

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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MEDICARE FOR ALL

FOR-PROFIT HEALTH CARE
MAKES US SICK

ALSO INSIDE

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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, health care, 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 JOINED SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

I have been passionate about politics and social justice for as long as I can remember. I think it comes with the territory of paying attention to the world around us and having compassion for others.

My siblings and I were raised by a struggling single mother and our immigrant grandparents who sacrificed what little time, money, and energy they had to give us a shot at living a good life. The way most of my friends and I were raised meant that we experienced first-hand the harsh reality of an unequal economic system that disadvantages working-class people – struggling to keep the lights on, buy food, fill the gas tank, and pay for visits to a doctor even if we were lucky enough to have health insurance. It also meant I grew up a die-hard Democrat, convinced that voting and hoping for change would be enough to end the suffering of so many people around me and in the news.

In college I went on to study anthropology and women's, gender, and sexuality studies with a concentration in power, institutions, and economies. It brought me a greater understanding of systemic issues like inequality and injustice, and while I learned much from intersectional feminism I still didn't know how these understandings could translate into actual victories for working and other oppressed peoples.

I finally gained the right to vote in time to cast a vote for Obama's reelection campaign, but with the failure of his administration to bring the change that was promised, I soon became disillusioned with the political process.

It wasn't until Bernie Sanders' campaign opened my eyes to socialism, the capitalist



Amanda Ponomarenko
Columbus, OH

establishment, and the blame for inequality rests with corporations and the billionaire class that I started making connections and getting excited again. I began attending rallies and events after Trump's inauguration because I was desperate for a way to fight back. At the 2018 Women's March in Columbus, I heard a speech given by members of Socialist Alternative calling for a movement of people to fight for demands like health care and a \$15 minimum wage – I quickly got involved. I am still learning every day from our work in Socialist Alternative, our study of Marxism, and our involvement in our communities, workplaces, and campuses. I now have a renewed sense of hope and drive based on an understanding of the power of working people coming together and fighting for a better vision of our world. ✦

International Workers Day Sees Increasing Class Struggle

Worldwide, May 1 is a working-class holiday. Originating in the fight for the eight-hour day in the 1880s in the U.S., it is a day of demonstrations, strikes, and memorializing the struggles that won gains for working people. Today, working people face a drastic social crisis due to incredible inequality – and this is before the next recession hits!

Working people are stepping up in struggle – from the teachers revolts in West Virginia to Oakland, to the recent Stop & Shop strike in New England. More American workers went out on strike in 2018 than any single year since 1986! This trend is international as well: in France the yellow vests movement continues and general strikes helped bring down Algeria's hated president.

In the latest stage of the education revolt, teachers in South Carolina are walking out on May 1. South Carolina schools have been underfunded for 11 years and teachers are struggling to live on their salaries while class sizes remain too large.

Meanwhile, private sector workers have begun to absorb the energy and resolve of the teachers' revolt as was shown in the recent Stop & Shop strike. After decades of defeats and concessions, striking is back because workers see the opportunity to push back against the corporate elite in an economy where we are told about labor

shortages in many sectors. After exhausting all other avenues, working people are looking at the strike as key weapon to win better pay, benefits, and working conditions.

While strikes have not yet spread to most sectors, for those who have come out, it has provided a rapid education in the class struggle. More than ever working-class activists are looking for new strategies that involve mobilizing the full weight of their coworkers. This can and will lead to a renewal in union leaderships as union members look away from the lobbying and concessionary strategies and toward class-struggle ideas. This also poses the need for a new political force based on the interests of working people. As in all previous periods when the labor movement in the U.S. began to move onto the offensive, socialists in the labor movement have a key role to play.

May Day was brought back to prominence in the U.S. in 2006 on the "day without an immigrant" which saw mass strikes against vicious anti-immigrant legislation. Today, under Trump, it is more critical than ever to mobilize native born and immigrant workers around their common interests. We need to rebuild the fighting traditions of the labor movement to battle for living wages, health care, and housing for all. ✦

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As Democrats Leadership Obstructs Build A Movement to Win Medicare for All

Marty Harrison,
Member, Pennsylvania
Association of Staff Nurses
and Allied Professionals
(personal capacity)

The public debate over health care is heating up across the political spectrum. The majority in society has reached a consensus on the solution, improved Medicare for All, with polls consistently demonstrating support around 70% overall and over 50% among self-identified Republicans. More than 100 Democrats have signed on to Pramila Jayapal's robust Medicare for All legislation in the House and Bernie Sanders introduced an updated version of his bill in the Senate. With a consensus in society and viable legislation pending in both chambers of Congress, why isn't my Medicare for All card already in the mail?

The short answer is capitalism. Even the most ardent defenders of capitalism recognize there is a problem. The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas summed it up from the banker's perspective, "U.S. spending on health



care as a share of gross domestic product is well above average for other developed countries, while health care outcomes are much worse than in other developed countries." While the health-care profiteers in Big Pharma, the health insurance industry

and the for-profit hospital corporations and their representatives in the leadership of the Republican and Democratic Parties unequivocally reject Medicare for All, they have not yet reached consensus on their own solution.

President Trump sparked the latest

escalation in the debate when his Department of Justice, in a change from previous policy, sided with a Texas federal judge's ruling that the whole of the Affordable Care Act is unconstitutional. Even in the absence of sweeping "repeal and replace" legislation, the piecemeal attacks on Obamacare directed by the Trump administration are having significant negative effects, raising costs to consumers, increasing the ranks of the uninsured, limiting plan choices and undermining the financial stability of safety net hospitals in rural and urban areas.

Congressional Republicans, still smarting from their losses in the 2018 midterm elections, declined to take up Trump's incendiary rhetoric and pledged not to consider repealing Obamacare until after they retake Congress in 2020. However, the Trump tax cut they championed in December of 2017 has created real deficits which they will demand be offset with massive funding cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. The biggest threats to health care at the federal level

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Democratic Socialists Win in Chicago

Now Build A Mass Movement to Win Real Gains!

**Matt Wylder and
Nick Wozniak**

In a fantastic result for working people, six self-described democratic socialists and members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) will join Chicago's fifty-seat City Council after a hard-fought runoff election on April 2: Daniel LaSpata, Carlos Rosa, Byron Sigcho-Lopez, Jeanette Taylor, Andre Vasquez, and Rossana Rodriguez.

Voters overall delivered a total shake up to city politics and a devastating blow to the "machine" that has been the evolving instrument for corporate Democrats' top-down rule over the city for decades. Socialist Alternative endorsed Byron and Rossana, the two campaigns independent of the Democratic Party, but we welcome the victories of all the democratic socialist candidates as well as the defeat of establishment incumbents by other left candidates.

The entry of democratic socialists into the City Council and the defeat of key allies of outgoing Mayor Emanuel will disrupt the routines of big business' political domination of the city. The Chicago City Council has traditionally operated as a rubber stamp

for the mayor and corporate interests, but now with these victories there is already talk of the formation of a "democratic socialist caucus." If democratic socialists, as well as other elected left candidates, forcefully bring the issues that many of them campaigned on into the council – like rent control, taxing the rich, an elected civilian police review board, and full funding for schools with an elected school board – it could become the site of sharp conflict with the city's corporate elite.

Democratic Machine Dealt Serious Blow

The new left on the council will be contending with a new mayor in Lori Lightfoot. Lightfoot, a former prosecutor and corporate lawyer, ran as a little-known "outsider" and will be the first black woman to take the mayor's office as well as Chicago's first openly gay mayor. By explicitly running on an agenda of "change" and against Emanuel and the machine, she won a stunning 73.7% of the vote. This was the second-biggest margin in Chicago history and is testament to the depleting power of the city's Democratic political establishment and the enormous

desire for change from the rotten status quo under Emanuel.

