like a President Clinton who has made as few promises as possible but this is also a dangerous approach in dealing with Trump who is clearly prepared to make a lot of promises.

The DNC Walkout

From the start of Bernie Sanders' historic campaign, Socialist Alternative argued that he should have run as an independent. By accepting the framework of the rigged Democratic primary system, he set the stage for the betrayal of the political revolution after likely losing. In the end he tragically gave his fulsome endorsement to Hillary Clinton, who represents Walmart and Wall Street. But if Sanders was standing all the way to November there would be the potential for a left vote on a historical scale.

But despite the serious limitations of Sanders' campaign, millions got an education in how the political system and particularly the Democrats really work. Wikileaks only confirmed what folks already knew, that the Democratic National Committee, under Debbie Wasserman Schultz, was in reality an extension of Hillary's campaign. The clear conclusion was that the Democratic establishment were prepared to go all out to prevent Sanders winning. Why? Because as a party which serves the interests of corporate America they are opposed to the pro-working class program which Bernie ran on including single payer healthcare, a \$15 minimum wage and opposition to the Trans Pacific Partnership trade deal. If the ruling elite seem distressed about the prospect of a President Trump that is nothing compared to how they would have reacted to the prospect of a President Bernie who in his own words intended to act as "the organizer in chief".

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Minneapolis City Council Blocks \$15

Vote Theft Is Wage Theft!

Ginger Jentzen

On August 3, the Minneapolis City Council faced a room of over 100 community members and workers who support bringing a \$15 minimum wage to voters in Minneapolis on the November ballot. Despite nearly 20,000 signatures supporting \$15 on the ballot, the City Council needed to give final approval to bring the Charter amendment to voters. Instead, the Council blocked \$15 from the ballot, and passed a non-binding, general proposal to request city staff look into raising wages. This staff directive is preferred by business because it's without a clear timeline, doesn't commit the Council to pass an ordinance to raise wages, didn't include \$15, and pushed off any possible action by the Council to mid-2017, when council members will be gearing up for re-election.

But the Council wasn't able to self-congratulate on taking a meagre step toward raising wages when the packed room clearly rejected the proposal by shutting down the meeting and chanting "Vote Theft is Wage Theft" and "Let the People Vote!".

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. \$15 an hour would impact over 100,000 workers, predominantly women and workers of color, and put almost a billion dollars a year into the hands of working people.

The Democratic Party led Council made politically motivated arguments to avoid the question of \$15. Council members hid behind small business, and in one case, a council member compared \$15/hr to the "Brexit" referendum to illustrate that ordinary workers can't be trusted to make important decisions on the economy. It exposed how the Democratic Party gives lip service to progressive causes, but in the end defends the interests of big business. Like with Bernie Sanders' campaign, the Democratic Party worked overtime to block \$15/hour. It shows we need to build a party that is



15 Now protesters occupy Minneapolis City Council Chamber, August 3, 2016.

accountable to and built by the 99%, that fights unapologetically for the interests of ordinary people.

City Attorney Susan Segal gave cover to the Council's vote with a legal opinion stating the minimum wage isn't one of the city's core functions and shouldn't be in the charter. This same City Attorney raised an obscure legal argument in 2012 to by-pass a charter provision stating stadium subsidies require approval by referendum. When big business money was on the line, the attorney sought to work-around the charter, but if put to the people, polls showed that public funding for the stadium would likely have lost (*Star Tribune*, 3/12/12). Faced with a \$15 minimum wage, the City Attorney encouraged the Council to defend poverty pay.

Let the People Vote! Workers Bring Lawsuit

Now, low-wage workers are suing the city, demanding the courts to overturn the Council's decision and put \$15 on the November ballot. As Tyler Vasseur, a minimum wage worker at Jimmy John's and plaintiff in the lawsuit, said: "Mayor Hodges and many of you on the Council were voted in to fight this city's worst-in-the-nation racial inequities. Yet in the two years you have been here, you have done little to address these problems. You have done nothing to address poverty wages." The court case would need to be settled by August 26th to ensure the referendum appears on the November ballot.

The "\$15 for Minneapolis" legal team of local and national attorneys made the

case publicly that increasing the wage fits within the "general welfare powers" of the city's charter. When it comes to the minimum wage, big business leverages its power through backroom deals and legal maneuvering rather than come out against a popular proposal like \$15 an hour. The City Attorney's legal opinion gave City Hall clearance to divert the power from the majority in society, that would benefit from higher pay in working class communities.

History shows that mass movements drive social change. While the courts serve the interests of the ruling elite they can be forced by mass pressure to back down. In Minneapolis, 15 Now Minnesota is embarking on a massive campaign to organize working people to pressure the court case.

Winning \$15 in Minneapolis

Workers want to vote for \$15, not vague promises from the City Council. Workers want to take their case to those directly affected by poverty wages, not plead in the back rooms of City Hall with the same big business representatives who make record profits at the expense of ordinary people. 20,000 people who signed the petition to put \$15/hour on the ballot, and the over 1,000 who donated to the campaign, confirmed what workers know, that \$15 an hour is popular and possible across the country.

We're taking on the Democratic Party establishment and big business; support our campaign by visiting Votefor15MN.org today! 🗳️

Inside the DNC Walkouts

Led by delegates from Washington State and California, 700 delegates walked out of the DNC. Pam Keeley, a Bernie delegate and organizer of the walkouts, and Calvin Priest explain what went into the walkouts and the plans to take #DemExit into a new party of the 99%.



Read more at SocialistAlternative.org and CounterPunch.org.

MOVEMENTFORTHE99%

Seattle's socialist City Councilmember Kshama Sawant, and Socialist Alternative, launched Movement4Bernie last December. We campaigned for Bernie on an independent basis, organizing nationwide MarchForBernie events that drew thousands into the streets, community forums to educate our neighbors and co-workers, and student clubs to mobilize young people for the political revolution. While doing our part to help Bernie win, from the beginning we warned that the rigged Democratic Party primary was hostile terrain for any candidate challenging corporate interests.

Linked to these mobilizations, we launched a petition calling on Sanders to continue running independently if he was blocked in the (un)Democratic primaries, and launch a new party for the 99%. Nearly 125,000 people signed onto our call! Unfortunately, Bernie did not choose this path. It's now time to take our movement beyond Bernie.

Kshama Sawant
Seattle City Councilmember



🐦 @cmKshama

📘 facebook.com/cmKshama

The powerful protests at the DNC and the walkout of hundreds of Bernie delegates – which Movement4Bernie played an important role in – showed the anger at the two party system. Alienation with the entire political establishment is at record highs. Millions are filled with fresh confidence that another world is possible and that the time is ripe for building a new mass party of the 99%. The rapid rise in support for Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein, especially since the walkout at the DNC, gives a glimpse of the huge openings for progressive movements.

