

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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# CLOSE THE CAMPS



**CRISIS AT THE BORDER  
FUELED BY TRUMP**

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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



**Emerson Johnson**  
Seattle, WA

I have been a lifelong resident of Seattle, a city which is often touted for its progressivism and high-paying tech jobs, but which is also experiencing a dire housing crisis and has seen a 400% rise in hate crimes. As a young trans man growing up in this city, there was a constant feeling of contradiction. I was told to be grateful to live in city where a gay mayor had been elected, but to ignore the fact that despite their platitudes about "equality," more and more marginalized people were being forced from their homes due to skyrocketing rents and predatory developers.

And the only answer I was hearing from the mayor and corporate city council members was "we don't have enough funding." But at the same time, I was watching corporate politicians pave the way for corporate developers to build hundreds of luxury apartments buildings that no one I knew could afford to live in. It was infuriating. It was clear to me that Seattle has massive amounts of wealth.

In my search to figure out what the heck was going on, I started to learn about struggles like the fight for \$15 and the 1,000 Homes Coalition. With \$15, low-wage workers - in spite of everyone telling them it was impossible - had organized and joined up with the office of socialist Councilmember Sawant and Socialist Alternative to fight for, and eventually win, a \$15 an hour minimum wage for all workers in Seattle. This victory transferred \$3 billion from big business to workers. The 1,000 Homes Coalition had successfully blocked the building of an unnecessary police bunker and had forced the council to use part of the funding to instead build new affordable homes. These

socialists and community members in Seattle were not taking "no" as an answer and these grass-roots movements were spreading from Seattle across the nation. Seattle's victories were coming from the work of ordinary people who were dedicating themselves to these struggles.

It was clear to me, that it was absolutely not a coincidence that the only councilmember consistently fighting alongside these movements was the socialist Councilmember Kshama Sawant and that her organization Socialist Alternative was a key part in leading these struggles. I became a socialist and joined Socialist Alternative because of the wealth of history here in Seattle and internationally that shows that when working people fight back, we win! ✦

## New Era of Trade Conflict Here to Stay

**Josh Koritz**

Trade deficits, tariffs, and sanctions are now taking on a new relevance to working people in the U.S. While clearly there is support for Trump's aggressive approach to trade, many workers scan the news anxiously, seeing how these conflicts can contribute to a new downturn or recession. And yet, international conflict over trade is now the norm as Trump threatens, cajoles, and bullies any and all U.S. trade partners.

It wasn't so long ago that conferences like the G20 meetings were gatherings where the U.S. presided as other nations signed off on deals that benefited American corporations. At the June G20 meetings in Japan, this was not the case and tensions were high.

One of the crucial conversations the world awaited was between Trump and Chinese Premier Xi Jinping. This meeting

appears to put a pause on the escalation of the trade war between the two powers, however it has neither addressed nor solved the contentious issues.

In an important article on SocialistAlternative.org and in our new journal Socialist World, Vincent Kolo analyzes this China-U.S. trade conflict in depth. Kolo explains that the roots of this conflict are embedded in the rise of the Chinese economy and its challenge to the weakened but still dominant economic power of the U.S. This process has created a competition in which China's interests are increasingly opposed to the U.S. These underlying inter-imperialist rivalry have erupted into a trade war of tariffs between Trump and Xi Jinping as working people look on nervously and the world economy edges closer to recession. ✦

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# Shocking Conditions at the Border

**Keely Mullen**

“Three days ago my baby soiled his clothes. I had no place to wash the clothes so I could not put them back on my baby. Since then, my baby of only three months has only been wearing a small little jacket made of t-shirt material. I have nothing else for my son to wear... I have been told they do not have any clothes here at this place. I am having to make sure I carry my baby super close to me to keep his little body warm.”

-17 year old mom being held in a detention camp at the border.

Babies sitting in soiled diapers for days on end. Clothes that haven't been washed in weeks. Pregnant teens sleeping on concrete floors with only an aluminum blanket. These are the conditions in immigrant detention centers along the U.S./Mexico border.