Despite her image, Lightfoot was big business' preferred candidate in the runoff race. Although she won an overwhelming majority, there was an historically low turnout and her election represents more a rejection of the status quo than enthusiasm for any platform. The one element that resonated was her vow to "bring in the light" against corruption. Yet, taking on official corruption will not prevent big business from rigging the system in their favor through entirely legal and official measures. If major unions and left leaders had put forward an alternative to the Democratic Party after Emanuel's exit from the race last September, the anti-establishment mood could have been directed behind a genuinely working-class campaign fighting for a transformative program instead of Lightfoot's vague self-described "progressive" one, which working people cannot rely on.

At times, Lightfoot may be willing to be out of step with downtown elites, but in her opposition to grassroots demands like rent control and through establishment appointments on her transition team she is already demonstrating that she will largely be friendly

to big business.

Build for Socialist Policies in City Hall

The five, or potentially six, winning campaigns did not run in a coordinated or fully united way and, to achieve victories, more fighting unity will have to be built.

A democratic socialist caucus in the Council will have to base itself on the power of working people, not on its ability to cut deals with the mayor or other factions on the Council. This would mean caucus members using their offices first and foremost to rally working people into struggle and to build mass movements. With this approach, Seattle Councilmember and Socialist Alternative member, Kshama Sawant, spearheaded the first victory for a \$15 minimum wage in the country in 2014. This led to other gains for working people, upending the political status quo in Seattle.

The newly-elected democratic socialists have taken an important first step towards a

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“Seattle is Dying” Video Sparks Debate

Housing Crisis Fuels Polarization in Seattle Elections

Ty Moore

A “sensationalized spree of fear and hate-mongering,” is how Seattle’s Crosscut aptly characterized KOMO-TV’s special on the homelessness crisis. “Seattle is Dying” has over three million views since it first aired on March 19. The film demonizes homeless community members, blames the poor for the conditions they face, and reduces what is really a deep housing affordability, health care, and opioid crisis to individual failures.

Nonetheless, discussion of the program is now dominating the already heated debate over Seattle’s worst-in-the-nation homelessness crisis. Although most of the political establishment and media have expressed outrage at this latest right-wing spectacle from the Sinclair Broadcast Group, it has clearly touched a nerve. The program offers an echo – if a severely distorted one – to the understandable popular frustration with the city establishment’s abysmal failure to address the homelessness crisis.

In the four years since city and county officials declared a “State of Emergency” on homelessness, the situation has gone from bad to worse. Unfortunately, the dangerous, right-populist ideas animating “Seattle is Dying” are likely to gain growing support in the absence of any real solution to the sky-high rents and the lack of funding for homeless and mental health services.

Jeff Bezos Strikes Back

Despite Seattle’s liberal image, new conservative groups like “Speak Out Seattle” (SOS) have emerged over the last year, mobilizing a layer of mainly older, middle and upper-class Seattleites into action against the “liberal establishment.” These groups were indirectly supported and funded by Amazon and big business as a populist battering ram to push back the housing justice movement and defeat the “Amazon Tax” last year.

The pressure and polarization created by this business-backed right-populism helped push several councilmembers into early retirement. This forms part of the backdrop for Seattle’s sharply contested City Council elections this year. At the epicenter of the fight for the future of Seattle is the District 3 race, where big business is aiming to unseat socialist councilmember Kshama Sawant and push back the considerable influence Socialist Alternative has achieved in Seattle politics since Kshama first won her seat in 2013.

While the sheer scale of the homelessness crisis is forcing Democratic politicians in City Hall to rhetorically acknowledge the problem,

they have shown little commitment to action. No serious solutions matching the scale of the crisis have been on offer from the Democratic leaders or big business.

In fact, their record so far has been the opposite. In 2017, Jeff Bezos spent \$350,000 on a corporate PAC to elect Mayor Durkan. Six months later, in April 2018, under enormous pressure from big business, she and the majority of the City Council repealed the “Amazon Tax.” This tax on the richest 3% of Seattle business was won after a hard-fought nine-month battle waged by a broad coalition of housing justice groups, with Socialist Alternative and Kshama Sawant playing a central role. This progressive revenue source, while not enough, could have substantially expanded publicly-owned affordable housing and funded social services.

This capitulation, especially by the more liberal wing of the council, demoralized the left and emboldened big business and the right-wing forces mobilized behind them. Ironically, despite City Hall caving to Jeff Bezos’ bullying, less than a year later Amazon went ahead with moving the threatened jobs anyway! Now Jeff Bezos has dumped \$200,000 into a Chamber of Commerce run PAC – with many other businesses following Amazon’s lead – to back their chosen candidates for City Council. Much of that will flow into their drive to unseat Sawant.

This underscores the serious mistake of so-called progressive leaders who complained the Amazon Tax failed because the movement “alienated” big business and promised that consensus solutions could be found by “bringing business to the table.” A year later, and with city elections underway, this strategy has produced nothing while popular frustration is reaching a boiling point.

Lessons of the Tax Amazon Campaign

The real lessons of Seattle City Council’s disastrous repeal of the Amazon Tax are two-fold:

1. We need to elect political leaders who will consistently stand on the side of working people, and who firmly reject the failed strategy of aiming to both appease big business and represent working class communities. We need elected leaders who will treat their offices as organizing centers for our movements, using their considerable resources, media influence, and ability to shape policy to strengthen the organized power of working people.



Immigration activist Maru Mora speaks with Kshama Sawant at a “Seattle Needs Rent Control” press conference in Seattle’s City Hall.

2. We need to build a stronger movement. History teaches us that successfully challenging the ruling class is only possible by building a truly mass movement, rooted in working class communities. For the Seattle housing justice movement, this means uniting the broadest possible forces – including the powerful trade union movement – behind bold policies including comprehensive rent control free of corporate loopholes, and taxing big business to build tens of thousands of high quality, permanently affordable, publicly-owned homes. These demands are the cutting edge of our campaign to re-elect Kshama Sawant to City Council.

The Failure of “Class Consensus” Politics

The debate over strategy cuts to the core of the political disagreement socialists have with most progressive Democratic Party politicians, and even many labor and NGO leaders. The central debate is not over what needs to be done – there have been endless studies and deep wells of experience from academic studies, front-line service providers, self-organized houseless communities, renters rights activists and others which we draw upon. The central debate is how we can win the funds needed for solutions matching the scale of the problem.

In reality, the mantra of “bringing big business to the table” is a strategy of paralysis. Big business owns the table. Business uses

this argument as a perennial diversion and delay tactic to block attempts to make them pay for the crisis their policies have created. For decades, big business has fought openly, ruthlessly and successfully to rewrite the tax laws in their interests at the federal, state, and local levels and they are not about to change course now. After doubling its profits to an eye-popping \$11 billion last year, Amazon paid no federal taxes, and instead received a net subsidy of \$129 million!

For billionaires like Bezos, the math is simple: higher taxes = lower profits. They also fear even a small tax hike in Seattle will set a dangerous precedent by raising working people’s confidence to win further victories, so Bezos and others have drawn a firm line in the sand. At the same time, in Seattle and nationally, the fast-growing affordability and homelessness crisis is creating deep political problems for the establishment. With popular anger at them growing – reflected both on in right-wing populist ideas and growing support for the socialist left – the stability of their political system is weakening.