"That's why we changed our name from "Movement4Bernie" to "Movement for the 99%." In dozens of cities across the country, we organized a series of "Beyond Bernie" community forums to announce this transition and our endorsement of Green Party candidate Jill Stein's presidential campaign. And we will continue our efforts to build support for independent social movements that can provide the foundation for a new party of the 99%.

"Please donate \$25, \$50, or \$100 today to help build the Movement for the 99%! M99 activists will be helping ongoing campaigns that hem to Bernie's platform, like the fight for \$15 being waged by 15 Now in Minneapolis against the entire corporate establishment.

Visit <http://movement99.org/> 🗳️

A Call to Action

Socialist Students Launched Nation Wide



A STUDENT MOVEMENT FOR THE 99%

www.SocialistStudents.net
facebook.com/SocialistStudentsUSA

Elan Axelbank,
Socialist Students Organizing Committee

Starting with Occupy Wall St. five years ago, and moving through the Fight for \$15, Black Lives Matter, and Bernie Sanders, social movements are changing the scope of American politics. And at every turn, young people are at the forefront.

Youth Radicalization

If you're 20 years old like me, you were 12 when the Great Recession of 2008 happened. The worst economic recession since the Great Depression 85 years ago, the Great Recession rocked working and middle class families. My generation, in our formative political years, watched our parents get laid off, and we watched our friends' parents get laid off. Families lost their homes and couldn't pay back debt and mortgage.

We are called "the generation of the over-educated barista" because the amount of good-paying jobs plummeted after the 2008 recession and many of us are stuck in low-wage jobs with no way out in sight.

Many of us placed hope in Obama in 2008 only to see him campaign on the same promise of "hope and change" in 2012 after not delivering much of either in his first four years. If we were old enough many of us even voted for him in 2012 despite being disappointed because we sure as hell didn't want Mitt Romney the Republican.

Not much has changed under the first Black president. Racism still runs rampant, we still have troops in the Middle East, catastrophic climate change is underway, and more and more wealth is being concentrated in the hands of a few rich capitalists, while the rest of us are figuring out how to pay off our student loans.

So it shouldn't be a surprise that in many places the Black Lives Matter movement has been led by young Black women, or that the Fight for \$15 was led mainly by young fast food workers, or that more young people, ages 18-29, voted for Bernie Sanders and his call for "a political revolution against the billionaire class" in the primaries than Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump combined!

Nor should it be a surprise that recent polls have consistently showed that young people are more favorable to a socialist society than a capitalist one.

Socialist Students

From campaigns for fossil fuel divestment, to campaigns against sexual assault on campus, to the #MillionStudentMarch for



Million Student March day of action, November 2015.

free college last year, to Black Lives Matter on campuses, the student movement is growing stronger every day and student members of Socialist Alternative have been there every step of the way.

Last school year, student members of Socialist Alternative initiated and led the organizing of the two massive #MillionStudentMarch national days of action against student debt and racism. We demanded tuition-free public college, cancellation of all student debt, a \$15 minimum wage for all campus workers, and the divestment from private prisons by all colleges and universities. Last November, we had over 15,000 students in the streets at 110 college campuses across the country.

It is time for all students and young people who want to fight for serious reforms - yet see that economic and social justice cannot be achieved without fundamental system change, and that the connection all forms of oppression have to each other is capitalism - to come together.

Therefore, student members of Socialist Alternative are officially launching Socialist Students, a nationwide initiative to help build the socialist movement in schools and on campuses across the country.

What Will Socialist Students Do?

Socialist Students will hold regular meetings on campuses across the country (SocialistStudents.net to find the group nearest you). We will have political discussions on all sorts of topics ranging from current events, to socialist history and theory, to Black and LGBTQ liberation, the limits of reform under capitalism, and most importantly how to put these into practice building the socialist movement

on our campuses.

We intend to hold debates on campuses across the country with chapters of College Democrats and College Republicans as well as Libertarians on who to support this Presidential election. Socialist Students will argue the case for students and progressives to support Jill Stein in order to continue the political revolution against the billionaire class that Bernie Sanders started. We want to explain to our fellow students why we do not see the corporate-controlled Democratic Party as a vehicle for left-wing change, and why we think that continuing to support the "lesser evil" year after year is a dead end.

We will also help organize anti-Trump protests and demonstrations but put forward to our fellow students that, despite what the corporate media may tell us, supporting Hillary Clinton and the Democrats is not the way to stop the right populist threat!

Join Socialist Alternative! Build Socialist Students!

The American Dream is supposed to guarantee that, as long as you work hard, each generation will have a higher standard of living than our parents. But our experience is telling us otherwise.

If you think that what we need instead is a democratic socialist society, where the economy is democratically planned by the majority, where resources should be used to meet human need, not to satisfy the greed of a tiny minority, then join Socialist Alternative. If you want to help spread these ideas to other students, join us as well in building Socialist Students on campuses across the country. The socialist movement isn't going to build itself. Get involved today! 🗳️

Socialist Alternative and the International Student Movement

There are numerous instances throughout history – the near-revolution in France in 1968, the Civil Rights and antiwar movements in the U.S. in the 60's, and more – in which students played a crucial role in kickstarting or catalyzing mass movements. The same is true of recent times as well. In South Africa just last year, the student-led #Fees-MustFall movement successfully stopped major tuition hikes at several universities across the country. The student-initiated Nuit Debout movement in France this past Spring helped lay the basis for a nationwide movement against anti-labor legislation, involving mass demonstrations and strikes.

Socialist Students in the US will link up with socialist youth groups internationally including Socialist Students in Britain and Canada, as well as an organization in Belgium called Active Left Students. In Britain, Socialist Students has campaigned on a range of issues including housing, anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-war, refugees, and tuition fees. In the past few months, they have played an important role building the movement to defend Jeremy Corbyn, the left-wing leader of the Labour Party from the party's corporate-oriented right wing, and also in campaigning among students for a left-wing leave vote on the EU referendum.

Students in the U.S. are now coming out to protests in higher numbers than any year since 1967. There is a clear reemergence of the U.S. student movement and Socialist Students can be a place where all students who see the need for fundamental system change can come together to organize and further their political education. Capitalism is international, so socialism and the socialist movement must be as well, and we are proud to stand in solidarity with Socialist Students and other left student groups around the world. 🗳️



The Case for Socialism

Ty Moore

Seemingly out of nowhere, over the last few years socialist ideas swept in from the ignored margins of American politics to compete for center stage. The 2008 economic crisis opened a fresh debate on socialism and capitalism, but it was the electrifying presidential campaign of self-described democratic socialist Bernie Sanders that brought socialism back into the mainstream debate.