At any given time 2,000 children are separated from their parents and 16,000 people total are being held in U.S. Border Patrol custody. In a viral video from NowThis, Justice Department Attorney Sarah Fabian can be seen defending the Trump administration's practice of forcing children to sleep on cold cement without mattresses, access to toothbrushes, soap, or real blankets.

The conditions in the detention centers have sparked outrage from millions of ordinary Americans - both immigrants and native born. While these detention centers are clearly not the same as Nazi death camps, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was right to shock people into seeing the horrible reality of these detention centers by characterizing them as concentration camps. Unfortunately, life outside these detention centers for Central American refugees is often no less horrific. Proof of this can be found in the horrifying image of Salvadoran father Óscar Alberto Martínez and his 23-month-old daughter Valeria washed up along the banks of the Rio Grande.

## From Manufactured to Real Crisis

When Trump took office he talked about “hordes” of immigrants crossing the border, gaming the asylum system and defrauding immigration agents in order to gain access to the U.S. In manufacturing a crisis for political gain, he painted a picture of a border flooded with criminals and rapists being exported to the U.S. from Mexico.

The early stages of Trump's fear mongering about a crisis at the border consisted of him writing complete fictions in order to throw meat to his base. However, as increasing waves of Central American refugees are seeking asylum in the U.S., this crisis has become real. The real crisis, rather than being marked by criminals and rapists storming the U.S. from Mexico, consists of tens of thousands of individuals and families fleeing devastating conditions in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras and seeking refuge in the United States.

The conditions they are fleeing, including vicious narcotics gangs, collapsed economies and ecological disaster are to a very large degree the result of the policies of the U.S. which has ruthlessly dominated the region for 150 years. This includes literally dozens of military interventions in the region, support for military coups and the imposition of the “free trade” agreement CAFTA.

A socialist government in the U.S. would work with the working class of the whole region to rebuild the economy on a sustainable basis.

## Divisions Within the Democrats

While Trump has mobilized significant support for his overtly xenophobic positions, 57% of Americans disprove of how he is handling immigration. A majority of Americans do not support his border wall and only 30% believe that it should be harder for refugees to seek asylum in the U.S.



*Workers at Wayfair, an online furniture retailer, walked out to protest the sale of Wayfair furniture to immigrant detention centers.*

In recent days, massive divisions have been exposed within the Democratic Party on how to address the crisis at the border. These divisions have come to light in the context of a controversial bill for border funding. Under pressure from “centrists” in the party, Nancy Pelosi pushed through a Senate bill that contained far fewer protections for children than many House Democrats were willing to accept. The bill she advocated, which passed with more Republican than Democratic support, got rid of specific provisions like a 90-day time limit on children being held in temporary intake facilities. This led to fury from left Democrats like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez who called this “an abdication of power we should refuse to accept.”

Meanwhile, many Democrats seeking the party's nomination in the 2020 presidential elections have tacked left on the question of immigration. In the most recent Democratic debates, many of the candidates said that undocumented immigrants should have access to health care and that crossing the border should be treated as a civil rather than

criminal offense. This goes sharply against the recent history of the Democrats. They want people to forget that under Obama 2.9 million people were deported, although Trump has certainly taken vicious cruelty toward migrant families to a new level.

## What We Stand For

Americans rank immigration second only to “the government” in their overall list of concerns. It will be a central question in the 2020 election.

Liberal politicians shed crocodile tears for migrants while supporting the continued domination of corporations who profit from cheap immigrant labor. The only way to defeat Trump's policies and defend the right to asylum is to build a mass movement across the country. This movement must seek to unite the working class, both immigrant and native born, against the divide-and-rule tactics of the wealthy elite and fight for good jobs and housing for all! 🇺🇸

# No to War in the Middle East - U.S. and Iran Plunge into Conflict

**George Martin Fell Brown**

The United States is dangerously close to a military conflict with Iran. The catalyst was the shooting down by Iran of a U.S. military drone on June 20. In response Donald Trump authorized airstrikes against Iran only to halt them ten minutes before they were due to begin. While the immediate threat of military action was temporarily withdrawn, Trump has gone back on the offensive, imposing new sanctions against Iran while threatening “Any attack by Iran on anything American will be met with great and overwhelming force. In some areas, overwhelming will mean obliteration!”