More and more people recognize that solving the affordable housing and homelessness crisis starts with rejecting the failed for-profit, market based strategies. Capitalism has failed to provide quality, stable housing to a growing majority of working people. It’s time for bold socialist policies to ensure everyone in Seattle has an equal right to enjoy this beautiful city; a right to an affordable, dignified, healthy, and stable place to live. This message is at the heart of Kshama Sawant and Socialist Alternative’s campaign for Seattle City Council. ☘

Stop & Shop Strike: A Review and Lessons for the Future

Elan Axelbank

The largest private sector strike in the U.S. in the past three years has ended. For eleven hard-fought days 31,000 Stop & Shop grocery-store workers across New England struck against company attacks on their wages and benefits. The tentative agreement, which will likely be ratified by all five New England United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) locals, is better than what workers would have gotten without striking, but there are many mixed feelings about the contract and the way the union leadership handled the strike and how it ended.

The strike succeeded in stopping the company's threat to significantly raise health-care costs, something which corporations everywhere are trying to do to their workers. This sets a clear example for working people that attacks in this arena can be stopped with a bold fightback. But the contract also institutes a two-tier system of wages and pensions between part-time and full-time employees, and new hires and current employees. This has to be seen for what it is: an attempt by the company to divide the workforce and weaken the union for the next contract battle in three years. We must be clear that this cannot be allowed to happen.

Workers at other companies would do well to follow Stop & Shop workers' lead, so long as the lessons are learned. Over the course of the strike, Stop & Shop lost a whopping \$100 million. Delis, bakeries, and customer service counters were closed. Stores began to smell as meat and dairy expired, and produce wilted. Put on full display for all to see was the simple truth: without workers, Stop & Shop is nothing.

The Early Days of the Strike

The strike began at 1pm on Thursday, April 11 when workers got a text message beginning the strike and instructing them to walk out of work. Unfortunately, for some workers, this was the first time they had even heard of the contract dispute. Many workers wished that the union leadership had done more pre-strike organizing and preparation for the strike.

As soon as the strike started, the company decided to close many smaller stores and keep the larger ones open using managers and scab labor. Given the different situation between closed and open stores as well as the differences between busy city-stores and less busy neighborhood or suburb stores, picket lines looked different everywhere. For most workers this was their first time going on strike – the last Stop & Shop strike was in 1988 and it lasted four hours – so a common theme everywhere was learning on the fly.

Building Effective Picket Lines and Stopping Delivery Trucks

Winning a strike requires shutting down a company's production or the service they provide – in this case making and selling food and groceries. This strike required strong picket lines – stopping customers from entering stores and delivery truck drivers from making deliveries; widespread customer and community support; and the active involvement of other unions and the wider labor movement.

Over the course of eleven days, the workers learned an enormous amount about strikes and the labor movement, not least how to organize an effective picket line. Moving picket lines were much more effective at deterring customers than standing still. Respectfully talking to customers about the issues in the strike, what the company was trying to do, and politely but firmly asking them to shop somewhere else was shown to be effective. Creative chants that helped to keep up the energy on the picket lines were important too. Picket lines were overwhelmingly effective, with the company losing over \$2 million each day.

Union truck drivers in the Teamsters pledged not to cross the picket line and make deliveries during the strike, but that didn't stop the company from hiring non-union scab truck drivers who would. Convincing these truck drivers to not make their deliveries was a crucial part of making the company suffer. Learning by doing, workers realized that this took a two-pronged approach: physically blocking the truck from backing into the loading dock and actually talking to the truck drivers to convince them to turn around.

Another important lesson learned throughout the strike was the way the police were used to defend the company's interests, not those of the workers. This is true of all serious labor battles against the bosses.

Socialist Alternative members in Boston, Worcester, Amherst, Providence, and Connecticut were active on the picket lines at a number of stores and assisting workers to develop militant tactics. Among other things we helped organize a public meeting of rank-and-file Stop & Shop workers and community supporters titled, "Beat Stop & Shop: How Can We Win This Strike."

Mega Pickets

On the eighth day of the strike, the union held a rally in Boston with soon-to-be presidential candidate Joe Biden. Many workers were happy to have Biden's support and knew it would get them good publicity and media attention, but many also had a healthy skepticism of Biden's intentions and understood that he could not be relied on to win the strike



Just one of many pickets in Boston. This one includes signs for the Mega Pickets organized over Easter weekend.

for them.

An unofficial committee of strikers decided to use the Biden rally, which drew over 2,000 people, to build further momentum and escalation for the strike. Workers passed out 1,500 flyers building for an Easter-weekend "Mega Picket" at the South Bay Stop & Shop with the goal of effectively shutting it down. South Bay is the second most profitable store in New England so workers knew this would have a huge effect on the company. Seeing this, workers at the Jamaica Plain store that night decided to build for their own Mega Picket to prevent the company's attempt to reopen their store before Easter.

On Friday, April 19, South Bay workers drove to stores across Greater Boston to build for the Mega Picket. In Jamaica Plain, workers handed out over 1,000 flyers at the local T (subway) station and along the neighborhood's main street.

On Saturday, 250 workers and community supporters rallied in front of the Jamaica Plain store, preventing the store from opening.

At South Bay, 150 workers, community supporters, and members of other unions from the teachers to nurses, and carpenters to ironworkers, gathered for a Mega Picket which spanned the entire front of the massive building covering both entrances to the store.

Stop & Shop management was absolutely furious at this. We found out the next day that the South Bay store made one-tenth of normal revenue for the day before Easter. The two mega pickets pointed toward what was necessary to escalate the strike. If the union leadership had called for mega pickets at stores across the region, it could have motivated more workers to join the picket line, given a concrete way for the community

and other unions to support the workers, and most importantly made it harder for the company to operate. An important lesson from this strike though is that even without the union leadership taking this sort of initiative, rank-and-file workers can still organize to take bold initiative themselves.

Tentative Agreement (TA)

The day after the mega pickets, on Easter night, the company and union leadership came to a tentative agreement. This was met with an enormous sense of relief by most Stop & Shop workers, who had gone without pay. Many workers were also extremely frustrated with how the union leadership let the process play out. Union leaders instructed workers to immediately stop picketing and report back to work the next morning, before a ratification vote had even taken place. They also refused to release the actual details of the tentative agreement!

A tentative agreement should be just that; tentative. Pickets should not be lifted and workers should not return to work until the union membership votes to ratify the agreement. Lifting the pickets prematurely makes it much harder to go back on strike if needed, which puts enormous pressure on the membership to ratify the contract, even if really they don't want to.

Instead, it would have been far better if the union leadership had announced a tentative agreement had been reached, immediately released the details, and allowed for a 24-hour period in which union members could come together to discuss and debate

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Democratic 2020 Race Begins

Establishment Tries

Kailyn Nicholson

The 2020 Democratic Primary Field

The number-one concern in most Democratic voters' minds is which candidate will be the strongest opponent to Trump, and Democratic strategists are well aware of the polls showing that Sanders would likely have won against Trump in 2016.

Instead of throwing all their weight behind one clearly establishment candidate early on, Democratic leaders and fundraisers are instead entertaining several potential serious candidates, all of whom are making some attempt to appeal to Sanders' base. In an amazing shift, most of the Democratic candidates claim to support the most popular elements of Sanders' platform, including Medicare for All, a Green New Deal, and not taking money from corporate PACs. This shift in rhetoric reflects huge pressure from below, but are these genuine commitments?

Most Democratic candidates are strategically trying to sound like Sanders without actually shifting to the left in a serious way. Young and left voters will be struggling to discern the meaningful differences among a crowded field of candidates trying to blur political differences and stand out by likeability/effectiveness.

But major political differences do exist, particularly between Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, on the one side, and the rest of the pack. These are already evident but will be drawn out more clearly over the course of the primaries. In fact, strong early fundraising both among grassroots and corporate donors indicates the potential for the primary battle to be even more heated and polarized than in 2016.