But what does socialism mean? Merriam-Webster reported “socialism” was their most searched word in 2015, spiking 169% and becoming the dictionary’s 7th most searched word ever. This points to the rising interest as well as widespread confusion surrounding socialist ideas.

What is Socialism?

The defenders of capitalism attempt to paint socialism as a utopian schema dreamed up by self-appointed intellectuals who would dogmatically impose their grey, lifeless system on the unwilling masses. For many who associate socialism with the Stalinist legacy or the sellout social democratic parties in Europe, there is an understandable desire to abandon the old ideas and start fresh.

Yet any serious look at the history of working people’s struggles reveals a fundamentally different story.

Workers and oppressed people worldwide have repeatedly fought back to improve their conditions and liberate themselves. Everywhere, a central feature of the class struggle is a battle of ideas. The ruling minority attempt to shroud their exploitation through lies and distractions. Meanwhile, the exploited majority attempt to clear the fog and discover the real mechanics of the system which oppresses them, and what an alternative system might look like.

Arising organically from the experience of the class struggle, the genuine ideas of Marxism initially worked out nearly 170 years ago are a living body of ideas continuously developed by successive generations of class fighters. The history of capitalism reveals how social movements repeatedly face similar challenges and similar debates, and how the most far-thinking fighters draw similar conclusions. Marxist theory and practice flows from careful study of these international and historical experiences and from rigorous debates within these living struggles.

Marxism is an attempt to scientifically trace out the actual dynamics of global capitalism and the class struggle. Only through a lucid understanding of social processes, cleared of the fog

of capitalist propaganda, can workers and the oppressed map out a strategy and tactics to defeat big business and transform society.

Genuine socialist theory is therefore a sort of best practices guide to winning short-term struggles, a transitional method of linking today’s movements to a broader global strategy to end capitalism, and a vision of a future society based on the experience of workers self-organization in struggle.

Workers Democracy

The 2016 elections show more clearly than ever that democracy under capitalism is completely rigged against working people. Wall Street and the big corporations finance both parties, so whether the Democrats or Republicans win, the 99% loses. Despite the wave of anti-establishment anger destabilizing both parties, the resulting “choice” between Clinton and Trump – the two most hated candidates in modern history – underscores that unless working people build our own political party, corporate and right-wing forces will continue to dominate.

Yet corporate domination of our political system is just an extension of capitalist control over our economy. Consider the awesome power concentrated in the hands of the few owners of the big corporations. Five companies dominate the U.S. media industry. A handful of corporations like Google, Apple, and Facebook control the information age industries.

The energy industry is monopolized by several fossil fuel profiteers who effectively prevent a shift to a renewable energy economy and better mass transit.

The overriding goal of these corporations is not to produce quality news programs, wider information access, or a sustainable energy policy; their goal is to maximize profits. Achieving this requires a relentless drive to cut costs and increase market share at the expense of all other considerations.

Apologists for capitalism reduce the problem of corporate political domination of society to corrupt or greedy political leaders, or to the lack of sufficient regulations. Social democrats like Bernie Sanders argue that it is possible for ordinary people to take control of government and use it to tame and control the capitalist class through regulation, higher taxation, and more generous social programs.

We welcome every positive reform under capitalism and argue for a mass party of the 99% which alongside a fighting labor movement could win significant gains for working people. But as long as the capitalist class remains economically dominant such reforms will never be

SOCIALISM RISING

permanent and will be undermined at every opportunity. Furthermore there is no way to permanently end the boom and bust cycle of capitalism and the vicious day to day exploitation of workers without taking power out of their hands both here and internationally.

Socialists argue that only by placing the big banks and corporations into public ownership, under workers democratic control, can a genuine democracy of, by, and for the 99% be achieved.

Instead of elections every two or four years determining which capitalist party runs things, a socialist government would be composed of elected representatives from workplace, community, and student councils. Every workplace, university, and institution would be run through elected workplace and community councils. Representatives could be immediately recalled and would be paid no more than those they represent.

In this way, the profit motive would no longer dominate society and the warped priorities of the market could be replaced with a global economic plan. All political and economic decisions could be made democratically, with social and environmental priorities determining investments, wages and laws.

Ending Poverty and Inequality

After the onset of the global economic crisis, capitalist politicians everywhere demanded working people tighten their belts while they continued to rake in record profits. As Bernie Sanders continually pointed out, virtually all the gains of the post-2008 economic recovery have gone to the top 1% while wages and conditions for most workers have continued to worsen.

We face a distribution crisis, not a scarcity crisis. There are more than enough resources to ensure a decent life for all, but a tiny elite hoard the wealth or waste it in nonproductive speculative investments. As the leaked Panama Papers revealed, big business and the wealthy elite hide trillions in tax havens, looting national treasuries of billions in lost revenue.

Socialists argue for taking the top 500 corporations and financial institutions into public ownership and using their wealth to fund a massive green jobs program. On this basis, all

those unemployed and underemployed could be offered full time jobs at living wages on projects addressing vital social needs.

Tens of thousands of new teachers could be hired and crumbling schools rebuilt. Free, quality health care could be extended to everyone, unhindered by the rapacious insurance companies. Huge investments in clean energy infrastructure, including the dramatic expansion of mass transit, could accompany the phase-out of fossil fuel reliance. Free, quality child care, elder care, and programs serving the disabled could be established.

On this basis, poverty could be rapidly wiped out, alongside the crime and social problems caused by widespread economic desperation.

Fighting Oppression

Racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression, cannot be understood – or fought – in isolation from capitalism as a whole. Despite this, unfortunately, most movement leaders fail to link anti-oppression struggles to a unifying socialist vision.

As Malcolm X argued, “you can’t have capitalism without racism”. If the multiracial American working class became conscious of its collective interests, and potential power, the rule of the 1% could be rapidly broken up.

That’s why big business continues to fund right-wing Republicans, if it furthers their divide-and-conquer agenda. That’s also why the corporate media amplifies the voices of bigots and perpetuates racial and gender stereotypes.

There are also narrow economic incentives to maintain structural inequalities. Sexist ideas allow businesses to pay women just 73 cents to every dollar men make and to deny proper maternity and paternity benefits. Racism justifies maintaining 12 million undocumented immigrants as a terrorized, super-exploited underclass and the mass incarceration fueling the prison-industrial complex.

A socialist transformation of society wouldn’t automatically erase deeply ingrained prejudices, but it would remove the most significant root cause. With workplaces under public ownership and democratic control, there would be no capitalist class with an interest in dividing workers from one another.

SOCIALISM IS WINNING



A socialist system would invest in communities of color traditionally starved of quality schools, good jobs, decent housing, and social services. Homophobic laws would be removed. Women could be guaranteed equal pay for equal work, free quality child care, paid maternity leave, and other necessities. The mass media, run democratically under worker/community control, could be transformed into a powerful tool for undermining prejudice.