The current deterioration of relations between the U.S. and Iran began with

Trump's decision to pull out of the Iran nuclear deal in May. This 2015 agreement between Iran, the U.S., the EU, Russia, and China was designed to limit Iran's capacity to build nuclear weapons in exchange for the lifting of sanctions and greater integration of Iran in the world economy. This deal represented a certain normalization of relations between the U.S. and Iran after decades of antagonism going back to the 1979 Iranian revolution.

## An Imperialist Conflict

Iran has been economically crushed by sanctions, first by the U.S. in the 1980s and then by the U.N. in 2006. With Trump's new wave of sanctions following

the withdrawal from the nuclear deal, the government of Hassan Rouhani and Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei have been backed into a corner, and it is completely predictable that the Iranian regime would hit back.

Rouhani has adopted a calibrated approach. He announced a speeding up of uranium enrichment, but falling short of producing weapons-grade uranium. The main strategy from Iran is not to push for an all-out military conflict with the U.S., but to pressure China and the European Union into forcing the U.S. to back off from its attacks.

An implicit threat in Iran's current actions is to stop oil moving through the Strait of Hormuz, something that would

pose a serious economic threat to Saudi Arabia and the world economy. Thirty-five percent of the world's seaborne oil shipments move through the Strait and serious disruption could lead to a spike in oil prices.

Significant sections of the U.S. establishment are reluctant get more involved in regional conflict in the Middle East. They also feel that Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and unambiguously taking the side of the Saudi/Israeli axis was a mistake that directly contributed to instability.

With avowed hawks in his administration, Trump himself has adopted a contradictory approach. During the 2016

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## How Far Can Capitalism Be Reformed?

# Sanders, Warren, and the Fight for Socialist Change

**Tom Crean**

The 2020 presidential election marks a dramatic shift in U.S. politics. The debate in the Democratic Party has increasingly become defined by the ideas and proposals of Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. In particular, Sanders, along with Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, have popularized “democratic socialism” which now has mass appeal.

According to a recent survey from Axios, four in ten would prefer to live in a socialist country over a capitalist one, and 55 percent of women between 18 and 54 reject capitalism. This reflects the radicalization of significant sections of the population, especially young people, having lived through the aftermath of the 2008 economic collapse. It also reflects the effect of Occupy, BLM and the emerging women’s movement as well as the re-emergence of labor struggle sparked by the teachers’ revolt.

But a rejection of neo-liberal capitalism is not the same as clarity on what socialism would look like. Sanders’ recent speech entitled “How Democratic Socialism Is the Only Way to Defeat Oligarchy” pointed to Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal as a model. In truth FDR was very clear that his mission during the Great Depression was to save capitalism, not replace it.

Meanwhile, despite sharing much of Sanders’ platform, Elizabeth Warren says that she’s a “capitalist to her bones,” and unlike Bernie she does not call for the kind of mass movements needed to win meaningful change.

An article in the New Republic by Conor Lynch on democratic socialism refers to the adage “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.” The “end of the world” is certainly very vivid with looming climate catastrophe but the enormous retreat of class consciousness and working class organization, especially after the collapse of Stalinism in the early 90s, means that visualizing a socialist society is challenging.

It is not really news that Sanders’ political outlook points more to the reform of capitalism espoused historically by European social democrats than to Marxism. But in today’s context, calling for Medicare for All, tuition free college and forgiveness of student debt, a \$15 federal minimum wage, a Green New Deal and linking this, as Sanders does, to building a movement against the billionaire class, is a starting point for discussion about more fundamental change.