Joe Biden



Despite declaring late in April, former Vice President Biden has generally led the field of likely candidates in early polls with around 25-30% support. Biden is running on his massive name recognition as many voters harbor a nostalgia for the era before Trump. Biden also has widespread support among the party powerbrokers. One DNC member described him as "a respected party elder and heir to the Obama legacy." Indeed, many of Obama's top fundraisers publicly pledged their support to Biden before he declared. For this reason Biden is being touted as a strong candidate to run against Trump, thanks to his supposed ability to "unify the party."

However, getting the nod from the party establishment is not the golden ticket it once was. High-end fundraisers filled with corporate executives and wealthy celebrities may make for impressive fundraising numbers, but they stand in stark contrast to the growing anti-establishment mood and support for grassroots-funded campaigns.

Biden's track record makes him both an automatic front-runner for the establishment and also a poorly positioned candidate to win over Sanders' supporters. There is growing understanding that Sanders is likely the strongest candidate to beat Trump, while Biden shares similar characteristics to Clinton with a long voting record supporting corporate interests. His record includes enthusiastic support for mass incarceration, the Iraq War, and the disgraceful treatment of Anita Hill during her testimony about now Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas' sexual harassment.

Beto O'Rourke

Beto O'Rourke's national profile developed during his midterm race against right-wing Senator Ted Cruz. Anti-Cruz sentiment built support for O'Rourke among young and left voters in Texas – where Democrats often struggle for support. His strong grassroots fundraising in the first quarter of the presidential race (second only to Sanders) combined with his relative youth and charismatic image as an outsider progressive candidate also raises his appeal as an opponent to Sanders in the eyes of party leadership.

While doing his best to continue appealing to young and left voters (Sanders' core base) by pledging not to accept corporate PAC money, O'Rourke is openly courting the support of big-moneyed corporate players. He has received massive donations from big tech and fossil-fuel executives.

O'Rourke has been careful to stake out positions acceptable to big business while giving a nod toward the demands made popular by Sanders. While he claims to support the Green New Deal, he talks about it being accomplished on "sacrifice and service" by ordinary Americans rather than taxing big business to fund it. While at an earlier stage he said he supported Medicare for All, he has since switched to arguing for an establishment plan that would leave the private health insurers in place called "Medicare for America."

Kamala Harris

Despite being in second place behind Sanders for early fundraising, polls show Harris

The Background of 2016



Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton at the Las Vegas primary debate October 13, 2015.

The 2016 Democratic presidential primaries engaged a broad layer of young and left voters – many for the first time – thanks to the heated contest between former U.S. Senator and Walmart board member, Hillary Clinton, and self-proclaimed democratic socialist Bernie Sanders. The sharp differences between the two candidates gave expression to a deep and growing polarization among the Democratic voting base. Clinton had nearly universal support from superdelegates, the party leadership, and major corporate donors. Sanders drew such large crowds to his rallies that the campaign struggled to find stadiums big enough to contain them.

Clinton was paid hundreds of thousands for speeches at Goldman Sachs while Sanders raised over \$200 million in small donations with no corporate money. Sanders' campaign and his call for a political revolution against the billionaire class pointed to the need for new party to fight for the needs of working people, while Hillary defended the status quo that led to millions of people losing their jobs and homes after the 2008 financial crisis.

The stunning victory of Trump was a

wake-up call to the party leadership to find a more effective way to win over young and left voters or risk an even deeper division in the party. Over the course of Trump's first term in office, Democrats have continuously tried to channel public outrage at his sexism, xenophobia, and corruption into electoral support while refusing to mobilize people for a real fight in defense of the rights of immigrants, women, or working people generally.

Instead of wielding their control of the House to launch an all-out fight back against Trump's presidency, under Pelosi's leadership House Democrats have adopted a strategy of compromise with Republicans on issues like funding for border security while failing to support impeachment. Meanwhile, they use Trump and the Republican-dominated Senate as excuses for why they can't fight on key issues like Medicare for All, a Green New Deal, or taxing the rich.

But what type of change will the Democrats actually offer if they succeed in taking back the White House next year? That depends to a large extent on how the struggle between the Sandernistas and party establishment plays out in the primaries.

stuck in the pack of secondary candidates with single-digit support. Harris has been relying for her fundraising on bigger donors and attending a series of high-end Hollywood fundraisers, tapping into the deep-pocketed support she garnered among California's elite while running for state attorney general and the U.S. Senate.

Harris has



announced – and later walked back – support for many of the demands popularized by Sanders in an attempt to show herself as reliable for the ruling class. Like O'Rourke, after claiming to support the elimination of the private insurance industry during a CNN town hall, she later instead indicated she would support more modest reforms that left the industry intact.

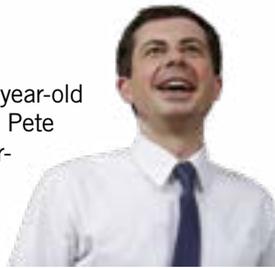
After four years of Trump's blatant bigotry, many voters are understandably excited to support a woman of color for the Democratic nomination. But the radicalization of millions due to

How to Stop Sanders

the wave of social struggle since Occupy and particularly since Sanders' 2016 election campaign has made many working people more skeptical of establishment-friendly candidates, no matter their background.

Pete Buttigieg

Thirty-seven year-old South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg has garnered widespread media attention and support as an underdog phenomenon, coming from relative anonymity to being fourth in fundraising with 64% of his money coming from small donations. But while his identity as a gay Christian small-town Democrat appears to offer something new and different that could appeal across traditional party lines, his politics are remarkably status-quo.



Since his entry into the race, major bundlers for Obama and Clinton have started organizing big-ticket fundraisers for Buttigieg around the country. He has yet to take clear positions on most major issues, but has already indicated he does not support Medicare for All and instead favors offering a public option. Despite his rhetoric of uniting ordinary Americans from across the political divide, Buttigieg has so far allied himself squarely with the economic and political elite.

Elizabeth Warren

Senator Elizabeth Warren (along with Sanders) is substantially to the left of the rest of the pack on several key issues. In particular, echoing Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, she has called for a 70% marginal tax on income over \$10 million, which many candidates have praised but not supported. She proposes using part of the proceeds from this tax to finance tuition-free public colleges and universities and cancel a huge chunk of government-held student-loan debt.



Warren has also called for breaking up Amazon and other big tech companies to reduce their influence over the political system. While this alone would be inadequate to fully bring the industry and its wealth under democratic control, it proves that Warren isn't afraid to directly challenge corporate interests. On this topic, most other candidates avoid giving an answer, favoring generalities about the dangers of consolidation and the complexity of regulating the tech sector.

But Warren's left credentials don't hold up well in a direct comparison with Sanders.

Warren has refused to come out clearly for a Medicare-for-All system. She also stops short of calling herself a socialist, which is a significant part of Bernie's appeal for many of his supporters. Many remember the 2016 Democratic Primary when Warren was silent until Clinton came out on top, then uncritically endorsed her.

Warren's biggest political weakness is that she doesn't point toward the working class as the force that can push back against the power of the corporate political establishment and win progressive change. Instead she implies that simply by getting elected she could convince Democrats in Congress to fight for and pass her proposed legislation – a totally unrealistic expectation given the party's deep reliance on corporate funding. By contrast, Sanders' "Not Me, Us" slogan points to the need to build a mass movement of working-class people in order to fight for and win the policies in his platform.