Sustainable World

Capitalism now literally threatens our existence as a species. The scientific community is unanimous that unless we drastically reduce consumption of fossil fuels in the next few years, catastrophic climate change is inevitable. Already the impact is being felt. Extreme weather is on the rise. Droughts are causing crop failures across the world, driving up food prices, and pushing millions more into hunger.

Yet both political parties are promoting more drilling for oil, more fracking and more coal usage. No wonder, since capitalist politicians from both parties rely on the support of the huge energy corporations for their political careers. On a global scale, the cooperation needed to address the crisis is blocked by capitalist competition between nations. Instead, endless wars for control over global energy reserves have destroyed the Middle East and created the biggest refugee crisis in human history.

Numerous studies show it is technically possible for a combination of wind, solar, tidal, and hydro power to meet world energy needs. With a democratically planned socialist economy, and the profit motive removed from global investment decisions, this transition could be achieved.

Capitalism is plunging the globe into an ever deepening spiral of inequality, environmental destruction, and violent conflict. If working people fail to build a powerful left, socialist movement to offer a way out, right-wing forces will tap into the anger and desperation to fill the political vacuum. On the other hand, with openness to socialist ideas rapidly rising, the opportunities to build a mass movement capable of fundamentally transforming society is rapidly unfolding. Let's seize the time! ☘

Fight Capitalism, Join the Socialists

Cora Bergantinos

We live in exciting times. A new wave of struggle is opening up and the 99% is reestablishing its voice. Like our forebears in the 60s we are shaping the political landscape; we are making history. From OWS to the fight for \$15 and Black Lives Matter there is a new mood. Many are rejecting politics as usual and are determined to fight for an alternative. This culminated in the last year with the electrifying presidential campaign of self-described democratic socialist Bernie Sanders that brought socialism back into the mainstream debate. And now there are many, especially young people, that realize we need an alternative to capitalism and consider themselves socialist.

Building A Party of the 99%

The broad shift to the left in social and political attitudes in society over the past period has forced issues like racial and economic equality, environmental destruction, tuition free college and breaking up the big banks onto the agenda. This demonstrates our strength when organized, but to ensure that working people win we need fighting unions and sustained movements that don't demobilize during election season because its not "convenient" for the Democrats.

A new broad party of the 99% is desperately needed that not only runs progressive candidates but offers a common space where all the struggles of working people, women, black people, LGBTQ people can join forces and sustain the fight on a day to day basis. Elections and elected positions won't be the end goal but rather tools to raise

the demands of working people.

Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant ran for a city council seat in Seattle in 2013 to put these ideas into practice. As a working class candidate independent of the two major parties she was able to win not once but twice. Immediately after her first victory we used her position to launch an independent grassroots campaign, 15Now, with the support of unions, community organizations and activists. We won the first city-wide \$15 an hour minimum wage six months after she was elected and the demand spread all across the country.

Imagine this on a big scale. Imagine BLM, the youth for tuition free college, environmental activists, the unions fighting for decent jobs and community organizations for affordable housing, all joining forces on a national level with a common voice, in a common party of the 99%. The strength of our voice will be multiplied exponentially!

Such a tool in the hands of working people will elevate our political revolution to the next level where candidates and movements will be one. New formations of that kind are arising in other countries around the world and in U.S. the political environment has not been more ripe for such a step in a long time.

The Role of Socialists

But for Socialist Alternative winning reforms is not the end of the road. For many, including Bernie Sanders, socialism means to reform capitalism. We believe in fighting for all possible advances under capitalism, but to win real, lasting change we need a fundamental social transformation. We see

the struggles for immediate reform not as the end goal but first and foremost as a way to increase our confidence to fight for more.

Socialists see the working class as the key force in the fight to transform society because of its social power based on its numbers and its ability to shut down the economic engine of capitalism through strikes. But for the working class to win it must champion the fight of all the oppressed against injustice and actively work to cut across divisions based on race, gender or country of origin. Socialists seek to build a bridge from the day to day struggles to an understanding of the need for socialism. That broad vision will allow us to turn apparently simple demands into the beginning of a broad movement that can transform society.

Through history this has been a key strategy galvanizing the struggles of working people across the world. Today socialist ideas are equally important. The existing political vacuum will be filled by right-wing populism if the left can't provide an alternative. A party of the 99% can cut across this development but if it falls in the trap of trying to reform the system piecemeal it will ultimately reach a dead end.

We need a well-organized and consciously socialist wing inside this party that connects the struggles of the present to the need for fundamental change. And that's the next challenge of Socialist Alternative, to develop into a party of several thousands that can become this socialist wing, ensuring not only the survival but the victory of the U.S. party of the 99%. If you want to be part this join us today. ☘

Rise Up: The Struggle to End Racism and Capitalism

Eljeer Hawkins

As of the start of July, 136 black people have been killed by police in 2016, (*The Guardian*, 7/7/2016). On top of police violence, the black community faces disproportionate unemployment, poverty, a lack of access to social services, and mass incarceration.

The two rebellions in Ferguson and Baltimore in 2014 and 2015 respectively rocked the very core of U.S. society as hundreds of thousands of young people and black workers expressed their rage at law enforcement, the political establishment, and the black mis-leadership class under the banner of Black Lives Matter. As a result of mass pressure, over 40 bills were introduced around the country to curb law enforcement terror and enhance police accountability to the community. The Department of Justice and Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing have acknowledged the numerous violations and police misconduct in police departments across the country.

Perhaps the most shocking example to date is the Justice Department statement on the

Baltimore Police Department which showed in the words of the *New York Times* that they had "for years ... hounded black residents who make up most of the city's population, systematically stopping, searching and arresting them, often with little provocation or rationale" (8/10/16). Yet, the racist police murders, mass incarceration, militarization of the police and rampant economic injustices continue.

Since the Ferguson and Baltimore upheavals, there's a heightened class and racial polarization, along with a developing radical consciousness in society due to the crisis of capitalism. The times we are living through, demand a concerted effort to challenge the system of capitalism and racism head on.

This summer, as protests broke out in cities around the country after the killings of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling, the BLM movement seemed set to fully reemerge on the national stage.

Unfortunately, this was followed by the killing of five police officers in Dallas and three in Baton Rouge by lone gunmen. These type of actions will not win justice against racism, if that was the intention, and



have only served to strengthen the authority and militarization of the state and undermine the strength of Black Lives Matter mobilizations. This is a temporary setback but it does point to the need for the BLM movement to fully take stock and chart a course forward.

A Program for BLM

For the past two years, Socialist Alternative has put forward the urgent need for the movement to take on demands and a focus to

challenge the ruling 0.1%.