A key question is whether Sanders’ program is achievable under capitalism as it exists today. Sanders likes to point out that

most of what he’s calling for has been achieved in other advanced capitalist countries. This is true but the period when these gains were achieved was the historically exceptional expansion of capitalism after World War II. Today’s reality is very different.

### What Can We Win Under Capitalism?

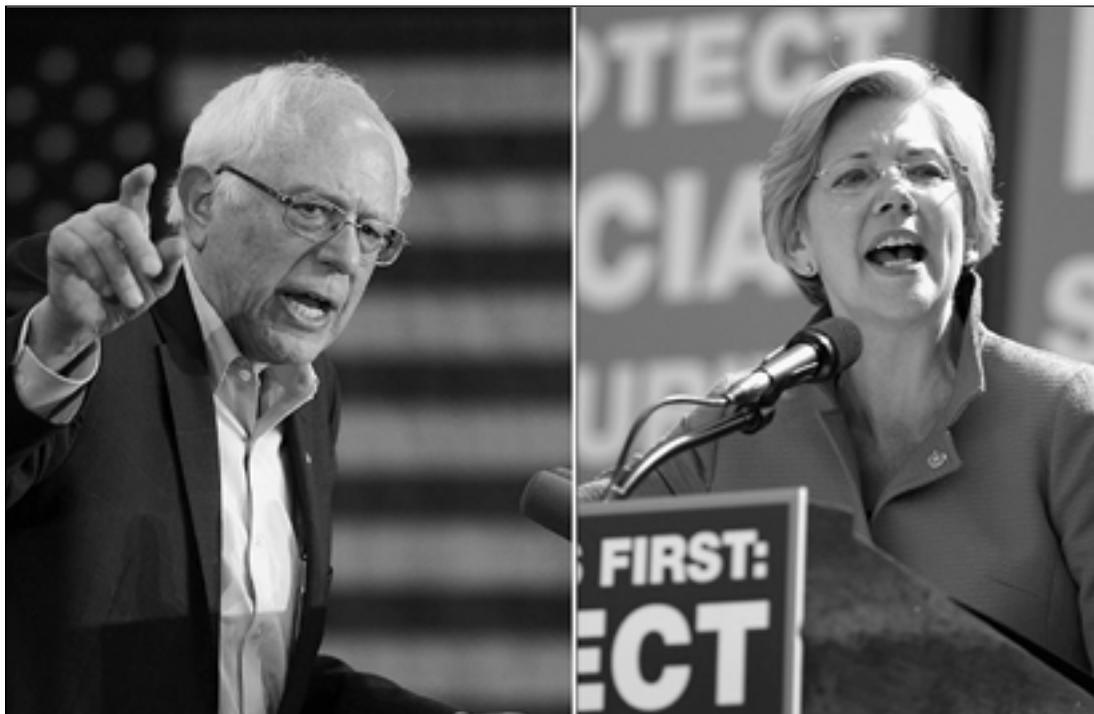
Contrary to widespread belief, the policies of FDR’s New Deal were not what pulled the U.S. economy out of the Great Depression. The decisive factor in “recovery” was actually the mobilization for World War II. The massive destruction caused by the war then laid the basis for the unprecedented economic expansion of the 1950s and 1960s.

Two other circumstances conditioned the postwar situation and made possible the significant gains won by working people, particularly in Western Europe: the strength of working class organization and the threat of the Soviet Union whose existence, despite the horrible deformation of Stalinism, showed that an economy could be built on a non-capitalist basis.

In previous periods, the working class in many countries built mass organizations that explicitly fought for a socialist transformation of society. Even as these parties moved towards reforming rather than replacing capitalism, they still reflected the mass desire of working people for change.

The gains made by working people depended on the country but included universal health care programs like the National Health Service in Britain as well as national pension systems, free college, free childcare and paid maternity leave. In Western Europe, many of these gains were enshrined into law because of the pressure brought to bear by working class parties. In the U.S., without such a party, less was won through legislation although Social Security was a key gain. However the powerful labor movement after the war negotiated significant employee health and pension benefits on a company by company basis. These gains were more vulnerable.