Bernie Sanders

While Democratic leaders like Nancy Pelosi try to downplay support for Bernie's politics, it's clear they recognize him as a major threat. In a recent article titled "Stop Sanders

Democrats are Agonizing Over His Momentum," the *New York Times* noted that top funders and party officials are holding meetings around the country to discuss how to prevent Sanders "complicating their efforts to unseat Trump", despite many polls that show Sanders would likely beat Trump in a head-to-head race. Sanders' recent *Fox News* Town Hall in Pennsylvania steel country proved beyond doubt that his pro-worker, anti-billionaire message resonates with ordinary voters, including many workers who voted for Trump.

If the Democratic leadership's first priority were really to defeat Trump, Sanders would be their obvious favorite. If their priority were to reflect the views of their base, who overwhelmingly support taxing the rich and winning Medicare for All, Sanders would again be the clear choice.

Threats of Sanders "splitting the party" don't make sense in relation to the party base, but are more a reflection of how unacceptable he is to its corporate funders- the very billionaire class he calls for a political revolution against. To take one example, Medicare for All represents a full frontal assault on the \$3 trillion for-profit health care industry. A Sanders' presidency would destabilize U.S. capitalism and give powerful encouragement to working-class struggle in the U.S. and globally.

Unlike any of his opponents, Sanders'



program points to the fundamental conflict between free-market capitalism and the needs of working-class people. He does not hide behind carefully-worded polls to excuse refusing to support pro-worker policies like single-payer health care. Instead, he uses his platform to try and counter the dishonest scare-mongering tactics of corporate media and politicians to build popular support for these demands.

Sanders himself does not seek to end capitalism but to reform it. Nevertheless achieving his program requires building a mass movement against corporate America and the entire capitalist political establishment. If elected president, he would find himself under assault from big business, with the leadership of his chosen party working against him, and without an organized mass grassroots force to back him up. Overcoming this will require an organized political force, which is why we have consistently called on Sanders to use his campaign to build a new party that fights 100% on the side of working people.

While Sanders does not shy away from his differences with the party leadership in most ways, he unfortunately has not used his campaigns or elected office to build ongoing grassroots movements or a mass grassroots organization to counter the establishment's power. He also stops short of drawing the full conclusions from the directly hostile role the establishment of the Democratic Party plays in relation to working-class interests, sowing illusions that the Democrats can be transformed.

These mistakes could eventually prove to be a fatal flaw – you can't win a war if you refuse to identify your enemy or to build your own forces. The Democratic leadership has very clearly and openly identified Sanders as their enemy, and he will ultimately need to do the same or be crushed. Even if he does manage to win the presidency, the current crop of congressional Democrats will overwhelmingly stay loyal to the

party establishment and fight Sanders every step of the way.

Of course, truly going to war against the party leadership is complicated by the fact that Sanders is currently running as a Democrat, which forces him to comply with a Democratic primary process designed to disadvantage him. The DNC is already taking anti-Sanders primary measures in the hopes of avoiding the messy scandals that plagued 2016. Their hope is to defeat Sanders in such a way that the result will be seen as fair and not obviously rigged – but if the threat of Sanders becomes serious enough they will deploy whatever dirty tactics seem necessary. Sanders' campaign team and his supporters need to take these obstacles very seriously and have a plan for how to counter them.

Before Bernie launched his campaign, Socialist Alternative argued for him to run as and independent, as we did in 2015. This would have allowed him to bypass entirely whatever rigged process the DNC sets up. Sanders has the name recognition and energetic support base to build and run a powerful campaign without relying on the Democratic primary debate stage to get attention. Despite our disagreement with Sanders' decision to run on the Democratic Party ticket, Socialist Alternative will energetically campaign for him to win, while raising our proposals to strengthen the campaign.

But if the Democratic Party establishment continues to move to block Sanders in the primary, he should not simply accept this outcome as he did in 2016, but instead take immediate steps to launch a new party for working people. This could include running all the way as an independent. As Clinton proved in 2016, the corporate Democrats cannot be trusted to defeat Trump's right-populist agenda, and the huge movement building up behind Sanders will need it's own political organization to mount an effective fight back. ✪

IMF Warns of "Growth Slowdown"

Trump Increasing Economic Instability

Alan Jones

There were stark warnings about world economic prospects at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) meeting Washington in early April. "A growth slowdown and a precarious recovery" warned the main IMF report, while Managing Director Christine Lagarde warned that the global economy had slid into a "synchronized deceleration" was "unsettled" and in a "delicate moment."

At the moment the slowdown is most evident in Europe where there were sharp declines in economic indexes in Germany and Italy, especially in manufacturing and the auto industry. The continuing trade conflicts between the U.S. and China, Trump's tariffs on imports, the new sanctions against Iran, and the threats of temporarily closing the border with Mexico are all creating an air of instability and serious risks to the world economy.

Weak and Uncertain Trends

Officially, the U.S. economy is on track to show economic growth around 2% to 3% for 2019. But while the financial markets are on record highs, they continue to be rattled by mounting bad warning signs since December of 2018. Concerned about the short term economic prospects, the Trump administration had demanded another 0.5 percentage point reduction in interest rates and that the Federal Reserve resume the "quantitative easing" (QE) policy of easy money for corporations. QE has played a significant role in the economy since the economic collapse of 2008.

However with the Federal Reserve holding \$3.5 trillion worth of bonds and financial assets (compared to \$800 billion before 2008) the demands of the Trump administration to continue to boost Wall Street and

the financial markets with unrestrained debt are creating huge risks. Clearly rattled, the *Financial Times* warned in an editorial that the Trump administration policies are threatening "the integrity of the world's dominant central bank."

"Even more is at stake than sound management of the world's premier reserve currency" the editorial said. While it took decades to build an institution's independence, it noted, "it takes far less to destroy it."

Lagarde warned: "The reality is that many economies are not resilient enough. High public debt and low interest rates have left limited room to act when the next downturn comes, which inevitably it will." Lagarde's warnings continue to underline the enormous dependency of the financial markets' on the steady flow of virtually free money from the world's central banks and the risks for another meltdown when confidence is shattered. Any efforts to even slightly increase interest could trigger enormous upheavals. Meanwhile the money funneled in the economy for the most part has fuelled profit taking, wealth consolidation, massive speculation, and massive corporate buyouts rather than productive investment.

No Trickle Down

Little if any of all this has flowed into any wage increases for working people after years of economic recovery.

According to the latest data: in 1989, the richest 1% owned 23.6% of total U.S. wealth. By 2018, their share *increased* to 30.9%. The top 1% owns a majority of all shares of stock. Since 1989, the bottom 50% of Americans' share of total wealth *fell* from 3.8 to 1.2%. In other words, gross inequality worsened from Bill Clinton through Bush and Obama to Donald Trump.

In a shocking recent report from the Social



Trump and Fed Chairman Jerome Powell have fought over Federal Reserve policy.

Security Administration which tracks net income after taxes, an astonishing 48% of all workers (including part-timers, students) take home \$31,561 or less per year. These statistics make clear that enormous chunks of the workforce make a substandard wage, putting them at extreme risk of poverty if they face an unexpected financial problem. Overall, inflation-adjusted wages have remained stagnant since the mid-1970s while profits for the top 1% have exploded. Meanwhile, under the Trump tax cuts, the 60 wealthiest corporations paid \$0 in taxes.

In an essay quoted in *Bloomberg News* in April, Ray Dalio, the former CEO of the hedge fund Bridgewater Associates, warned that the U.S. may be on the brink of social revolution: "Disparity in wealth, especially when accompanied by disparity in values, leads to

increasing conflict and, in the government, that manifests itself in the form of populism of the left and populism of the right and often in revolutions."

It is indeed hard to imagine what would follow another economic meltdown under the current conditions. The 2008 Great Recession triggered colossal movements in the U.S. and internationally as working people tried to fight back against the dictatorship of Wall Street (like the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and the 2011 public-sector workers' revolt in Wisconsin).