Recently the Movement For Black Lives (M4BL), a coalition of more than 50 organizations, released a comprehensive program, "A Vision For Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, and Justice" (M4BL.org), taking on the issues of economic injustice, reparations, police violence, and political power.

We believe that adopting a clear set of demands is a very important step forward for the BLM banner. There is much that is positive in this material but the question is

how this will be discussed, debated, and amended by the wider movement so that the program becomes the driving focus for struggle. We desperately need to build mass campaigns for tangible gains for black workers and youth like community control over the police and a \$15 minimum wage.

To win victories against racism and poverty, we need mass demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people on the streets disrupting "business as usual." Union leaders should support Black Lives Matter in more than just words by mobilizing their members to attend protests with contingents connecting the fight against police violence to the struggles for good jobs, health care, education, and public services.

While fighting for every reform possible within the framework of capitalism, we must also recognize that the only way to end institutionalized racism and discrimination is to end capitalism. This will require the leadership of a mass multiracial workers movement whose common struggle will be a decisive step towards a society where race division is finally consigned to the history books where it belongs. ✪

Rebuild a Fighting Women's Movement

Audrey Cooney

As more students and young adults become involved in the feminist movement, the radical left must steadfastly promote the need for revolutionary feminism that ties gender oppression to oppression of all kinds.

Recent years have seen a significant increase in political activism among young people. Bernie Sanders' campaign helped politically activate swathes of college students and young adults as many were exposed to the concepts of corruption and inequality being built into our political and economic systems for the first time.

The feminist movement has moved into mainstream social consciousness. It has become a rallying point for many young people, especially women, and, for some, it is the first social cause they feel deeply invested in. This in part stems from a growing awareness of rape culture and its pervasive presence on college campuses – a 2007 survey claimed that one-in-five female

college students experiences sexual assault while in college, a statistic backed up by recent studies.

Society's systematic devaluation of women has led to vicious attacks against women's rights, in particular reproductive rights. Donald Trump, presidential candidate for one of the U.S.'s major parties, at one point said that women who receive abortions should be given some sort of "punishment." Earlier this month, Florida Senator and former presidential candidate Marco Rubio said he opposes abortion rights for women infected by the Zika virus, even as cases of the virus continue to spread across his home state.

The Supreme Court's decision in the *Whole Woman's Health* case was a victory for reproductive rights activists. But while this decision, which overturned a Texas law that limited abortions by tightening regulations on abortion facilities, was a defeat for the religious right, it will not stop the conservative onslaught against women's rights – the right will continue fighting to overturn *Roe v Wade*.

Attacks against women have come from both sides of the mainstream political spectrum, with the so-called progressive presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, proving that she has more loyalty to other members of the ruling elite than to working-class women. Clinton has run a campaign infused with identity politics, with Democratic Party leadership and the mainstream media remaining adamant that electing Clinton to the presidency would be a significant victory for feminism. But Democrats have made plenty of compromises on women's rights in the past – capitulations to the political right that should be far from surprising at this point. The Obama administration continues to ally itself with countries that have awful records on women's rights and to conduct drone strikes that kill civilians and contribute to the growing population of refugees, mostly women and children. What's more, the Republican Party's vehemently anti-choice stance has allowed Democrats to drag their feet on abortion issues while maintaining their image as

the pro-choice option for voters.

Clinton's brand of feminism excludes working-class women and women of color. From her support for the U.S.'s alliance with Saudi Arabia to her refusal to back a living wage, her advocacy for women routinely falls short of helping the most vulnerable.

True change for women will come not from electing a female president who supports corporate interests, but from building a working class women's movement independent of corporate politics. While many are realizing the extent to which the patriarchy impacts our daily lives, far fewer have recognized the full interconnectedness of the need for feminism with the fights against other forms of exploitation. As capitalism thrives on divisions within the working class, gender oppression is ingrained in our capitalist society.

While it is possible for gains to be made benefiting women within the system of capitalism, true women's liberation can only be achieved when capitalism is destroyed and replaced with a socialist society. ✪

International Gathering of Socialists Held in Belgium



SocialistWorld.net

For more in-depth coverage, see SocialistWorld.net, website of the Committee for a Workers International.

**George Martin
Fell Brown**

Socialist Alternative fights for socialism all across the country, in our workplaces, communities, and on our campuses. But the fight for socialism is international. From July 17-23, 330 socialists from 34 countries from all over the world gathered in Leuven, Belgium for a week of discussion and debates.

The event was organized by the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a worldwide socialist organization bringing together activists in 45 countries from every continent except Antarctica. Socialist Alternative is in political solidarity with the CWI and sent seven people to participate.

Socialist Alternative shared our experiences fighting for socialism in the U.S. with others fighting similar struggles around the world. Reporting from the belly of the beast, we discussed the lessons of the Sanders campaign, Black Lives Matter, and the Fight for \$15.

In turn, we heard from Irish socialists about their struggle against water charges. Turkish socialists discussed the recent coup attempt against Erdogan as the event was unfolding. Especially inspiring was the attendance, for the first time at this year's summer school, of members of the newly formed Socialist Alternative Sudan.

Peter Taaffe, from the Socialist Party of England and Wales, led a discussion on Europe in the aftermath of the Brexit vote. The Brexit vote represented the class anger in British society against the EU. But, due to the failure of much of the British left to take a clear anti-EU stand, right-populist forces were able to become the face of the movement.

Andros from our Greek sister organization, Xekinima, explained the importance of the Brexit vote for the Greek working class. "There is very low morale in Greece following the EU-imposed eye-watering austerity but we are helping prepare the forces for



future struggles to regain lost income."

The Donald Trump phenomenon is only the tip of the global far-right politics iceberg and an entire session was devoted to it. Europe has seen a rise in far-right parties, from right-populist forces like the National Front in France, to out-and-out fascist forces, like Golden Dawn in Greece. Our Swedish sister organization, Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna, recently had their offices attacked by far-right arsonists. These far-right forces have gained by scapegoating refugees and blaming them for the crisis of capitalism.

But fighting the far right isn't limited to moral critiques of racism. Marilou from Xekinima says that our successes in combating Golden Dawn stem from our ability to simultaneously appeal to those involved in solidarity work with the refugees and those Greek workers worried about the effect that refugees will have on their living standards.

Socialist Alternative's Brazilian sister organization, Liberty, Socialism and Revolution (LSR), explained how the crisis in Brazil is part of a Latin American phenomenon of left-populist governments experiencing crises due to their failure to make a decisive break from capitalism. A fuller report on that discussion is given below. Unfortunately, the crisis in neighboring Venezuela has reached such extreme levels that our Venezuelan members were unable to attend the school.

The CWI, and the summer school, aren't just about talk or passively cheering on each other's struggles. Being part of the CWI means fighting side by side with workers across the world for a common goal with a common

program and common democratic structures.

