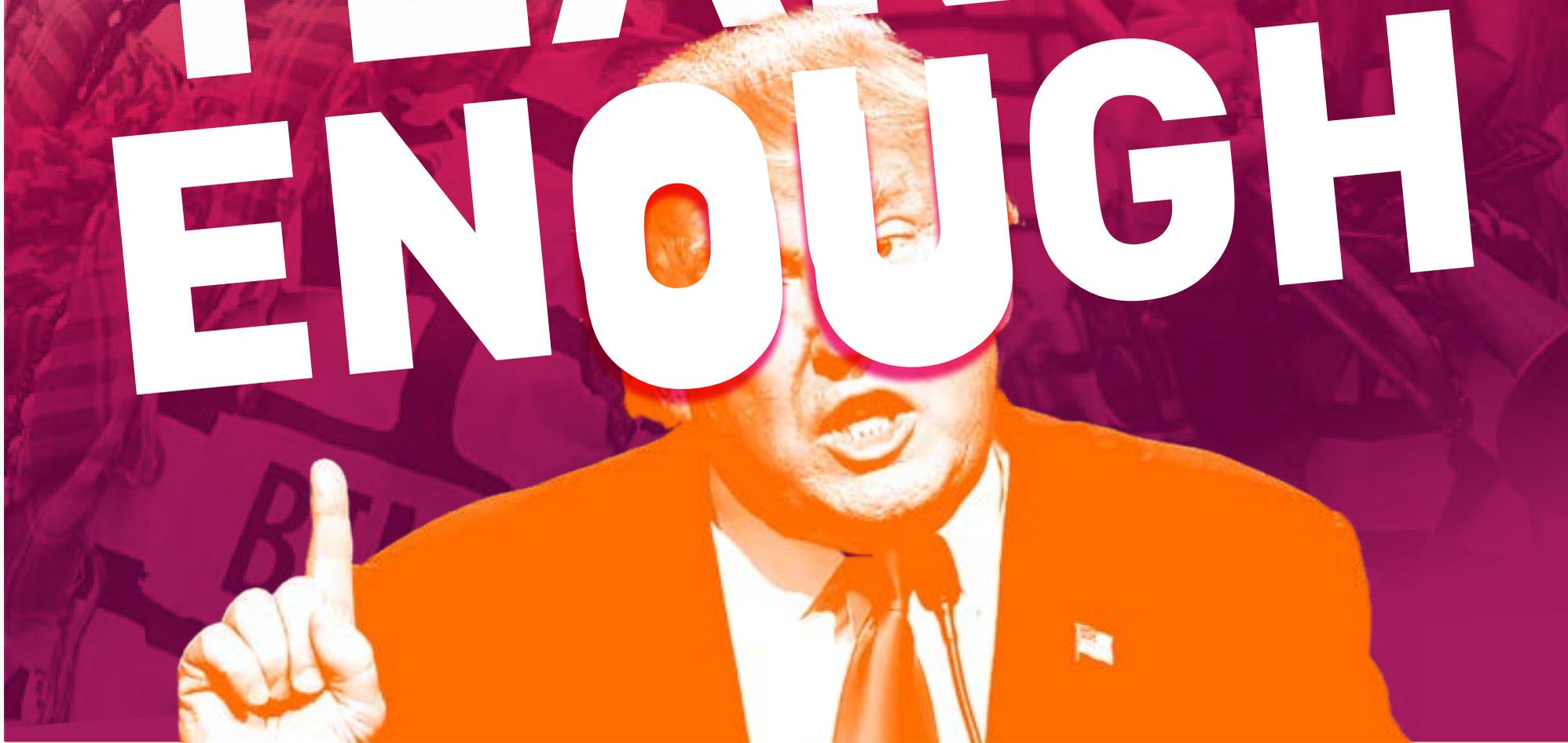


# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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# ONE YEAR IS ENOUGH



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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

## Sarko Sarkodie Washington, D.C.



My path to Marxism started at 18 when I learned about income-related health disparities. While it seems like common knowledge to most people, especially in the current political climate, I was fascinated and infuriated that one's income and race was so closely correlated to how sick one would be throughout life and to life expectancy.

The injustice of these disparities was clear and I thought that the way to fight this injustice was to get a couple of degrees and make my way through the nonprofit industrial complex. But after getting my Master's degree and obtaining full-time work, I found myself completely uninspired by "trying to save the world" through essentially white-collar wage slavery.

Instead of feeling liberated by a salary, good professional work, and the other trappings of "adulthood," I found myself trapped in a system that compelled me to destroy the world in order to survive. I started to accept this system and my place in it as inevitabilities.

It wasn't until Trump got elected that I became motivated, almost compelled, to fight back against this system that was keeping me trapped. During this radicalizing time I went to the Socialist Alternative D.C. public meeting. There I met Ginger Jenzten for the first time. Not only was Ginger very approachable and friendly, but she had hope and excitement for the fight ahead in a time where I was scared and depressed. When she spoke at the public meeting, she spoke

with power and conviction about the work Socialist Alternative does, and gave concrete examples of how our organization fights for working people. When I read the "What We Stand For" in the paper, it was the first time that the world I truly wanted to see was fully articulated. From that first public meeting, I quickly joined Socialist Alternative and got active with the local movements in my city.

It was important to me to join a political organization at that time, and now having been with Socialist Alternative for over a year I recognize the importance of joining a revolutionary political organization. Activism in the time of Trump can't stop at only improving conditions for working people or protecting vulnerable groups from right-wing attacks. It requires dismantling the system that allowed a racist, sexist, xenophobic bigot to gain power in the first place. Fighting this system requires a political platform that offers concrete, democratic, and responsive strategies for moving forward. Socialist Alternative is not only engaged in fighting the oppressive institutions that hurt all of us; we're also doing the hard and necessary work of building a system that guarantees justice for all working people. ✦

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Don't wait! Make sure you stay up-to-date on the important analysis, tactics, and strategy to take the struggle against the billionaire class forward and build the socialist movement. Socialist Alternative helped elect the first socialist to Seattle City Council in 100 years and win the first citywide \$15 minimum wage in 2014.

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## Reignite the Movement in the Streets

# One Year is Enough!

Tom Crean

It is nearly one year since the inauguration of the odious Trump. From the outset, it was very clear that this would be a horribly reactionary administration packed full of billionaires launching attacks on immigrants, poor people, women, LGBTQ people, against education, and the environment. In August, Trump declared that there were “very fine people” among the white supremacists in Charlottesville. He and the Republicans have also threatened what remains of union rights. Internationally, the regime was, if anything, even scarier. Trump has repeatedly threatened to bomb North Korea and start trade wars with Mexico and China. He pulled out of the Paris climate accord.

We, along with tens of millions of others, feel that one year of Trump is more than enough. It’s time for him to go. In December, Trump’s unpopularity – at record levels for a president at this stage of his first term – reached a new low. A Monmouth University poll in early December showed 32% approval and 56% disapproval. Nearly half of the population thinks he should be impeached. Depending on the revelations from the Mueller investigation, Trump could be forced out even in advance of the 2018 midterm elections, though it remains more likely that he will survive for a while longer, even if increasingly damaged.

## Trump and the Movement in the Streets

2017 began with mass protests, particularly the millions-strong Women’s Marches on January 21. The year ended with the #MeToo upheaval. This is a new phase of the mass women’s movement which was first ignited by Trump’s unapologetic misogyny and predation. But Trump’s attacks on immigrants also sparked mass opposition as did Trumpcare. Tens of thousands took to the streets of Boston in August and put the alt-right on the back foot.

While it cannot be said that the movement suffered a defeat in a



Two bigots: President Trump and Attorney General Sessions.

stand-up fight with the Republicans, nor did it win a decisive victory. Trumpcare’s defeat was not a clear result of mass mobilizations. These factors have created a relative lull in protest activity where many are not clear about the role of protests and there is a lack of leadership from the unions, civil rights, women’s, and other organizations. There was also a feeling that Republican divisions would prevent them getting anything serious done in terms of legislation.