The recent upsurge of strikes by workers across the U.S. as well as the huge increase in popularity for socialist ideas are preparing the ground for massive shifts in consciousness and show the need for a socialist program to end the nightmare of capitalism. ☪

Sackler Family Profiting Off Of Addiction

Big Pharma and the Opioid Crisis

Ranson Thomas

Revelations from recent lawsuits demonstrate that Purdue Pharma and its founders and owners, the Sackler family, helped instigate the horrific, ongoing opioid crisis by using deceptive marketing and hiding evidence of their drug Oxycontin's potential to cause addiction in patients. Oxycontin has been one of the most widely prescribed narcotic pain relievers available for decades, used to treat chronic pain for millions of Americans. Oxycontin also has addictive properties and those who do become addicted to it or other opioids are about 40 times more likely to develop a heroin addiction.

While Oxycontin has proven to be effective at treating pain, these lawsuits allege what

many of us have know, that Purdue Pharma engaged in deliberate and deceptive marketing campaigns targeting patients and health-care providers in an attempt to increase prescription rates for the drug.

As socialists we argue that a for profit health-care system is inefficient and unjust. Pharmaceutical companies in total spent \$29.9 billion in 2016 to market their drugs (*ScienceDaily.com*, 1/9/2019). The degree to which these companies hide the addictive nature of their products is similar to tobacco companies hiding the dangerous effects of cigarette smoke from consumers in the '60s.

The Opioid Crisis

According to the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC), over 200,000 people in the U.S. have died from overdoses related to prescription opioids over the last 20 years. Meanwhile a lawsuit in Oklahoma exposed that the Sacklers made over \$4 billion in opioid sales between 2008 and 2016. So at the same time that hundreds of thousands of sick people dying due to the effects of the medications Purdue Pharma had been pushing, the Sacklers were raking in obscene profits; profits which were made on the backs of the sick and dying. Now, universities and museums like the famed Guggenheim Museum in New York are refusing to take any donations from the family. This was in large part due to protest action by the group Prescription Addiction Intervention Now (P.A.I.N) which called on art museums

to refuse money from the family and remove their names from wings and buildings which had been dedicated or named after them.

The opioid crisis and the pharmaceutical industries' role in it help demonstrate the failures of the for profit health-care system. In search of profit, pharmaceutical companies misled doctors and patients and put those same patients' lives at risk. The need to prescribe as much of their product as possible in order to increase profits for their billionaire owners puts these drug companies in direct opposition to the interests of ordinary people which is why we say they should be taken into public ownership under democratic workers control. ☪

Algeria Revolt Deposes Bouteflika

North African Workers on the Move



Alex Souto

The popular uprising that has spread throughout Algerian society is now in its 10th week following the hundreds of thousands of workers who led strikes in Tunisia and Morocco this year, as well as the months of struggle in Sudan. Millions of people have flooded the streets of Algeria in indignation against their tyrannical ruling class, made up not just of the disgraced and now deposed President Bouteflika and his National Liberation Front party (FLN), but also the oligarchy of businessmen, oil tycoons, and military leaders that Algerians have long nicknamed *le pouvoir*, or “the power.”

This movement has roiled every section of society. Students have organized committees in their universities to plan actions, Algerians in villages and small towns have organized against oppressive landlords and local officials, and, most significantly, multiple general strikes of several days have taken place as the union rank and file burst into action, sometimes compelling their own leaders to follow through.

Bouteflika Out, But Regime Still In Power

Most English-language media reporting on the situation has focused on the fact that the 82-year old Bouteflika has been little more than a puppet for the past six of his 20 years in office, rarely seen in public since suffering a stroke in 2013.

The global collapse of oil prices in 2015

has pulled the rug out from under the economy and the social safety-net which has now brought the question of whether the country will be run for people or for profit to the foreground.

Most sharply affected by the depressed economy have been the young people of Algeria. 70% of the Algerian population is under 30 years old, and as many as a quarter of these young people are unemployed. Cuts to public spending due to new austerity measures have put more of a burden on university students to fund their own tuition, meanwhile the price of bread has increased by as much as 30%.

The students of Algeria kicked off the movement on February 22 of this year. They were shortly followed by huge hundreds of thousands in massive anti-government rallies and mass meetings, largely organized through hashtags and anonymous groups on social media, mirroring the experiences of the uprisings of the so-called “Arab Spring” of 2011.

Women have taken up the struggle in huge numbers, organizing in their workplaces, communities, as well as in the streets, and putting on massive International Women’s Day actions on March 8. After only a few weeks of struggle, Algerian society has changed from a climate in which women were not expected to have a voice in politics, to one where working-class men have enthusiastically joined the front lines alongside women.

The action of rank-and-file workers has forced the biggest union in the country, the UGTA, to go along with the calls for general strikes from below, despite its leaders’ close



A protest at Algiers’ Grand Poste square, demanding the president step down – March 16, 2019.

ties to the ruling elite. The strike wave has impacted everything from the shipping industry, absolutely vital for an export economy, all the way down to smaller factories, shops, and marketplaces throughout the country.

For a Decisive Break with Le Pouvoir and Capitalism

Bouteflika was forced by the military tops to resign in disgrace. The ruling class is running out of slack it’s willing to cede to the movement, seeing now that the movement is only encouraged by each victory to demand more, the masses increasingly see through the hot air of promises of gradual change.

The Algerian ruling class has begun to crack down on the movement. In addition to the ghost of the “Arab Spring” that hangs over the whole country, both sides of the conflict are doubtlessly drawing lessons from the struggle in Sudan.

Socialist Alternative works with the Committee for a Workers’ International to organize for a united fightback against the ruling class led by working people in international cooperation. The people of Algeria and elsewhere will only see this fight through to its end if the strike committees and organizations of struggle that students and working people have initiated are willing and able to lead society to a break with capitalism. ☛

Brexit Impasse Throws British Politics into Chaos

George Martin Fell Brown

In the wake of 2016’s Brexit referendum, British politics were thrust into crisis. None of the proposed withdrawal agreements have won majority support in Parliament, nor has a reversal of Brexit. The April 12 deadline for an agreement has gone and now Britain’s Tory Prime Minister Theresa May and the EU have agreed to extend the Brexit deadline until October 31. Rather than bringing relief, however, the Brexit extension has only deepened the crisis of the British political establishment.

The Brexit negotiations are not about the interests of the working class. The EU was created in the interests of the various capitalist classes of Europe. And May’s Tory government unashamedly represents the national interests of British capitalism. Any deal that is negotiated between these two players is bound to undermine the rights and conditions of the working class.

Parties In Crisis

A revolt within the Tory Party saw a majority of its MPs vote against the extension, abstain, or not vote. The extension only passed due to votes of opposition parties. May narrowly escaped a vote of no confidence last December, and Tory backbenchers are looking for ways to change the party rules to challenge May before the end of the year.

With the Tories thrown into crisis, left-wing Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn has a new opportunity. In upcoming local elections, the Tories are expected to suffer massive losses. Beyond the local elections, the Brexit extension deal commits the UK to participating in the upcoming elections for the European Parliament. Given the crisis of May’s administration, the possibility exists for a snap general election, which could bring Corbyn to power. How this plays out depends on Corbyn’s ability to mobilize the working class on a bold, socialist program.

Right-wing forces have also sought to capitalize on the Brexit crisis. A host of right-populist parties and forces aim to win over pro-Brexit Labour and Tory voters. On the pro-EU side, a new party, Change UK, was founded by a right-wing split from the Labour Party and a group of anti-Brexit Tories.