Our task is to build organizations internationally with a genuine socialist alternative, to ensure that the best of humanity is harnessed to put an end to the carnage and misery of conflict and war, and raise the banner and struggles of the working class for a socialist world to end the carnage of capitalism and imperialism. ✪

The Exclusion Games



Brazil's political and economic crisis forms an ironic backdrop to the 2016 Summer Olympics, held in Rio de Janeiro. The idea of the Olympics was to use sports as a platform to promote peace and goodwill among nations. But the games' legacy has been tarnished by absurd expenditures, unused stadiums, and forced removals of communities. The Rio games have been dubbed "The Exclusion Games".

The sheer cost of the Olympics has brought out the class divisions in Brazilian society. Expenditures on the Olympics cost R\$39 billion (US\$15.9 billion), of which R\$15 billion (US\$6.1 billion) came from public coffers. Construction of the Olympic village has forced the displacement of 67,000 people, mostly from working class neighborhoods.

Thousands have taken to the streets in Rio, protesting the Olympics themselves, as well as interim President Temer. They have faced police armed with tear gas and rubber bullets. ✪

Report from Brazil

New Cycle of Struggle Following Right-Wing Parliamentary Coup

Michael O'Brien, Socialist Party (CWI in Ireland)

Maria Clara from Liberty, Socialism and Revolution (LSR), the Brazilian section of the CWI gave an engaging account of the significant turn of events in that country culminating in the recent parliamentary coup by the traditional right wing parties ousting the Workers Party (PT) President Dilma Rousseff.

Unemployment has grown in Brazil by three million, climbing to a total of 11 million corresponding with a 25% decline in industrial output over the last three years. One quarter of those at work earn less than the monthly minimum wage, equivalent to €240 per month.

A mass movement of discontent exploded in the run up to the 2014 world cup when working-class people could see massive resources going into vanity infrastructure for the tournament when at the same time public services were being starved of resources.

Dilma's position became further undermined when corruption scandals involving the PT came to light. The investigation, called "Operation Carwash," indicted corporate executives and politicians. One minister called for the investigations and trials to end because everybody in the parliament was implicated.

In the face of a growing protest movement, this time made up more of the middle class, impeachment proceedings were pushed through parliament by politicians as corrupt as the PT, leading to Dilma's removal from office and her replacement by the corrupt Temer, who previously served as a junior ally in the government.

The bosses want this government to introduce labor reforms to facilitate laying workers off and to raise of the retirement age. Working people won't allow this without a fight.

There is a big social dimension to the opposition to this new government which is intent on attacking LGBTQ rights as well as restricting the availability of the abortion pill. These factors and the recent brutal gang raping of a teenage girl which went unpunished has provoked a revolt among women.

Fearful of a repeat of the protest movement that dogged Dilma's government during the World Cup, the Federal Government has introduced emergency laws to clamp down on protests during the Olympics.

The LSR, in the midst of these developments, had to adopt a position of opposing this parliamentary coup while at the same time not letting Dilma and the PT off the hook for the fact that they have done the bosses' bidding in government.

The LSR is working in cooperation with a number of other left and workers organizations in opposition to the coup under the banner of the "People without Fear". The Party of Socialism and Liberty, in which the LSR participates, has seen its poll ratings increase as it is seen to stand apart from the generalized corruption in Brazilian politics. It is now poised to make serious gains in Mayoral elections in key cities around the country.

The fundamental lesson is that winning political office means little if a government that describes itself as left is not prepared to challenge capitalism as a system and fight for socialist change. ✪

Seattle

REI Workers Win Raises, Better Hours Through Struggle

Benjamin Peterson,
Seattle

REI, a co-op famous for its recreation gear, is beloved by many. It has a storied history, promotes healthy outdoor activity, and is staffed by workers who genuinely want to help people get outside and seize the day. Last year, REI reported a record \$2.4 billion in revenue. For those who believe in “capitalism with a human face,” REI *should* be the perfect model.

Unfortunately, what happens behind the scenes at REI reaffirms the cold-hearted nature of capitalism. Wages are shockingly low. Highly erratic scheduling is the norm, with workers often placed in a position where they can't afford housing or benefits, but also have trouble acquiring public assistance. Cost of living adjustments have been ignored. Employees suffer through extreme hunger, sometimes years of homelessness, and even worse traumas as a result of the extreme precarity of these conditions.

Recently, a small group of REI workers began organizing REI Employees for Real Change,



Seattle Town Hall with REI workers focused on Fair Scheduling - July 11, 2016.

independently of any union. Lacking options, workers launched a public petition, and began to solicit support. In Seattle, workers reached out to the office of Socialist City Councilmember Kshama Sawant and Socialist Alternative. Kshama and her staff immediately met with workers to discuss their

situation.

In this discussion, the demands were clarified. The key demands — access to full-time hours, living wages, and cost of living adjustments — stood side-by-side a broader call for REI to reaffirm the right of workers to unionize with a card-check neutrality agreement.

Workers launched a second petition, and began planning a Workers' Rights Town Hall, to bring their plight and struggle to the broader public.

At the July 11 Town Hall, workers courageously told their stories of hardship. One organizer, Ash, explained how reduced hours on tight wages can drive working students into homelessness. Another organizer, Tia, noted that she was forced to go to bed hungry, even when breastfeeding. Tia was forced to cancel expensive health benefits to ensure that she could still eat and remain indoors. She fought through severe postpartum depression, anemia, and malnourishment, without support.

Unsurprisingly, the Town Hall took the city and the local media by storm. It was a powerful example of how workers' representatives like Kshama can work with movements to find new and powerful ways to amplify voices, educate workers, and arm people for political struggle and self-defense. Less than two weeks later, REI representatives announced a series of promises, including pay raises up to \$15 an hour in at least 37 of its 143 stores, along with yet to be seen

“worker-friendly” scheduling plans.

In public statements, REI executives claimed that raises had been in the works for months. Glossing over the very existence of REI Workers for Real Change, REI spokespeople chastised Kshama for “claiming victory.” To that, workers just laughed. This was a major victory for all involved. Two months ago, REI's CEO said \$15 an hour was “too risky.” The executives can spin, but they can't hide their record.

More struggles lie ahead. Higher wages and better hours from management are not rooted in newfound generosity. They are wrested away by a workers' movement that caught the bosses unaware. To retain these victories, workers will have to continue to organize. The creation of a fighting union should remain a central long-term goal of discussion, although much work needs to be done to win over the bulk of the co-op members.