The passing of the Republicans’ tax bill should be a wake up call. This will mean a massive redistribution of wealth to corporations and the super-rich, exacerbating the record levels of inequality which already exist. It will create pressure in many states and municipalities to enact further cuts to education and social services. By ending the Obamacare mandate, it is also contributing to undermining the ACA, increasing premiums, and potentially leading to 13 million losing health coverage over the next decade. And next year, the Republicans plan to go more directly after “entitlements” including Medicaid, Social Security, and Medicare. None of this is popular. The tax plan is supported by only 29% according to Quinnipiac (*CNN.com*, 12/5/17). But failing to achieve anything would have been an even worse political setback for the GOP.

## The 2018 Midterms

It is already clear that the midterm elections next November will be the most energized in recent

U.S. history. There is an unprecedented level of political polarization in society. All the signs point to a significant swing to the Democrats.

Until recently, Trump’s core base remained quite solid, seeing the attacks of the liberal media as confirmation that he is fighting on their behalf. Trump’s promise to fight on behalf of the “forgotten men and women” of working-class middle America has not been fully exposed - in large part because the opposition is corporate Democrats who poll not much better than Trump himself. A serious economic crisis exposing the lie that Trump is bringing jobs back would lead to a more decisive collapse of his support. And there is no doubt that a serious crisis is on the way as new bubbles develop in the housing and financial markets.

But it is also clear that most of the population rejects Trump’s racism and misogyny and sees the vicious cruelty of the Republican agenda for what it is. If anything, there is now greater support for measures like Medicare for All than even a year ago. This is partly a reaction to the viciousness of Trump and the Republicans’ proposals.

However, the reemergence of allegations of sexual harassment and assault against Trump as well as his support for the predator Roy Moore appears to be leading to the current slide in his core support, especially among women. The defeat of Moore in the special Alabama Senate race is a blow to the Trump/Bannon wing of the

continued on p. 11

## Poor People’s Campaign Continues – 50 Years On

Joshua Koritz

Before he died, Martin Luther King, Jr. launched a Poor People’s Campaign aimed at bringing the issue of poverty to the fore. He declared: “[When] profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people ... we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values” (*The Nation*, 12/4/2017).

Nearly 50 years later, serious organizing is underway to revive this campaign. Led by Rev. Liz Theoharis and Rev. William J. Barber II – one of the principal leaders of North Carolina’s “Moral Mondays” movement – they plan to conduct 40 actions around the country in 40 days starting in May 2018.

Based on a long history of organizing with the NAACP and within the faith community, this project has real potential to

mobilize tens of thousands of people against the attacks of the Trump administration and the Republican controlled congress.

The Poor People’s Campaign comes at a time when the slightest spark can set off huge protest as we saw earlier in 2017 with the airport occupations that beat back Trump’s initial Muslim ban. However, the Democratic Party establishment will seek to undermine this mobilization to point people in the direction of the 2018 midterms.

In 1968, the Poor People’s Campaign set out demanding huge investment in a war on poverty including legally mandated full employment and building half a million affordable housing units per year “until slums were eliminated” (*Poor-PeoplesCampaign.org*). We hope that similarly radical demands will be taken up in 2018 and we look forward to participating to the fullest in this campaign. ✪

## DACA Deal Remains Uncertain

As we go to print, frantic political wrangling in Washington, D.C. is no closer to keeping DREAMers in this country, while votes on tax cuts and funding the government loom. DACA is set to expire March 5, despite overwhelming support for this program in poll after poll and the impending loss of health care, education, housing, and other benefits for the 800,000 DACA recipients.

Earlier in December, Nancy Pelosi pledged “We will not leave [Washington, D.C.] without a DACA fix.” This determination appears to have waned, as top Democrats struggle to find a “bipartisan” fix at all costs. As the GOP tax plan and government spending measures go to a vote, Democrats have a fantastic opportunity to fight hard for the DREAMers. “Instead of

using the leverage they have now over the budget, they’re gonna throw away that leverage. And later, since they’ll have no leverage, they’ll say ‘Well, we’ll trade you the DREAMers for the wall’” explained Cenk Uygur of The Young Turks (*youtube.com* 12/18/2017). DREAMers and all immigrants are left wondering: If the Democrats won’t fight now, will they ever?

The key to defending the legal status of DREAMers is based in building mass mobilizations of immigrants, native-born working people, and youth – united in defense of immigrants and in opposition to Trump. Already immigrants are staging sit-ins and protests. As March 5 approaches, we can expect these actions to ramp up and Socialist Alternative will fully participate. ✪

Socialist Changes Minneapolis Politics

# Lessons from the Ginger Campaign

*The following is an extract from a longer piece which we will publish online at [socialistalternative.org](http://socialistalternative.org) and as a pamphlet. The longer piece will also address how our approach to elections contrasts with that of other sections of the left.*

**Chris Gray**

In November, Ginger Jentzen came within a hair's breadth of being elected to Minneapolis City Council in the face of unprecedented opposition from powerful corporate interests and the Democratic Party establishment. Four years after Kshama Sawant's historic election to Seattle City Council, Ginger narrowly lost in the third round of ranked choice voting to Democrat Steve Fletcher. Had Fletcher received 78 fewer votes in the first round of voting, our socialist campaign would have won the election.

Minneapolis and Seattle are very different places. In many ways, Minneapolis shares more in common with other Midwest cities than with the increasingly wealthy West Coast technology hub. But these two cities have become linked by the huge impact of Socialist Alternative's politics and powerful leadership on the \$15 minimum wage and housing struggles.

Ginger's campaign and this summer's victory on \$15 in Minneapolis decisively refutes the idea that Sawant and Socialist Alternative's victories in Seattle are just a peculiar Seattle or "left coast" phenomenon. Both Kshama Sawant in Seattle and Ginger Jentzen in Minneapolis are two revolutionary socialist candidates that dare to fight for the ideas of genuine Marxism, and who have both proven that large sections of working-class people can be won to socialist ideas, provided there is an organization with the correct politics, tactics, and strengths to run viable campaigns.

One hundred years after the 1917 Russian Revolution, where the working class first attempted to build a society in their own interests, capitalism is increasingly questioned and millions are attracted to socialist ideas again. Ginger Jentzen's campaign for Minneapolis City Council offers valuable lessons for how the growing openness to socialist politics can be harnessed to build a force that can put the demands and aspirations of working-class people into action.

## A Fighter for Working People

Our unapologetic working-class political program sent a clear message that something unique was happening in the Ward 3 race in Minneapolis and that Ginger was a totally

different kind of candidate.

We defined the issues in the Minneapolis city elections. The growing shortage of affordable housing is the key problem impacting working people in Minneapolis, and we made it central in all city races. We created a debate about rent control where none had existed before. In the working-class precincts of Ward 3, our demands for rent control and to tax developers to build affordable housing took on a powerful dynamic, as did our call to tax the rich to fund education and mass transit.

Ginger's pledge not to take corporate money, and slogan "Not for Sale," showed that she would be an authentic fighter for her campaign pledges. It cut across the normal lines of corporate-funded, advertisement-driven elections under capitalism.

Ginger's campaign broke the fundraising record for City Council campaigns without taking a dime from corporate interests or big developers, quadrupled voter turnout in student districts compared to the 2013 elections, and won nearly 50% of the votes in Northeast Minneapolis, an overwhelmingly working-class section of the city. Working-class homeowners upset with unrestrained developers found a shared interest with renters and students behind a bold working-class program.

We consciously sought to link the struggle for immediate reforms to the broader need for the socialist transformation of society while explaining the limits of fighting for reforms under capitalism, which is incapable of providing affordable housing for all or meeting the needs of working people.

## Big Business Fights Back

On Election Day, Ginger was ahead by 10% of the total vote, only to lose after the third round of ranked choice voting. So what happened?