The deep recession of the mid-1970s marked the beginning of the end of the postwar boom. The capitalists’ profits were squeezed and in order to restore profitability they went on the offensive against the living standards and social benefits of working



people. The bosses in the U.S. relentlessly attacked unions. They also moved to increase the power of the big banks and financial markets over the economy. Further growth was then fuelled by credit and debt in a way that ensured the growth of the type of bubbles that burst with such devastating effect in 2008.

This anti-working class offensive took a number of forms which can be collectively termed “neo-liberalism.” Neo-liberal policies were first implemented in the U.S. under Ronald Reagan but the Democrats also adopted a neo-liberal position. Bill Clinton famously “ended welfare as we know it.” His administration also ended the Glass-Steagall restrictions on banking, directly contributing to the casino economy that blew up in 2008.

The result was predictable: massive inequality on a scale not seen since the Gilded Age at the end of the 19th century.

The collapse of Stalinist regimes had a further effect in pushing the workers movement into retreat. Capitalism appeared triumphant and many working class political parties, like the social democratic parties in Europe, abandoned any pretense of supporting socialism and backed neoliberal programs.

### How Do We Win Reforms Today?

We are now coming out of this period of retreat but capitalism is now even more unstable and crisis prone. The capitalists’ ability to make significant concessions is reduced compared to the postwar period. The only way gains on the scale won after World War II will be won now is if the capitalists are threatened by a mass movement of working people.

It will require rebuilding fighting unions

and forging a new political party based on the interests of working people. Even then, gains made today will be more precarious. To make these gains permanent will require bringing the key sectors of the economy into public ownership under democratic workers control; that is to say, beginning the transition to a genuine socialist economy where working people democratically decide society’s priorities.

Despite the limitations to making reforms today, the more farsighted sections of the capitalist class recognize that they will have to change their approach if their system is to survive the next period.

Warren and Sanders aren’t the only ones calling for more “Keynesian” measures, ie state investment in the economy to alleviate inequality. The IMF and many serious ruling class economists are warning that such measures are needed to forestall further crisis. There is also a growing ruling class fear that further crisis on the scale of ‘08-’09 could lead to much more serious social upheaval -- and could even threaten their control over society.

### Sanders vs. Warren

In his recent speech, Bernie Sanders laid out a vision of a government that will beef up social programs, tax the wealthy, and break up monopolistic corporations. On one level this is not that different from what Warren lays out.

There is no question that Warren’s proposals are bold, thought out and if implemented would represent significant reform. But the key difference between her and Sanders is

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# Millions on the Streets in Hong Kong

## Marty Harrison

On June 16 an estimated two million poured onto the streets of Hong Kong to demand the complete withdrawal of a law to expand the scope of extradition to China. The law would have legalized the abduction of political dissidents, even those just passing through Hong Kong's international airport, to stand trial in China. It was rightly understood as another attack on democratic rights in Hong Kong.

Only the day before this massive demonstration, Carrie Lam, the hated Chief Executive of Hong Kong, had announced the law's suspension. Knowing that the government would reintroduce the legislation as soon as the movement faded, the protestors did not retreat but instead demanded more.

## Escalation in June

The situation in Hong Kong escalated quickly. Following the one-million-strong demonstration on June 9, calls for a one-day strike started circulating on social media. Then teachers, bus drivers and airline workers began petitioning their unions to join the strike. In the very early morning of June 12, 70,000 students and young people occupied the streets around the Legislative Council building. Police and the government responded with a level of violence never seen before in Hong Kong. They deployed more tear gas in one afternoon than they had in the entire 79 days of the 2014 Umbrella movement occupations and fired rubber bullets and bean bags into the crowds for the first time ever. Two students sustained life-threatening injuries.

On June 15, the following week, Lam announced that the law would be suspended and, in the same breath, strongly defended the extreme actions of the police. Rather than people returning home and claiming this temporary suspension as a victory, more than one quarter of the population joined massive demonstrations the next day, June 16. The

question of whether Lam will follow the heads of state of Algeria and Sudan, both toppled by mass movements earlier this year, is complex and tied up with conditions in China.