Unfortunately, Corbyn has refused to provide a bold challenge to the neoliberal Blairites within the Labour Party. Blairites still dominate the Parliamentary Labour Party as well as the Labour-led city councils. The Labour-led councils have been carrying out local austerity measures, provoking public anger towards the party in spite of Corbyn’s leadership on a national level.

Bold Working-Class Initiatives Needed

Corbyn needs to boldly campaign for an increase in the minimum wage to genuinely

reflect the cost of living, huge investment in the National Health Service and education, and an end to all cuts and privatization. He also has to outline what a workers’ Brexit would look like. As a starting point, that means the immediate repeal of all EU laws that limit workers’ rights or place obstacles in the way of anti-austerity policies. This has the potential to galvanize working-class anger at austerity and sweep Corbyn’s Labour to a decisive victory.

Combined with an appeal to workers’ organizations and left parties to fight for the same approach in other countries, this can begin to build the basis for genuine cooperation and solidarity of people across Europe, on a socialist basis, in contrast to the neoliberal EU, which only serves the interests of big business and the capitalist system. ☛

Socialist Alternative Launches New Political Journal

The Fight for a *Socialist World*

Tom Crean

Massive interest in socialist ideas has radically changed the political landscape in the U.S. As part of the growth of the left, Socialist Alternative also grew significantly in recent years and achieved national prominence with the election of Kshama Sawant as the first openly socialist councilmember in Seattle in 2013. Our organization prides itself on the clarity of our analysis and program, but we also feel the need to step up our game. For this reason we are launching a political journal *Socialist World*, initially coming out three times a year.

How We Got Here

The economic crisis of 2008-9 opened up a new era in the U.S. and internationally. Capitalism was exposed as an increasingly parasitic system without any vision for the future. There was fury at the status quo which has not ended. Political institutions lost authority and mainstream parties in many countries have either disintegrated or come under intense pressure from the left and the right.

Beginning in 2011, revolutionary “Arab Spring” developments occurred in North Africa and the Middle East. Workers in Southern Europe fought back ferociously against austerity policies that sought to put the cost of the crisis on the shoulders of ordinary people. But the crisis also demonstrated the inadequacy of the existing left and the leadership of the trade unions. Social democratic parties which had adopted neo-liberal policies were particularly exposed.

In the U.S., millions lost their jobs and homes. But initially there was no fightback as trade union leaders refused to do anything that would embarrass the Obama administration. The fightback began in January 2011

in Wisconsin with the revolt of public sector workers against the attacks of Governor Scott Walker. Then came Occupy, Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ struggles and the emergence of a new women’s movement. We are now seeing the beginnings of a new environmental movement internationally.

Polls showed a massive increase in support for “socialism” especially among young people. This was especially reflected in Bernie Sanders historic 2016 campaign when he called for a “political revolution against the billionaire class.” But Trump’s victory also showed the price we will pay for failing to build a political party based on the interests of working people and all the oppressed.

Now we are facing a new situation with a looming international economic downturn, new revolutionary upheavals in North Africa, the biggest strike wave in the U.S. in a generation and another Sanders presidential run. Millions want to fight back but to win requires leadership, a clear strategy and learning the lessons of past victories and defeats. This is the political task that Socialist Alternative has set for itself.

The Battle of Ideas

What does building a Marxist political force mean in practice? It means engaging in the living struggle as we are doing in the teachers revolt and the recent Stop and Shop strike in New England. It means fighting to hold the position won for socialism in Seattle where Kshama Sawant is standing for re-election.

It also means engaging in the developing battle of ideas on how to win serious, far reaching change. There is a hunger among hundreds of thousands of working people, young people especially, for a strategy to end massive inequality and the corporate domination of politics, address the developing



climate catastrophe and root out racism and sexism in our society.

A huge space has opened up on the left with the growing popularity of socialism. This has been partially filled by Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and the Democratic Socialists of America. AOC and Sanders have put forward a bold program that can be the basis for serious social struggle but they also accept the framework of capitalism and the Democratic Party. We need to clarify both the positive elements and limitations of these developments.

Socialist World will make the case for Marxism in the 21st century. It will also be thoroughly internationalist, carrying material from our co-thinkers in the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) around the world.

The first issue will come out at the end of May. It will feature articles on the conflict between U.S. imperialism and emerging

Chinese imperialism; the lessons of the teachers revolt; the case for a new party; the meaning of revolution today; the issue of reparations and how this is playing out in the presidential elections; and more.

We urge you to subscribe now:

- ✦ *Socialist Alternative* newspaper and *Socialist World* journal = \$42/year or \$3.50/month (60/year 5/month solidarity)
- ✦ *Socialist Alternative* newspaper alone = 25/year or 2/month (50/year or 4/month solidarity)
- ✦ *Socialist World* journal alone = 20/year (30/year solidarity) (no monthly options as it only comes out 3x/year) ✦

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Lessons from the Stop & Shop Strike

continued from p. 5

the details of the TA and then take a vote.

Socialist Alternative believes that the strike was absolutely worth it. The new contract is better than what the company was offering before the strike, including stopping significant increases in health care costs and the threat to cut time-and-a-half pay on Sundays and holidays. It maintains time-and-a-half for full-timers, but 80% of the company’s workforce is part-time. The new contract does include wage raises, but they are minimal, and are not enough to keep up with the rapidly rising cost of living in the Northeast.

If the union leadership had better prepared workers for the strike, including setting up a public strike fund weeks earlier than

they did, using bolder tactics such as mega pickets, and more rallies that included the broader public, it is very possible the strike could have won more in the same amount of time.

What’s Next

Through this process, crucial lessons were learned about how to organize effective picket lines and the role of the police during a strike. They saw the importance of a union but also began to ask what kind of leadership and strategy the union needs. The failure of the local union leadership to provide a bold lead and a clear strategy to win and the lack of democratic structures through which

workers across stores could coordinate were concrete barriers to the strike being stronger.

Now that the strike is over, workers who agree on tactics that would have strengthened the strike and how things could be better in the union going forward should come together and discuss how they can build a more democratic and more fighting union. Socialists say that all union officials should make the average wage of the workers they represent so that they are connected to their reality. Also, members should have the right to recall their union officials if they feel they are not doing their job. Going forward, there should be much more frequent visits to stores by union reps as well as monthly

membership meetings where members can come together to discuss issues in their stores and organize collectively around them. This will put the union in a far stronger position in three years, when this contract is up, and a fight over the new contract is posed.

Socialist Alternative is thrilled to have had the opportunity to fight alongside Stop & Shop workers during this strike. We have learned an enormous amount from Stop & Shop workers and have come away with a renewed fighting spirit ourselves. We look forward to deepening our relationship with Stop & Shop workers as they continue to fight the astounding corporate greed of their company. ✦

Build a Movement for Medicare for All

continued from p.3

will come through the budget process this legislative session, not directly as a new “Trumpcare” plan.

At the state level, Republicans in a number of states are pushing vicious “work requirement” bills aimed at forcing people off Medicaid.

What is Realistic?

The establishment Democrats are searching for a tweak of the status quo, which they will label “realistic” and “sensible”, i.e. limited enough not to scare off Wall Street but just bold enough to say they tried. This has led them to rediscover the very same “public option” they universally rejected from the original Affordable Care Act in 2010 and myriad versions of “Medicare for a few more” which all have very noble sounding titles but which only shift the eligibility criteria by a few years, offer prescription medications at cost or allow people to buy into their states’ Medicaid plans. While any and all of these would be small steps forward, none of them will come anywhere close to solving the problems inherent in trying to provide a basic necessary service in a for-profit system.