Ginger's socialist campaign reintroduced working-class politics into Minneapolis, a city long controlled by the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL – Democratic Party in Minnesota). The DFL's deep roots in Minneapolis and Ward 3 gave Steve Fletcher and Tim Bildsoe an advantage with some voters, including with more passive voters who had not followed the election closely and were apt to vote along party lines.

In April, Steve Fletcher won the DFL endorsement in Ward 3, which is usually an automatic ticket to victory in Minneapolis. However, he failed to build any strong dynamic around his campaign. Perhaps sensing a possible opening and the threat that our strong socialist campaign represented, Tim



Bildsoe entered the race on June 27.

Throughout the race, we warned that big business would try to buy the election and corporate PACs would be launched to oppose our socialist campaign. In the final weeks of the campaign, corporate PAC money flooded into the Minneapolis elections. The presidents of the Chamber of Commerce, Minneapolis Downtown Council, Minnesota Multifamily Housing Association, and powerful developers like Steve Minn co-authored a "call to action" warning of the impending threat to their profits, encouraging their allies to write corporate checks to a deceptively named PAC called "Minneapolis Works!" While complaining about the left-Democrat insurgency, they specifically identified Ginger's campaign: "If you thought it was impossible for a committed Socialist to run on a platform of rent control and establishing a municipal income tax ... meet: Ginger Jentzen," they wrote.

Seventeen mailers landed in the final months of the election, either attacking Ginger or promoting Bildsoe or Fletcher. The *Star Tribune* endorsed Bildsoe, and encouraged voters to use their other rankings to stop Ginger. As Bildsoe's campaign benefited from corporate cash to build momentum in the last weeks, he left Steve Fletcher clean of PAC money to position himself as a safer progressive choice. Bildsoe's second-choice votes would ultimately deliver Fletcher the victory in the final round of ranked choice voting.

The makeup of Ward 3 was decisive in the outcome of the race. In the seven working-class precincts, our fighting demands and calls for rent control and to tax the rich struck a powerful chord. The five wealthier downtown precincts never developed the same buzz and were instead more influenced

by the litany of pro-Bildsoe and anti-Ginger mailers along with the *Star Tribune* and DFL endorsements.

## Building on the Ginger Campaign

Vote Ginger had the biggest ground game of any campaign in the city elections. Over 200 people fanned out across Ward 3 to have meaningful discussions with one out of every three registered voters. However, it was our working-class program that left its mark on Minneapolis politics.

Our campaign was based on grassroots participation. One in six people who eventually voted for Ginger first choice also donated to the election campaign. Beyond the need for campaigns to raise money, our emphasis on fundraising was one of the most important ways we turned "passive" support into "active" support. Our success is shown by voter turnout which increased by a historic 60%.

Elections under capitalism – where the ruling elite has a whole range of tools to deploy – are hostile terrain for working-class politics. Obviously we would have far preferred to win the seat and extend the challenge to corporate politics into City Hall but we did not define success simply in terms of the final vote. While we narrowly lost, we successfully used the election as a tool to build the fight for affordable housing and rent control and to begin to seriously build the socialist movement in Minneapolis. This is laying the ground for huge steps forward for genuine working class politics in the next period. ☘

# Derail the Jail vs. Dane County, WI, Supervisors

Madison Socialist Alternative

Temperatures are falling, but things are heating up in Madison, WI. At the Dane County Board of Supervisors' final budget hearing in November, hundreds of residents furiously drowned out the Board's vote to spend \$108 million on jail construction. One supervisor, Dennis O'Loughlin, called it "the worst meeting [he's] ever been a part of" in his 20 years on the Board.

The fight against the jail construction project was organized by the Derail the Jail coalition, including members of Socialist Alternative along with a number of other activist groups. A rousing rally including area social, racial, and economic justice activists and organizers beforehand led to the meeting being besieged by 150 people chanting to "Derail the Jail."

The County Board has been notoriously hostile to any hint of activism during their meetings. During previous meetings activists who so much as snapped their fingers in support of people's testimony were chided for engaging in "demonstrations." With that attitude, the supervisors were caught unprepared for the real demonstration, the frequent outbursts during the meeting, and the eventual loss of decorum due to the highly-charged activism unfolding in the room before them.

As the meeting spiraled out of control, supervisors resorting to thumbs-up/down voting, and without the ability to properly deliberate any issues, the meeting ending abruptly.

Madison – and surrounding Dane County – have worst-in-the-nation levels of racial disparity in incarceration rates. 48% of those in the county jail are black, compared to 5% of county residents. At the root are economic inequalities. In a city of 250,000, there are more than 600 chronically homeless persons on the street any given night. As is the case around the country, within these statistics are further racial disparities. 76% of the families served at area homeless shelters are black, as are 50% of individuals experiencing homelessness. This is despite the Board's "commitment" to realize housing as a human right, to reduce incarceration, and to condemn acts of white supremacy.

The self-anointed progressives on the board justified their vote for perpetuating racist mass incarceration by presenting the jail expansion as a humanitarian program and accusing the protesters of perpetuating the status quo. While board members lamented the poor conditions of the existing jail, the mere thought of taking real steps to combat mass incarceration wasn't even considered. Disgracefully disingenuous arguments exposed the complete



Derail the Jail activists at the Dane County Supervisors meeting on November 30, 2017.

hypocrisy of most Board members. Supervisor Paul Rusk took to the soapbox to express his faux empathy for those experiencing mental health crises. Refusing to acknowledge the demands put forward by the Derail the Jail coalition, he obliquely stated his wish that "there was some other place for [those experiencing mental health crises] to go."

In the end, every single Democrat and Republican on the County Board voted for the jail expansion. Instead, opposition to the jail came from Supervisor Heidi Wegleitner of Progressive Dane, a progressive third party in the greater Madison area with six supervisors on the County Board. Wegleitner welcomed the Derail the Jail campaign and moved to amend the budget to remove the jail funding and use the freed up money on housing instead. Despite the overwhelming popular support for this move, Wegleitner was joined by only three other Progressive Dane supervisors – 32 voted for the jail expansion.

Unfortunately, Progressive Dane didn't put forward a united front against the jail, as the other two Progressive Dane supervisors voted against Wegleitner's amendment. One of them, Dorothy Krause, made a particularly atrocious defense of the jail, referring to prisoners as "clients" and treating imprisonment as a "service."

This jail is still years from completion, which gives Derail the Jail, Socialist Alternative and other activist groups time to mount a larger campaign to fight this misallocation of resources every step of the way. We will work with groups around the county to bring the heat on every supervisor who railroaded this jail through. The campaign will fight for a focus on allocating funding to reducing poverty rather than more repression. Dane County needs affordable housing, stable employment, and attainable healthcare for all residents. This fight isn't over – it's only begun! ✪

## Grad Students Fight GOP Tax Plan

Kyle Kamaz

As we go to press, the Republicans' tax bill giveaway to the super rich, which will act to massively increase inequality, is set to pass Congress. In a disgraceful ploy to minimize public discourse, the bill was introduced one day before the elections on November 6. Sold by Republican sponsors as a "middle class tax cut," it was anything but. It is so obviously an attack on working people that even *The Washington Post*, the newly acquired mouthpiece of Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, correctly called it "Republican class warfare at its most egregious."

Among the many cruel provisions were those targeting students, working graduate students in particular, by removing tuition waivers and deductions for interest payments on student loans. The effect would have forced tens of thousands of working graduate students out of their programs.

Two members of Socialist Alternative, also graduate students at Ohio State University, sensing the combative mood of their colleagues, immediately organized an action

committee of other students who then called a department-wide meeting on November 7. The students at OSU were organized under the banner of #SaveGradEd which was taken up by students across the country in conjunction with #GradTaxWalkOut and together organized over 60 rallies, walkouts, and sit-ins to protest the vicious tax bill.