The courage and ingenuity of the REI workers is a prime example of how we can smash through the suffocating corporate stranglehold, and win real gains, if we organize and fight around concrete working class demands. ☘

Political Polarization Sharpens

continued from p. 3

But to the great credit of Sanders delegates they were not prepared to go out quietly. Despite the efforts of the corporate media to keep the story under wraps, the Democratic convention in Philadelphia was the most contentious in 50 years. The walkout of half or more of Sanders' delegates on the Tuesday night of the convention reflected the anger at the way the primary had been stacked against them which was all brought back by the Wikileaks data dump. But it also reflected the disbelief at Hillary's choice of Tim Kaine, a supporter of bank deregulation, as a running mate all while talking about “party unity”. Only days before Clinton announced her VP choice, Kaine also reiterated his support of the TPP.

Socialist Alternative was proud to have played a role in helping to organize this walkout which was an affirmation of the political revolution. But even among those who walked out there was a clear differentiation between those who still believe the Democratic Party

could be reformed into a party which represents the interest of the 99% and those who, like us, believe this is impossible and have decided to support Jill Stein of the Green Party as the best way to continue the political revolution in the November election.

Sanders meanwhile has set up Our Revolution which is supporting a number of Democratic candidates in “down ticket” races who are standing against representatives of the establishment and the status quo. Sanders clearly sees this effort going on past 2016.

Johnson and Stein

Stein is now getting up to 5% in some polls while Johnson is polling near 10%. Both campaigns are feeding off the desire for more political choice than the dysfunctional two party system offers but they also point in fundamentally different directions. While advocating progressive measures on some issues including civil liberties, the Libertarians

adhere to a free market fundamentalism which would make the situation facing working people if anything even worse than it is today. Stein's platform on the other hand is a continuation of Sanders' call to end the domination of the 0.01%.

As we explain on the back page of this issue we utterly reject the argument that a “vote for Stein is a vote for Trump”. A vote for Jill Stein in November is a vote for single payer healthcare, tuition free college, ending mass incarceration and a transition from a fossil fuel based economy through a “green new deal”. The key issue for us is how to rally those forces who see the necessity for a complete break with corporate politics.

We fully recognize that millions who reject what Clinton represents will in the end hold their noses and vote for her to stop Trump. We also want to see Trump lose badly but we see the question of laying the ground for a new political force as primary. Forty years of

neo-liberal Democratic policies helped drive a big section of the working class into the arms of utter reactionaries. The solution to this is not to keep supporting those same Democrats but to build our own political party.

We must begin to prepare for the major social struggles that are going to be unleashed in the coming years. We recognize that many genuine Bernie activists will continue to try to reform the Democratic Party and we will seek to engage them in an ongoing discussion about the way forward. In Seattle, Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant proved the effectiveness of independent politics by winning election and reelection as a councilmember as well as winning the first local \$15 minimum in the country. We also aim, alongside others, to continue to demonstrate in practice what a new independent politics based on determined struggle and directly challenging the corporate political establishment can achieve. ☘

Book Review

Listen, Liberal by Thomas Frank

Jeff Booth

"None of them think she really means her populism,... . The Clinton Foundation has actually held meetings at the headquarters of Goldman Sachs." - William Cohan, "Why Wall Street Loves Hillary", *Politico*, 2014.

In *Listen, Liberal*, journalist Thomas Frank condemns a shift in the Democratic Party from a perceived "party of the people" to a party representing an elite, professional/technocratic "class."

Frank points to Jimmy Carter, who "cancelled public works projects... with the help of a Democratic Congress, he enacted the first of the era's really big tax cuts for the rich and also the first of the really big deregulations... [he] put the country on an austerity diet spectacularly punishing to ordinary working people..." A Carter advisor, Alfred Kahn, said: "I'd love the Teamsters to be worse off. I'd love the automobile workers to be worse off. You may say that I'm inhuman... but I want to eliminate a situation in which certain protected workers in industries insulated from competition can increase their wages much more rapidly than the average without regard to their merit or to what a free market would do..."

Listen, Liberal debunks the myth that Democratic policy failings are due to Republican obstructionism. In the first two years of both the Clinton and Obama regimes, the Democrats controlled Congress and could have passed any legislation they wanted to.

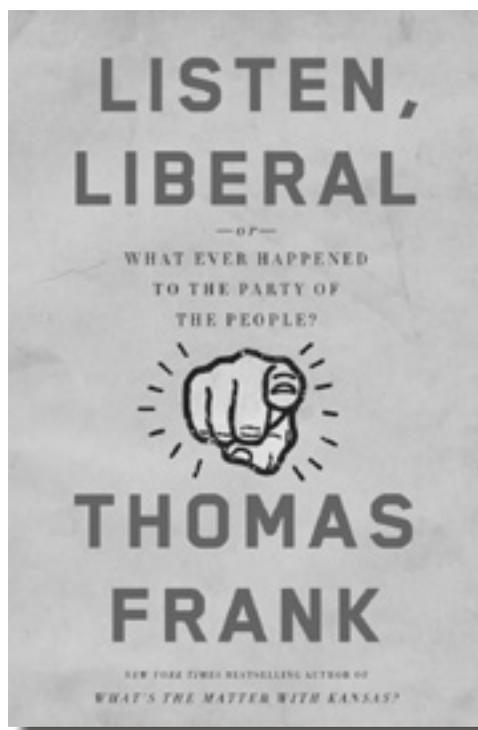
Frank examines Clinton's days as President: telecommunications deregulation, the racist 1994 crime bill, "ending welfare as we know it" in 1996, NAFTA. So, by 1996,

"Americans had two conservative presidential candidates to choose from." And Frank also exposes Clinton's bi-partisan plans to privatize Social Security toward the end of his second term.

Obama continued the economic policies of the Bush and Clinton administrations. Frank highlights the weakness and unnecessary complexity of "Obamacare", Obama's betrayal on the Employee Free Choice Act, etc. "Obama could have... unwound Bush's bailouts... stopped AIG bonuses... pushed to allow bankruptcy judges to modify mortgages... put the "Zombie banks" into receivership... and so on. Obama did none of it."

The two best chapters in the book are "The Blue State Model" and "Liberal Gilt". "The Blue State Model" examines states and cities with a Democratic Party lock on state government through long-term control of the State Legislature. Focusing on New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Chicago, Frank shows the same national Democratic Party policies of austerity for workers, corporate welfare, attacks on public sector unions, privatization, etc... repeat locally in these Democratic strongholds.

In "Liberal Gilt", Frank details Hillary Clinton's role as a Democratic Party leader, as first lady, as a Senator, as Secretary of State and probable next President. Even though Frank is a fan of Sanders, he barely mentions Sanders. Frank assumed Clinton would grab the Democratic Party nomination: "We have now observed several instances of the cycle of enthusiastic idealism that propels modern Democratic politics, as well as the lagging cycle of



disappointment that invariably follows... and now she gets to be the vessel of liberal hopes... . It is, as they say, her turn."