It is clear that Nancy Pelosi and the Democratic leadership in the House want to prevent any vote on Medicare for All. A *Politico* article from January reports that “a health care messaging guide developed for congressional Democrats by Protect Our Care...is advising Democrats to leave the bigger fights over universal health care for further ‘down the road.’ Corporate lobbies across the health sector,

meanwhile, are already lining up to fight any move toward Medicare for All.”

If improved Medicare for All is the clear answer to so many people, what will it take to move it from a good idea to a reality? Teachers across the country have been demonstrating what a decisive role the organized working class can play in forcing change when we fight for bold, popular demands using the powerful methods developed in previous struggles – strikes and mass demonstrations.

The unions working for Medicare for All, most notably the National Nurses United, should set a date for a national day of action and begin to build for it seriously, starting with their own members who can be passionate advocates for patients and health care. Then, this core of unions should issue a public call for other unions to join them and broadcast it widely so that the millions of rank and file supporters of Medicare for All could pressure their leaders to get on board or get out of the way.

Bernie Sanders and a new generation of progressive Democrats who owe their election victories in part to pledging support for Medicare for All like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez also have a key role to play. They could leverage their political authority with their tens of millions of supporters to amplify the unions’ call



National Nurses United has actively campaigned for Medicare For All.

to action.

This day of action would be a first but significant step in building what needs to become an organized and cohesive national movement for improved Medicare for All. To win, this movement must be armed with a political analysis of both its own strength and that of the ruling class forces aligned against it. Despite historically low level of unionization in the private sector and a weak union leadership, the U.S. working class retains tremendous potential social power. To transform this potential power into actual power, the Medicare for All campaign would have to take on aspects of both a union organizing drive and an independent political party organizing drive. A leadership developed through this process could wield our massive social power to peacefully disrupt business as usual, including strikes and mass protests in the streets, until Medicare for All is won. ☘

Chicago Elects Democratic Socialists

continued from p.3

fighting approach – joining protests on the streets against corporate handouts. Now, elected democratic socialists should take the lead and demand “No Developer Handouts!”; for massive investment in schools; and high quality, permanently-affordable, city-owned housing funded by taxing the rich and LaSalle street. A democratic socialist caucus will unite around such an agreed program.

However, we in Socialist Alternative disagree with the decision of most of the DSA candidates to run within the Democratic Party, which is dominated by big business and has no mechanism of accountability or structures that could help build struggle.

Working people in Chicago need a new party to fight for their interests. The victory of Byron and likely Rossana, as independents demonstrates it is not necessary to run with the Democrats to win. If an independent working-people’s party was on hand this past election to run in the mayor’s race and for council seats, the election could have shaken

the political establishment to its core. A democratic socialist caucus could use its profile to be an active catalyst for the development of a new party, although it does not appear most of the potential members would agree with this approach.

In the coming weeks and months, debate is likely to continue among working people and organized left forces over how to make use of the new opportunities posed by the election and victory of democratic socialists. Mass meetings and strategy conferences are needed to bring working-class people into struggle and also to discuss and debate how to make use of our strengths to win real gains. If elected democratic socialists united in calling for forums like these, bringing in representatives of the labor movement and social justice struggles, it could be a vital contribution to



Socialist Alternative members campaigning for Byron Sigcho-Lopez in Chicago.

building a mass movement that could transform the city. ☘

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TRUMP WHIPS UP BORDER CRISIS

DEFEND THE RIGHT TO ASYLUM

Brian Harrison and Tom Crean

President Donald Trump has continued to ramp up his campaign of terror against asylum-seekers at the border. After he shut down the U.S. government in a ploy to win funding for his “border wall,” Trump threatened to close the U.S./Mexico border and floated a plan to release detained migrants to so-called “sanctuary cities.” Shutting the border would lead to economic chaos and the ruling class has reacted sharply to this idea.

Meanwhile, thousands, including children, continue to be detained in horrible, desperately overcrowded conditions including 3,500 in El Paso who were herded this month under a bridge, behind razor wire.

For Trump the main purpose of his campaign is political. Whipping up fear of immigrants was a key part of Trump's campaign in 2016 and in his messaging for the 2018 midterms. Clearly he intends to double down on this as his re-election campaign begins.

Trump and other right wingers claim there's an “invasion” of immigrants at the southern border. There is no doubt that this is in part a manufactured crisis. When Trump took office, the number of people crossing the southern border, especially from Mexico, was far below the levels of a decade ago. But in recent month the desperate conditions in the Central American countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala are leading large numbers of families to make the perilous journey north.

At the current rate, up to one-million people will seek to cross the border this year. Most of them are seeking asylum. Immigration courts already have 800,000 pending

cases. Most asylum cases won't be heard until 2021. But the chaos which Trump rants about actually suits him.

Asylum Under Attack

Asylum is a process to get residency in another country because it is not safe for you to stay in your home country due to persecution or other reasons. It is protected under various international agreements even if frequently violated in practice.

There is absolutely no doubt that a large proportion of the families crossing the border are genuinely fleeing violence, persecution, and substantial risk of death. These conditions are a direct result of U.S. imperialism and its policies in Central America.

First, U.S. trade policies ensure that Central American economies serve the needs of U.S. corporations and not the needs of the workers and farmers in the region. Second, the U.S. war on drugs spurs drug production and trafficking in the region, leading to violence and the domination of vicious drug-trafficking gangs over whole sections of El Salvador and Honduras. Third, U.S. political and military interventions greatly destabilized the governments and societies in the region over many decades. Finally, global climate change, driven by greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. and other industrialized countries, drives down farming yields, causing hunger and desperation in the countryside.

Trump's Agenda

Trump sometimes cries crocodile tears

about the humanitarian disaster at the border. In reality, as Central American migrants flee deteriorating conditions, Trump uses punitive policies at the border in a political effort to bolster his support in the U.S. At Trump's direction, ICE decreased the number of asylum seekers processed daily to a figure much lower than the agency's capacity. This arbitrary restriction fails even to punitively discourage asylum seekers, and creates a bottleneck of fearful families waiting to apply for protection.

In addition, Trump's ICE detains families, including children, which is in itself a inhumane practice. To make matters worse, these detention facilities are poorly resourced and intentionally over-packed to beyond capacity. This leads to images of crying children behind fences, detained migrants in improvised shelters under highway overpasses, and a generalized sense that migration at the border is out of control and in crisis.

Trump then exploits these conditions even as he is responsible for them, using the situation to justify the repressive tactics and gain support for funding of his border wall. It bears many similarities to efforts by far-right governments across Europe and Australia, who also use repressive tactics against migrants. This is a cynical move by Trump to weaponize vulnerable asylum-seekers for political gain.

A Workers' Program for Asylum and Immigration

The truth is that the humanitarian crisis on the southern border is caused by our economic system, capitalism, and is made

worse by Trump's callous policies aimed at terrorizing migrants for political gain. Furthermore, only a mass working-class movement, fighting for a fair immigration policy as one component of a wider political program, can defeat Trump's bigoted inhumane border plans and end the crisis.

Socialist Alternative says:

- ✦ Remove the troops from the border immediately. No to a militarized border wall.
- ✦ Build a movement to defend immigrants from right-wing violence and intimidation.
- ✦ Hire more people to process all asylum applications as soon as possible.
- ✦ U.S. corporations have made billions by exploiting Central America, tax those big businesses to pay for the resettling of refugees and asylum seekers, while building affordable housing for all.
- ✦ We demand that ICE be abolished. We also demand an end to inhuman detention and mass deportation policies, and demand full legal rights for all immigrants.
- ✦ For a Green New Deal for working people to rebuild the nation's infrastructure based on renewable energy creating millions of well-paid union jobs for non-immigrants and immigrants alike. Tax big business to fund quality education, housing, and health care for all.
- ✦ A national \$15 minimum wage and union rights for all workers. ✦