Of course, we must acknowledge that the university administration lobby played a significant role in pressuring lawmakers. The bill would have severely impacted any university's ability to recruit talented student workers. However, it was the militancy and speed with which graduate students organized that put immense pressure on university administrations as rumors began to swirl of graduate student walkouts and strikes across the country.

Without a doubt, having the tuition waiver and interest deductions remain untouched is a significant victory won by the organized action of students in the overall context of this audacious tax bill which will inflict harm on millions of working people.

A significant question remains for graduate students. Do they stop here, or do they

broaden the movement and push forward, and how? We can be sure this was only the first round of attacks on students from Trump. There is also the looming threat to tens of thousands of immigrant students because of the cancellation of DACA. Beyond that, it's not a matter of if there will be new attacks from Trump, but when.

Of course how we fight is as important as who we fight. Gaining wider support was vital to pushing back the attacks on graduate students and must be expanded. Furthermore, where we did find graduate student worker unions we found the most mobilized and militant students willing to fight with us. Student workers everywhere should pursue forming unions where there is support, even in states that have legislated against it. It's also necessary to link up with other mobilized groups who are fighting Trump.

Trump's vicious tax bill will become law, but further victories for his administration are by no means guaranteed. In order to defeat brutal attacks like Trump's tax plan in the future, we need to meet them with a united fightback. Working people and students must organize ourselves now to



ward off Trump's coming attacks in the next period. ✪

# Housing is a CAPITALISM'S HOUSING CRISIS AND THE SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Patrick Ayers

The for-profit housing market is failing working people. Ten years after millions of homes were lost to Wall Street in the 2007-2009 foreclosure crisis, there has been a sharp decline in homeownership while the number of renters has increased by more than 10 million households.

Skyrocketing rent is causing a lot of pain. From 2011 to 2016 the number of apartments that rented for less than \$850 a month decreased from two-fifths of all rentals to one-fifth. Almost half of all renters now pay more than 30% of their income in rent.

While there has been a certain levelling off of the gap between rising rents and incomes over the past two years, a new report from Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies warns that it would take 24 years at the current rate to return to where we were in 2001. "The rental market thus appears to be settling into a new normal where nearly half of renter households are cost burdened," concludes the report ([www.jchs.harvard.edu](http://www.jchs.harvard.edu)).

The problem is most acute in the fastest growing cities in the South and West, but there isn't a single county in the U.S. that doesn't have a shortage of affordable housing according to the Urban Institute. For every 100 low-income households, there are an average of 28 units available nationwide ([www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)).

With Donald Trump in the White House, and Ben Carson his Secretary for Housing and Urban Development (HUD), things could get even worse. The administration has proposed a 13% cut to HUD programs like Section 8

vouchers.

Already, public assistance is tight and only about 25% of those in need are served. Meanwhile, more than half a million people in the U.S. are homeless, and one-fifth of them are children. Globally, the UN estimates that 1.6 billion people struggle to find adequate housing.

## Build More Housing?

The most common answer to the lack of affordable housing offered by the establishment is based on free-market thinking: let private developers build more housing.

Undoubtedly, we need more housing and we need to update the existing housing stock. But simplistic supply and demand arguments neglect the fact that it's not profitable to build housing for the far greater portion of the demand that exists -- the growing ranks of the poor and near poor.

It is far more lucrative for developers to build luxury condos for the global elite. After more than a decade of aggressive development in New York City -- in the name of "affordable housing" -- the results show this contradiction starkly. In a single year between 2015 and 2016, over 2.5 million people in New York applied for just 2,600 "affordable" apartments (*NY Daily News*, 5/11/16), while in Manhattan there are more than 12,000 unsold luxury condos because too many have been built (*Financial Times*, 6/8/17).

Most of these condos that are purchased, are investments, not homes. According to data from the Census Bureau's 2012 American Community Survey, more than half of all luxury condos in midtown Manhattan are left empty for an average of ten months every year, an outrageous waste of resources (*NY Times*, 10/24/14).

## Capitalism

The driving force of the problem is the way capitalism treats the housing sector as a gigantic casino for maximizing short-term profits.

Never before in history

has housing been so dominated by big business. Speculation in urban areas has pushed up real-estate values, paving the way for more lucrative projects by multi-national developers. This further drives up the price of land along with rents of surrounding areas.

Developers, banks, and corporations have benefitted from a political establishment which has been more than willing to support their aggressive agenda with tax-breaks and sweetheart deals. City centers have been transformed into playgrounds for the rich as part of a "race to the bottom" to attract investment and jobs. Meanwhile, public housing assistance has been starved for decades. This shift disproportionately affects people of color and families headed by single moms.

## Political Establishment

The liberal establishment in a number of cities is promoting "Inclusionary Zoning," whereby incentives are offered to developers to include affordable units in projects.

One celebrated "model" for this approach has been NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio's plan to build or preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing. However, only 16,000 "affordable" units will be offered to the 25% of New Yorkers who make \$25,000 or less a year. Meanwhile, 425,000 people in NYC are on waiting lists for public housing and 62,000 people are homeless.

The fundamental weakness of his strategy is that it's entirely dependent upon private developers whose main interest is to extract as much profit as possible out of the housing market -- not to benevolently build affordable housing.

## Urgent Action

Socialists support every improvement we can win to provide relief in this crisis. We reject an approach that accepts the limits of what developers and bankers will support. In that vein, we would support using eminent domain to take empty luxury condos in big cities into public ownership to house the homeless.

Speculators and their politicians won't just give up on their profits. Solving the housing crisis will require the involvement of millions of people under the guiding idea that housing is a human right. Socialist Alternative has been at the forefront with other activists in helping

build support for rent control and other affordable housing policies in Seattle, Minneapolis, and other cities.

In building campaigns on housing, we have to contend with the dominance of establishment ideas about housing which spread confusion about pro-worker housing policies like rent control and public housing.

For example, New York is often cited as a place where strong regulations like rent control doesn't work. In reality, it worked great for tenants in New York for decades. But the number of rent-controlled units fell from two million in the 1950s to just 27,000 by 2015 due to landlord-friendly loopholes -- this loss was decisive in fueling skyrocketing rents. This shows we need strong rent control laws that cover all apartments with no loopholes.

It's true that rent control is not a silver bullet under capitalism where investment depends on profit. That's why we need to go much further. We need an alternative to for-profit developers altogether: a massive public works program to build high-quality public housing, funded by major tax increases on big business and the super rich, and built with union labor.

Public housing has been stigmatized in the U.S. for decades as low-quality housing for the poorest of the poor. Addressing the horrendous and inhumane conditions in many public housing buildings is an urgent priority for the housing movement. But there is no reason we couldn't build high-quality public housing, not only for current residents or the hundreds of thousands of people on waiting lists, but also for working- and middle-class families as an alternative to private development.

To ensure quality, all plans for new public housing should be overseen by democratic committees of workers and residents.

To win such reforms it certainly helps to have a fighter in City Hall like Seattle's socialist Councilmember Kshama Sawant. She rejects money from business and fights uncompromisingly for working people. But Kshama is the first to point out that what's been most decisive to winning housing reforms in Seattle is building a movement outside City Hall.

Historically, it's been mass militant action like rent strikes, mass pickets, demonstrations, and mass occupations that have been decisive to winning housing reform, along with systematically organizing democratic mass organizations.



Socialist Alternative and Councilmember Kshama Sawant led the fight in Seattle to build 1,000 homes instead of a new police precinct.

# Human Right



*Craines dot the Seattle skyline as developers build luxury housing.*

## Need for Socialism

It's not possible to provide high-quality and affordable housing for all on the basis of capitalism, particularly when looked at from an international perspective. It is possible to win many reforms, but as long as the biggest banks and corporations dominate the economy they will use that leverage ruthlessly against the 99%.

This is an important lesson from the period after World War II, when huge movements of tenants and workers won significant gains in housing. But because these movements did not have a program to go beyond capitalism, when conditions changed, the capitalist class was able to regroup and roll back those gains.