"Listen, Liberal" is useful reading. But it lacks an accurate class analysis and has no solutions on offer. Frank refuses to understand the limits of liberalism, how it is by definition pro-capitalist. He seeks to return to a mythic time when the Democratic Party was the "party of the people". But the Democratic Party has always been controlled by sections of the capitalist class, even under FDR. The Democratic Party never was a "party of the people". Working people need to build their own party. ☘

Massachusetts Schools Face Big Cuts

Sonia Chien

Earlier this summer, the University of Massachusetts Boston announced a budget deficit of about \$22.3 million, and will be cutting up to one third of faculty and some staff.

These system-wide cuts are part of the systematic defunding of public education in Massachusetts. Since 2001, the Massachusetts legislature has cut higher education spending by 25%. In 2013, this resulted in the state spending \$200 million more on its prison system than on its public colleges (*Washington Post*, 10/5/2015).

In the midst of the cuts, UMass Boston tuition is expected to rise by 6% this coming year, at the same time as an increase in student enrollment.

Across the country, schools, libraries, community centers, public parks, and other public facilities are being drained of funding, while for-profit corporations continue to find ways to take public money and avoid taxes. As the income gap continues to widen, there becomes less public money generated by taxes.

The majority-Democrat state legislature is responsible for slashing the UMass budget despite the fact that Massachusetts' economy is outperforming the rest of the U.S. (*Boston Globe*, 7/29/2016). The money exists to fully fund the entire UMass system and public education. What's missing is the political will to tax big business to raise the necessary funds.

This is not the first time students, faculty, and staff have faced, and fought budget cuts. It seems that every budget since the recession began has cut the UMass system. The strategy of electing and lobbying Democrats in the state legislature should by now be considered a failure. Building struggle on campus and the community has won some small gains, particularly when students unite with faculty and staff unions. These struggles have consistently run up against the state budget and the Democratic politicians supported by unions. As part of our strategy to raise the stakes, we must be ready to run independent candidates against those who cut public education.

Socialist Alternative has launched Socialist Students - including a chapter at UMass Boston - through which college students can become more involved in struggles and politics. Socialist Students aims to connect student-oriented demands, such as free tuition and the abolition of student debt, to a larger program of fighting for the interests of the 99%. We will be connecting these struggles with the struggle for full funding for the UMass system and all public education from birth through college! ☘

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SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Issue #26 - September 2016

Build a New Party of the 99%

Support Jill Stein



Joshua Koritz

Fueled by anger at massive inequality and a “recovery” that leaves the 99% behind, Bernie Sanders showed that it is possible to run a nationally viable campaign without taking corporate money and on the basis of a working-class program. Especially young people, who overwhelmingly supported Bernie, have lived through the “Hope and Change” presidency of Obama and seen little change and less hope.

Socialist Alternative supported Bernie’s call for a “political revolution against the billionaire class.” Unfortunately, by then endorsing a representative of the corporations, his supporters are left searching for ways to continue this revolution. Jill Stein’s campaign represents a concrete way to continue the fight Bernie started.

Running on the Green Party ticket, Jill Stein has correctly courted Sanders supporters, first by offering Sanders a spot on her ticket, and now, following Bernie’s endorsement of Clinton, by appealing directly to them. A visible and constant presence at the recent protests at the Democratic National Convention, Stein has seen her support grow in the polls and she has increased name recognition and fundraising.

Popular Anger Against Corporate Politics

In the 2016 elections, the majority of Americans are disillusioned with the status

quo, politics as usual – corporate politics and corporate candidates.

The political situation is ripe for a new party on the left, representing the 99%, that takes no corporate money, and is based on building movements. While the majority of Sanders supporters will vote Clinton “holding their noses,” Jill Stein’s campaign can be a rallying point to unite the tens of thousands who want to continue the political revolution beyond 2016. This can help lay the basis to run local candidates against corporate Democrats and Republicans alike as a step towards establishing a new party.

The outstanding work of Seattle socialist Councilmember Kshama Sawant – since leading the way for the nation’s first \$15 minimum wage, this and other movements have changed Seattle’s political landscape – is more evidence that it is possible to take on the establishment and win. Socialist Alternative stands ready to help build any and all movements to take on corporate domination of our society.

We call for a new party of the 99% that bases itself on the interests of working people. Recently, Stein has made statements hinting in this direction. The Greens can play an important role in bringing about a new party, but it will require the active involvement of unions like the NNU and the CWA, as well as other progressive movements like BLM, student movements, and community campaigns.

Defeat Right Populism – Vote Stein

Many working people are rightly worried about the threat of Trump winning. Clearly, a Hillary Clinton presidency would be different in important ways from a Trump administration. Yet, to call her or the Democrats, friends of working people or the oppressed, is to ignore their record under Obama of bailing out the banks, record levels of deportations, supporting the TPP, and attacks on civil liberties.

Beginning under Jimmy Carter, the Democratic Party embraced neoliberalism. Under Bill Clinton, they brought in NAFTA, overturned Glass-Steagall, massively cut welfare and other social services, and expanded mass incarceration. The fruits of the Democrats’ service to corporate interests are being reaped today by Trump. Hillary promises to continue Bill Clinton’s and Obama’s neoliberal agenda – voting for Clinton will not be a tool to defeat the right. In reality a Clinton administration will fuel further right populism.

Regardless of the outcome in November, the threat of right populism must be opposed on the streets, in our workplaces, and our schools. Voting is not enough to fight inequality and oppression, we must build movements – the motor of change – to assert that Black Lives Matter, for LGBTQ equality, for free education, to raise the minimum wage, and for universal health care. Stein not only includes these in her program, but consistently stands up for them. She participates

in and builds movements while running for office.

Stein has the potential to win the largest independent left vote since Nader in 2000. We do not agree with all aspects of the Greens’ politics but winning several million votes for a genuine left candidate can help unite the genuine left, and give momentum to independent candidates going forward. A vote for Stein is a vote for single-payer health care, \$15 minimum wage, and tuition-free public education. Millions of votes for Stein would embolden supporters of these demands to step into political action in 2017 – both building movements and in elections.

Two-Party System Broken

This two-party system is broken. Only 14% of eligible voters chose either Trump or Clinton in the primaries. The majority of local elections are, in effect, single-party elections.

The Democratic and Republican Parties have now nominated the two least liked candidates in recent history. Millions of working people are disgusted by the “choice” between an egomaniac and a corporate shill. Yet the leaders of the Democratic Party, at the city, county, and state levels tell us that’s our only choice.

Join us - take a step away from the corporate two-party system, build the socialist movement against the oppression, environmental destruction, and inequality of capitalism. Join Socialist Alternative. Vote Jill Stein. ✪