Socialist Alternative calls for rooting out the power of the billionaires by taking into public ownership the 500 biggest corporations that dominate the economy – including the banks who dominate investment and the multinational developers who dominate construction – as a first step toward building a society where housing is treated as a right for all.

To win such a program, the fight for affordable housing needs to be linked to a broader struggle of the working class. Historically the housing movement has been strongest when connected to a radical labor movement.

Many leading voices in the housing movement today have serious doubts about the key role of the working class because the composition of cities has changed with the disappearance of manufacturing. However the working class retains incredible potential power. Transit workers, telecommunications, airports, logistics, public sector, health care, hospitality, and service workers are all essential to the functioning of modern cities.

Along with workers internationally, we have a world to win. Instead of subjecting housing to the needs of profits, we need to fight for a socialist world where housing and development is planned based on democratic committees of workers and residents to make life better for all. ✪

## Houston: Still Fighting Evictions After Hurricane Harvey

**Nathalia Rojas**

In September, the Houston Housing Authority (HHA) gave eviction notices to 180 low-income, elderly, disabled, or veteran residents at 2100 Memorial, a public housing high-rise. They were given five days to vacate their units. The HHA cited health and safety issues due to Hurricane Harvey, but they have never provided legitimate evidence to justify evictions.

A group of residents argued that this was “all about the money” and that HHA was using Hurricane Harvey to justify evictions in order to sell the property which is located on

prime real estate.

Residents, with Socialist Alternative members' help, formed Seniors Stand United to fight the evictions. Residents got local media attention and staged actions when management would not take their rent. Their campaign won an injunction, successfully forcing HHA to carry out necessary repairs and prohibiting evictions, at least until the next trial on March 26.

However, HHA is trying to make it uncomfortable for residents to stay in their homes. They eliminated residents' food service, decommissioned the van that helped seniors run errands, and stopped cleaning common

areas. Longstanding pest and mold issues are still not being addressed. HHA has even offered housing vouchers for residents to persuade them to leave the residence.

To save this public housing, residents need to reach out to the wider community and other tenants unions of other HHA properties. We need to build a strong movement to defend public housing and resist evictions. If we broaden the fight, we can build a movement that ensures 2100 Memorial remains an affordable, clean place to live, and that strengthens the larger fight for affordable housing. ✪

## Seattle's New Years Resolution: Tenant Power!

**Emily McArthur**

Every day in Seattle, the signs of the housing crisis grow: more tents under highway overpasses, more RVs along the streets, and more luxury apartments being built.

It's hardly surprising that working people are feeling the squeeze: a minimum wage worker would need to work 87 hours a week to afford a one-bedroom apartment.

But there's a glimmer of hope: working people are organizing and fighting back! Housing activists, including Socialist Alternative and coalitions of groups, waged a pitched battle this past November during the

city's budget season for two clear demands: Tax the Rich and Stop the Sweeps! Over 600 sweeps of homeless encampments have happened in the last year alone, with the city spending millions that could have been spent on housing. To sustainably fund housing we need to tax big business. Through well organized, bold tactics, housing activists dominated the news cycle, won public opinion, and held the political establishment's feet to the fire.

Emboldened by recent wins, the housing movement energetically mobilized to council meetings. Working with Councilmember Kshama Sawant, a member of Socialist

Alternative, the movement forced the conservative wing of the city council to commit to steps toward a tax on the 5% biggest businesses in Seattle to fund affordable housing and homeless services.

The fight is far from over. First, we will have to take the fight for a tax on big business all the way to the end to make sure the strongest possible legislation passes. But another battle line has opened up: statewide the demand for rent control is growing, and a bill legalizing it has been introduced to the state legislature. Winning will require working people to fight and build pressure in every part of the state. When we fight we win! ✪

## Rent Control, Rent Control, Make Minneapolis Affordable!

**Eva Metz**

Like most cities across the country, Minneapolis is facing a burgeoning housing crisis. In Minneapolis this year, the homeless population rose by 4.5% – the first time it has increased since the national foreclosure crisis in 2010 – but the number of beds in shelters decreased.

Backed by politicians like Minneapolis Mayor-elect Jacob Frey, wealthy real-estate developers present the housing crisis as an issue of supply-and-demand. But despite

apartment construction in the Twin Cities accelerating to the highest level since the 1980s, only 1 in 10 were slated to be affordable – and rents keep going up.

This past fall Socialist Alternative candidate Ginger Jentzen's campaign raised the issues of rent control and taxing the rich to build thousands of units of affordable housing and demonstrated the broad support for these policies. But as the movement moves forward and gains power, big developers and the landlord lobby will fight back, spreading propaganda aimed at eroding its support.

On December 9, just over one month after the election, 150 people joined Socialist Alternative, renters' rights organization Inquilinx por Justicia, and community leaders to discuss next steps in the movement to make Minneapolis affordable to all. Going forward, Socialist Alternative will continue building a powerful coalition of renters, tenants' unions, community organizations, unions, and working-class homeowners to winning the struggle for rent control. ✪

# FCC Ends Net Neutrality

Public Ownership Needed to Safeguard the Free Exchange of Information

Sarah Champernowne

On December 14, 2017 the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) voted to give internet providers, such as Comcast and Verizon, the power to give preferential treatment to web content producers of their choosing. Under the current regulations guaranteeing net neutrality, Comcast cannot offer faster speeds to site owners for a named price, for example, but this policy of equal access could change without net neutrality.

Previous attacks on net neutrality under the Obama administration were reversed under the impact of mass outrage. But the FCC under Ajit Pai – an Obama appointee made Chairman by Trump – is pushing to reverse these regulations. Putting more control in the hands of private internet providers is a threat to the availability of information on the internet.

## What is Net Neutrality?

Net neutrality is essentially a policy that internet providers should control only the quality and distribution of the mechanism (broadband) that websites use to serve content over the internet, not decide which websites have access to that broadband. The FCC is in favor of changing the definition of companies like Comcast from “common carriers” to “information services,” thus giving them the power to offer a “fast lane” to certain sites.

With the repeal of net neutrality, it will be legal for Comcast to offer higher quality



Rally outside FCC headquarters to protest the end of net neutrality

streaming to content producers, like Netflix or Fox News, who could pay more for the faster option, without the consultation of the consumer or the public. This restriction would act against the free flow of information on informal and non-corporate sites such as blogs and independent news sites. In the extreme case, repealing net neutrality could result in outright censorship of certain types of content.

## Don't Trust Corporate "Allies"

The companies attacking net neutrality, like Verizon, CenturyLink, and Comcast specialize in, and profit off of, the physical cables that make up broadband and internet networks. They would profit highly from being

allowed to commodify access to that cable, and suppress content. However, there are other big tech companies that openly defend net neutrality like Google, Facebook, and Netflix. Some of these corporations even engaged in “activism” organizing an online “Day of Action” in July.

Their position has little to do with an altruistic support for the democratization of information and everything to do with the fact that, as content producers and search engines, their profits and freedom are threatened by a repeal of net neutrality. They should not be considered allies in the fight for democratic control over our information sharing systems.

Google has recently come under fire for adjusting its search algorithm against left-wing websites as part of a campaign against

“fake news.” And pro-net neutrality video streaming websites like Hulu and YouTube have migrated previously free content to pay services like Hulu Plus and YouTube Red. And they will fight for their freedom to control the information you see – and profit off of it – if that ever comes under attack. We must not allow private monopolies to control our access to information.

## Defend Net Neutrality! Fight for Municipal Broadband!

These attacks by the FCC must be stopped. The repeal of net neutrality regulations are an unacceptable threat to free communication and a vital public service. But the fight back must go further to stop cable companies from continuing to push against net neutrality in the future. How can we expect Comcast to abandon a fight for its own profits?

As long as broadband remains in the hands of private industry, the fight to defend net neutrality and universal access to broadband will continue to be an uphill struggle against the powerful interest of capitalist profit. To truly win this battle, and keep the internet accessible to all, we must build a movement connecting workers from across the communications sector, CWA union members, and electricians. We should fight for municipal and national broadband, owned by the community, that can distribute internet service as a utility to all cities in the United States, without the motive of profit to limit access. ✪

# Fight Privatization of Boston's Public Transit!

Keely Mullen

November 20 marked a new attack on the working people of Greater Boston. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), the government agency responsible for public transportation in Massachusetts, announced a \$723 million contract with private corporation Cubic Corp to privatize fare collection. They will digitize fare collection and are leaving open the possibility of an investment in a new a “tap out” fare system where the longer you ride the more you pay.

This shadowy deal, referred to as AFC 2.0, is being rolled out as the great “modernization” of Boston's subways (the “T”) and buses. However, what it really represents is a continuation of the ongoing attacks on working-class and poor people in the city of Boston. Unfortunately, politicians from

politicians from both political parties are behind these attacks. Opposing these attacks will mean building a movement that opposes the political elite in both parties.

## Public Transit Under Attack

In 2014 the T was used over 400 million times. After years of trip cancellations, service delays, and system-wide shut downs, in 2015 Republican Governor Charlie Baker decided it was time to “fix the T.” His plan? To appoint a Fiscal Management and Control Board tasked with transforming Boston's public transit. The creation of this board formalized what had long been whispered about: privatizing the T. When public goods are put in private hands, it means that profit takes precedence over what is best for the community.

The proposed deal with Cubic Corp. to privatize fare collection means that, up until 2043, a private corporation can be in charge of maintaining and updating fare collection for the entire MBTA.

There have been other recent attempts to privatize public services in Massachusetts, and – crucially – those attempts have been defeated! The most recent example is in 2016 when the Massachusetts Teachers Association led a coalition that defeated a Wall-Street-backed ballot question to lift the statewide cap on charter schools. This is what we need to repeat if we're going to defeat privatization of the T!

Establishment politicians like Governor Charlie Baker and Mayor Marty Walsh to fight these attacks. If Marty Walsh were serious about defending the interests of working people, he would be fighting these

attacks tooth and nail, not allowing them to pass unchallenged! In order to defend our public education and transportation we need to build the biggest possible movement of unions, community organizations, socialists, and faith groups. As the 2016 victory to defend public education and keep the charter school cap shows, when we fight – we win!

- ✪ No to the deal with Cubic Corp! No to the privatization of the T!
- ✪ Tax the rich and redirect the \$723 million into improving the crumbling T infrastructure, expanding service throughout the Greater Boston area, and lowering fares!
- ✪ No to corporate appointees! Yes toFor a democratically elected board to oversee the funding and operation of the T! ✪

# Trump's Jerusalem Declaration Provokes Mass Outrage



Read more on international news at [SocialistWorld.net](http://SocialistWorld.net), website of the Committee for a Workers International.

Shahar Benhorin and  
Yasha Marmer,  
Socialist Struggle Movement

*The Socialist Struggle Movement in Israel and Palestine is part of the Committee for a Workers International with which Socialist Alternative is in political solidarity. Visit [SocialistAlternative.org](http://SocialistAlternative.org) for a longer version of this article.*

Trump's recent recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital – while ignoring the right of the Palestinians for a state with a capital in Jerusalem

– ignited a wave of protest around the world, and already has raised the death toll in Palestine. This in fact is recognition of the status quo of continuing occupation in east Jerusalem

while denying the right of the Palestinians for a state with a capital in Jerusalem.

Allegedly, Trump is not taking a position on the boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem. But, in fact, he gives clear backup for the continuation of the violent and unilateral takeover of the east side of the city by the Israeli regime in collaboration

with settlers' organisations.

## "The Deal of the Century"

Trump plans to reveal in the coming months a new "road map" that he claims will solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Trump is using his recent move to step up pressure on the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the PLO to accept all his dictates. Trump tears off U.S. imperialism's fake mask of "fair broker" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in a particularly blunt manner.

But the PA's elite are in a dead-end in terms of strategy.

They fear the development of mass popular protests. PA leaders are also aware that there is no other world imperialist power that would be accepted by the Israeli regime to "sponsor" negotiations.

## Protest on the Ground

The idea of a significant uprising against the occupation regime has had widespread support for some time among Palestinians in the 1967



Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu.

territories. At the same time, there is deep pessimism about what could be won. Taking into consideration heavy Israeli military repression, the scope for mass demonstrations in reaction to Trump's declaration, particularly in the West Bank, has, so far, been limited.

After Trump's declaration, thousands took to the streets in east Jerusalem, in parallel with demonstrations in other places. It is not clear, at this stage, if these Palestinian "rage" protests will develop into a wider and prolonged uprising. But wide protest, on a mass scale, that will defy the dictatorship of the

occupation and the settlements, is definitely necessary.

Trump and Netanyahu are ready, in the service of nationalist fanaticism and to hold onto power, to allow the region to deteriorate into more bloody turmoil. The appropriate response is to build struggles against them and their disastrous agenda. Protests in the Palestinian territories and throughout the region, particularly within the Green Line [the pre-1967 borders of Israel] – crucially including joint demonstrations of Jews and Arabs against the occupation and for peace – are essential to block the warmongers.

The struggle for peace demands a wide struggle against the occupation and for policies in the interests of working people and the poor, on both sides of the national divide.

The propaganda that portrays Jerusalem as a "unified" and prosperous city that preserves the freedom of worship along with liberty and dignity for all, aims to hide the reality of the separation wall, checkpoints, never-ending incitement on the basis of nationality and religion, heavy discrimination, disgraceful poverty, theft of houses and land from residents, racist hate marches promoted by the state, and daily abuse by *Magav* [the Border Police, a semi-military police force] and the authorities.

As part of the struggle against the occupation and for peace, Socialist Struggle Movement calls for the establishment of two national capitals in Jerusalem, while ensuring a life of well-being, equal rights, freedom of movement, freedom of worship and freedom from religious coercion. In the context of two socialist, democratic, and equal states, it will be possible to create a society that will enable Jerusalem to genuinely flourish as pluralist city without poverty-stricken ghettos, without discrimination and without concrete walls. ☺

# Struggle to Repeal Irish Abortion Ban Heats Up

Audrey Cooney

In mid-December, the abortion rights movement in Ireland scored a massive victory when a parliamentary committee recommended repealing the current ban on abortion in Ireland and allowing for unrestricted abortion up to the twelfth week of pregnancy.

The 8th amendment of Ireland's constitution outlaws all abortion except if a panel of doctors concludes that the pregnant person's life is endangered by the pregnancy. This forces people who need abortions to either continue their pregnancy, travel outside the country to one where abortion is legal or take abortion pills which, while safe, can land you in prison for 14 years. This law disproportionately impacts the working class, who often lack the funds to take time off from work and travel to receive an abortion, or must make significant financial sacrifices to do so.

The Socialist Party, the Irish sister party of

Socialist Alternative, has been an integral part of the struggle for abortion rights and played a huge role in achieving this recent victory against one of the strictest abortion laws in the world. In 2013, members of the Socialist Party founded ROSA (for Reproductive rights, against Oppression, Sexism & Austerity) a socialist feminist organization. The group has contributed greatly to the growing public awareness that the draconian 8th Amendment does little to stop people in Ireland from obtaining abortions and that legalized, accessible abortion is a necessity.

The mainstream media's coverage of the decision has mostly focused on how hours of expert testimony about the need for legalized abortion gradually shifted committee members' opinions. In reality, this battle was won by an organized movement that compelled the anti-choice establishment to bend to popular will. Several members of the committee said that the widespread illegal use of

abortion pills convinced them the current law is untenable. ROSA played a leading role in raising public awareness of the use of abortion pills. In 2014, they organized an "abortion pill train" that saw members of ROSA and other abortion rights activists traveling from Dublin to Belfast to pick up abortion pills and publically consuming them back in Dublin, in a powerful display of civil disobedience. In 2015 and 2017, a "bus for repeal" traveled to major cities around Ireland to distribute abortion pills and raise awareness; each action garnered international media attention.

ROSA is spreading to other countries, as Spain and Belgium have also founded their own chapters. This comes as more and more people are seeing the need for socialist brand of feminism that attacks the root causes of sexism and all forms of oppression: the system of capitalism.

The movement to repeal the 8th amendment has mobilized young Irish people and

budding activists in droves, as they increasingly reject the conservative government's outdated laws and the remaining though waning influence of the Catholic church on the state. This is a continuation of the growing radical mood in Ireland demonstrated in 2015 when the country became the first to legalize same-sex marriage with a popular referendum.

Along with recommending abortion on demand up to 12 weeks, the parliamentary committee called for a referendum on repealing the 8th Amendment to be held next year. ROSA and the Socialist Party are poised to play a key role in the developing fight to repeal the 8th Amendment and win safe and accessible abortion rights in Ireland. Socialist feminism is on the agenda internationally, and the victory in Ireland is a lesson to the global women's movement that when we get organized and fight unapologetically, we win! ☺

# Amazon Warehouse Workers: Will the Sleeping Giant Awake?

Tony Wilsdon

Rumblings are starting among new sections of the working class. Target workers in Christiansburg, Virginia went on strike for five days in September, winning their key demand related to sexual and racial discrimination. These workers have started to move down the path of their grandfather and grandmothers, by learning that they have enormous power in the workforce if they unite and move into struggle.

Most important is the start of struggle by workers at the huge Amazon warehouses. Warehouse workers and supporters protested low wages and brutal working conditions in Manhattan, New York in December. Amazon warehouse workers went on strike at the biggest Amazon warehouse in Italy in 2016. Underground organizing drives are starting in warehouses in the U.S.

In the U.S. alone, there are more than 50 gigantic buildings, with over 40,000 fulltime workers. The total workforce of Amazon is over 450,000. Conditions are brutal.

Yet, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos is the richest man on earth, with a wealth of over \$100 billion. He makes more money in one minute than the average millennial makes in a year. This is only possible because, under capitalism, the bosses control



A normal day in an Amazon warehouse.

wages and working conditions, and can therefore pay their workers less than the wealth that their labor produces.

## Deplorable Conditions

A reporter who went undercover to work at an Amazon warehouse in England wrote: "Alone in a locked metal cage, 10 feet from my nearest colleague, a robot approaches from the shadows and thrusts a tower of shelves towards me. I have nine seconds to grab and process an item to be sent for packing – a target of 300 items an hour, for hour after relentless hour. Those

who could not keep up with the punishing targets faced the sack – and some who buckled under the strain had to be attended to by ambulance crews.

"Many of the clocks have been covered over with tape by employees desperate not to be reminded how long is left of their shift" (*Mirror*, 11/25/2017).

Another Amazon worker explained: "If you're way over on one side of the warehouse and lunch is called, you have 30 minutes from that point to clock out, eat, and come back. You're spending half your time waiting to be scanned out so you can be sure you're not

stealing anything. It leaves you with about 10 minutes for food." One Amazon warehouse worker estimated he walks 13 miles a day in the warehouse. (*MentalFloss.com*, 11/4/2015).

Workers face a daily barrage of arguments that they are powerless in the new gig economy, and that labor unions are a thing of the past. However, the boss makes no money when workers withdraw their labor – that hasn't changed.

There is still a powerful industrial sector economy in the U.S. Transportation workers, power workers, warehouse workers, grocery store workers and others have lots of power if the unions stepped up and mobilized union members.

The high-tech and digital economy is creating new powerful sections of the working class. Workers in the huge Amazon distribution warehouses outside most cities and

major towns have enormous potential power. These are massive hubs which deliver products that represent a huge section of the economy, based on a just-in-time distribution system. If the workers shut down these warehouses, Amazon would have to grant them improved wages and working conditions or lose billions of dollars.

Outing the brutal working conditions at Amazon is a key part of mobilizing public opinion on the side of the workers. But even more essential, and crucial to creating any lasting change, will be the workers themselves organizing. Undercover organizing inside the warehouses is essential. Socialist Alternative encourages workers to take up this important work of building core groups of workers in the warehouse that can then mushroom into the powerful unions of tomorrow. ✪

## Can Retail Be Saved?

The retail industry as we know it will never be the same. There is urgent need for retail workers, both in traditional box stores as well as in the new warehouses, to organize alongside the wider working class for:

- ✪ \$15 minimum wage – a living wage for all!
- ✪ Union jobs – we need democratic unions run by the rank-and-file to fight for better pay, working conditions, and social services, especially in Amazon warehouses;
- ✪ Public ownership of top retail corporations under democratic control – break the power of the bosses! The enormous wealth and infrastructure of the retail sector should belong to all. ✪

## The Madness of Capitalism: Retail Industry in Crisis

Theresa Powers

With the rise of technology, the invention of the internet, and an overall shift towards convenience, the retail industry as we know it is changing rapidly. Amazon, Jeff Bezos' multi-billion dollar corporation, is becoming the Sears catalogue of the future. Workers are faced with uncertainty as big-box stores are replaced by websites and warehouses and jobs are lost. As wages remain stagnant and health-care costs continue to rise, this crisis leaves retail workers at the mercy of a backwards capitalist system where a few people own the majority of the wealth.

### Just A Click Away

If goods are available to us through a simple click of a button, all we have to do

is select "one-day shipping" to save ourselves time and a trip to the store. Big-box retail stores are quickly becoming obsolete as online shopping increases. Half of all U.S. households are Amazon Prime subscribers, with convenience at their fingertips. Rather than seeking out storefronts, retail businesses are on the hunt for warehouses to feed the supply and demand of quick and easy online shopping. Traditional retailers are struggling to compete with companies like Amazon, eBay, and Wayfair, to name a few.

As the retail industry changes, the ones who suffer the most are the workers. Retail is the most significant employer in the U.S. with an estimated 4.6 million full and part-time employees. In the past year, 89,000 jobs have been lost, plunging these refugees of the retail crisis into financial instability. While the warehouses replacing big-box

stores can offer new homes to some employees, they certainly won't make up the difference, leaving possibly millions jobless and mostly unable to support themselves or their families.

### Department Store Decline

Following the end of World War II and during the post-war economic upswing, department stores were revelling in their glory. New highway infrastructure shuttled families from the suburbs to shopping malls – convenient, climate-controlled monuments to consumerism with lots of parking. However, in the wake of the Great Recession, mall visits declined a staggering 50% between 2010-13 as consumers became bargain shoppers and department store shopping was replaced with thrifting. When anchor stores

like Macy's or Sears leave a mall, the whole space can lose business. Hundreds of vacant retail stores across the country are being turned into trampoline parks and community colleges.

While there was a slight recovery after the '07-'08 recession and workers see more money in their pockets as wages rise thanks to campaigns like the Fight for \$15, the results are shallow. Wages are still in a long term decline which means a decline in purchasing power for a big section of the population.

The collapse of large parts of the retail sector is a warning sign for capitalism reflecting the massive growth of inequality. What was called the "middle class" in the U.S. – including big sections of the working class – is being relentlessly squeezed. This has already led to political upheaval and it will lead to a social explosion in the coming period. ✪

# One Year is Enough

continued from p. 3

Republicans but also a warning to the party as a whole of the fate that could await them in the 2018 midterms.

The Democrats clearly want to run in 2018 as the #notTrump and #metoo party. As in 2016, they seek to avoid making any substantive promises to the working class and young people. Given Trump's downward spiral this may be enough, but it is also a very dangerous game. Millions want them to stand up and fight – for impeachment, to defend Dreamers, for Medicare for All – but again and again they refuse.

In general, the mid-terms will cut across struggle in the streets. But given the enormous volatility in the current political situation, there are many scenarios that could restart the movement in 2018 - including the fight for women's rights, the threat to DREAMers, and the call for a new Poor People's March (see accompanying pieces). And then there is the Trump factor: if, for example, he chooses to fire Mueller, the effect could provoke an explosive constitutional crisis.

## We Need Our Own Party

For the past several years, both establishment parties have been roiled by division, reflecting the enormous social crisis in U.S. society, acute political polarization, and the profound desire for change. The ground is being laid for three or four major parties in the U.S., including "center right" and "center left" establishment parties as well as a far right and a clearly left party.

At the moment, however, the main energy on the left remains focused on trying to transform the Democratic Party into a "people's party." While we sympathize with those engaged in this fight, we do not believe it will succeed. At some point, a more decisive crisis will impel millions of radicalized working people, women, people of color, and young people out of the Democrats and toward building a new party based on an anti-corporate program.

If Bernie Sanders, still the most popular politician in the country, was to call for such a party, even now, it would receive an enormous echo. But Bernie should also put his authority behind the effort to build a serious mass movement to bring the opposition to Trump back on the streets. At the heart of this, we need a national organization of struggle with democratic structures that can engage in an ongoing debate on the strategy and tactics of the movement. This would be the first step towards serious



Roy Moore defeated in Alabama special election.

political realignment. Such a mass movement centered built around demands that speak to the needs of the working class – including a \$15 federal minimum wage, Medicare for All, free college, massive investment in a green infrastructure, and an end to mass incarceration – could lead to a much more serious degrading of Trump's support.

Trump's accession is both a byproduct and a further cause of the degeneration and decline of American capitalism. It is this deeper crisis that is leading millions to see socialism as an attractive alternative. Sanders' presidential campaign in 2016 was a key moment in this process and, in the wake of Trump's victory, thousands joined socialist organizations including ours. The latest sign of the potential to develop a serious force around clear, socialist ideas was the campaign of Ginger Jentzen, member of Socialist Alternative, for Minneapolis City Council. While not in the end winning the seat, her campaign redefined the political debate in Minneapolis. This also comes in the wake of Ginger and SA playing a key role in the successful fight to win the first local \$15 minimum wage in the Midwest.

While 2017 saw the development of enormous mass opposition to Trump and deepened the radicalization on the left in society, there is undoubtedly a lot of confusion about the way forward. In 2018, we must rededicate ourselves to clarifying the key strategic issues facing the left and building the mass force that can bring down Trump and open the way to the working class coming back on the stage of American history. ✪

# #MeToo

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## Collective Action Against Harassment

#MeToo has harnessed enough power to demand major legal changes for women's rights and workplace protections. This would be a pivotal next step, but the pandemic level of harassment shows we need to go further. We need to build a collective force in our workplaces that pushes back against harassment and bullying in all forms, against low pay and terrible working conditions. These conditions affect women workers disproportionately, but also millions of people of all genders.

Uniting around collective action that would shut down workplaces when sexual harassment is rampant would transform #MeToo into a monumental force for change. We can take inspiration from the struggles of working women in the past. In the 1830s in Lowell, Massachusetts, teenage girls working in textile mills, faced with pay cuts as well as sexual harassment and assault on the job, went on strike. This was the first female led labor struggle in American history, long before women even had the right to vote. These are the kind of steps we should look to today, and speak to the urgent need for a re-built labor movement that stands unabashedly on the side of all workers.

#MeToo could initiate a turning point in society with a more decisive rejection of sexual harassment, assault, and violence against women. However, it will require taking the palpable level of outrage and developing it into an organized movement on the ground and in our workplaces to win lasting changes in women's lives.

A new chapter in the fight for women's rights could be opened up through the courage that #MeToo has inspired. Yet history shows that our gains will be under constant attack. Socialists believe that to truly end the structural sexism which allows our bosses to harass us, we have to simultaneously fight the root cause: capitalism. We can create a new system and society which ends predatory capitalism, and is democratically run in the interests of all working people. ✪

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# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



## #MeToo SHAKES THE SYSTEM

### BUILD A MASS WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Kelly Bellin

Just a few months ago, detailed allegations of Harvey Weinstein's sexual harassment first broke into the mainstream media. Courageous actresses took a stand against a powerful figure within a multi-billion dollar industry that normalizes sexism. This has sparked a new phase of a growing women's movement which began with the explosive reaction to Trump's election.

Even while #MeToo remains a primarily internet-driven mass discussion, its power has rocked the globe. A whole series of men in media and politics have been exposed, and many forced to resign. The Washington Post reports that the last time this many congressmen were driven from office was during the Civil War.

Even before the anti-Trump protests that kicked off 2017, there has been a steady flow of resistance from women to their abuse under capitalism. The Slutwalks, Carry That Weight, and #YesAllWomen all showed that young women are ready to fight back against sexism and abuse. These movements, as well as #MeToo, are part of an international revolt by women from Latin America to Eastern Europe.

#### Fighting Our Own Weinsteins

In the face of a seemingly endless flood of accusations, women worldwide are talking to

their friends, families, and co-workers about their own experiences. The #MeToo collective uprising has already had a profound impact on society and politics, bringing front and center the need to stop sexual harassment in the workplace.

But it has opened another question: What about the tens of millions of women whose bosses and harassers are not famous people? What are we to do?

Sexual harassment in the workplace is widespread, underreported, and, in too many cases, results in retaliation against the victim. Women who come forward against harassment on the job are told to look to Human Resources or other internal company routes. Yet HR departments answer to the very companies that face liability. The choice for many women boils down to losing their jobs or enduring abuse.

Taking matters outside of company mediation means looking to a court system that has systematically failed women. The vast majority of workplace discrimination lawsuits – which includes sexual harassment – are dismissed by the courts. In fact, a study from the University of Cincinnati reported that only 4% of these suits result in awarding damages to the victim.

The federal agency that is supposed to deal with harassment complaints, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), is toothless. A new system needs to be set up where every workplace has a

complaints officer, federally protected from employer retaliation. The legal framework also needs to be radically overhauled. Among other things, a new system must void clauses in employee contracts that require mandatory company-run arbitration for complaints, meaning victims can't go to court. It is estimated that more than half of American workers can't take harassment claims to court because of these clauses. Of course the only guarantee that a new agency would also not become toothless is a mobilized and active workforce refusing to return to the past. This kind of serious approach to reform will be met with ferocious resistance from corporate America and will require a massive push from below.

#### Bringing #MeToo into the Streets

The most notorious sexual predator in the U.S. sits in the White House. The majority of Americans now believe Trump should resign because of the growing allegations of sexual harassment against him. The #MeToo campaign has a crucial role to play in the overall fight to drive Trump's hateful administration out of office. This can be made concrete with massive #MeToo contingents at protests that have been called for January 20 – the one year anniversary of Trump's presidency – as well as on International Women's Day.

While the Republican Party pushes the

brunt of legislation attacking women's rights, claims of sexual harassment and assault have rocked both parties. Key figures in the Democratic Party seem to be determined to get on the right side of this issue after years of looking the other way. But is it enough to run a slate of candidates in the 2018 midterm election who do not have sexual harassment allegations against them? The real question is, what will the Democratic Party do to fight for the millions of women who do not have famous abusers? Are they prepared to take on entrenched corporate power that stands in the way of making meaningful change in our workplaces? Unfortunately, there is little basis for confidence and plenty of history showing Democratic Party opposition to any serious threat to corporate power.

Already we've seen the defeat of predator Roy Moore in the Alabama Senate race, which represented both a rejection of Trump's agenda and of sexual abuse. It was also the first time a Democrat won a Senate seat in Alabama in 25 years. But after defeating Moore, Democrat Doug Jones promptly went on CNN and stated that Trump should not resign because of his history of harassing and assaulting women – outrageously claiming that people need to "move on" rather than fight back.

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