## What Will Xi Do?

Carrie Lam's master in China, Xi Jinping president and leader of the Chinese "Communist" Party (CCP), has a difficult choice to make: removing her might release some of the pent up anger against the government and diffuse tensions, but handing the movement such a victory would embolden the growing opposition in Hong Kong and, critically, in China itself. Any "weakness" in Hong Kong, or retreat in the face of mass pressure, would immediately weaken Xi's personal state capitalist dictatorship and help to fuel resistance by workers and students in mainland China. Even the suspension of the extradition law was further than Xi wanted to go and is seen as his most significant political retreat since his ascension to power in 2012.

Hong Kong's Chief Executive is not directly elected by the people, but by an elite group of 1,200 wealthy electors. A new election held during the height of the mass mobilization would also bring to the surface the question of voting rights for the seven million people in Hong Kong who do not have a vote in choosing the Chief Executive and would fuel calls for extending democratic rights in both Hong Kong and China.

Under pressure from escalating trade tensions with the U.S., Xi had wanted to deal with the situation swiftly in Hong Kong and decisively. Clearly, that did not happen. The Trump administration is cheering on the struggle in Hong Kong, not because of any concern for democracy but because it could represent a weakening of Chinese imperialism.

The movement shows no signs of backing down and Xi cannot back down. If the movement fails to find the methods and program to win decisively, the dictatorship will come back for revenge.



An estimated one million people participated in protests in Hong Kong on June 9.

## Taking the Struggle Forward

As of now, the movement lacks organization and experience, but the mood to fight back opens many possibilities for new workplace committees to be set up, strike meetings and union organization drives in non-union sectors to be mobilized.

Socialist Alternative is in political solidarity with our co-thinkers in the Hong Kong/China/Taiwan section of the Committee for a Workers' International, Socialist Action. Socialist Action is raising concrete proposals on the ground – such as strike action – and is advocating the type of struggle needed to defeat not only the Hong Kong puppet government but the much bigger dictatorship that stands behind it. This is in sharp contrast to some current movement leaders who lack a fighting strategy and limit their demands to democratic rights.

Socialist Action calls for:

- ✪ Condemn the police violence – set up an independent public inquiry into police actions against the youth on June 12!

- ✪ Reject the label "riot" – stop the arrests and terror tactics against protesters!
- ✪ Down with the extradition law and Carrie Lam's (TAM) murder regime!
- ✪ For a one-day HK-wide political strike to force the government out!

This movement and the emerging discussions about a political strike against the Hong Kong government's antidemocratic law represents a historic new stage of the mass struggle that will have huge implications regardless of the outcome. The next important breakthrough is for the Hong Kong mass struggle to shed its isolationism to actively link up with the mass discontent rumbling beneath the dictatorships' foundations in mainland China. This especially applies to the emerging workers' movement in China which is facing even more ruthless repression, but has shown incredible heroism and strength. When these forces are united and organized around a new working-class party, with a clear program linking revolutionary democratic demands to a decisive break with capitalism, the dictatorship's days are numbered. ✪

# Sanders, Warren, and the Fight for Socialist Change

*continued from p. 4*

not this or that proposal -- it is that Sanders speaks straight to working people and their interests. He acknowledges that his program will only be won through a mass movement bringing about a "political revolution." Warren's plan for achieving her plans? Rational argument and political cleverness! This approach has never changed the position of any ruling class.

Sanders by contrast has raised working people's sights. The activists who played a critical role in launching the teachers' revolt last year in West Virginia, Arizona and Oklahoma were all inspired by his 2016 campaign. What keeps the ruling class awake at night is that Sanders' campaign could play an even

bigger role this time in helping to coalesce the forces to rebuild a fighting labor movement and a new political party. Even those sections of the elite who favor the Democrats would rather have Donald Trump win a second term than face a Bernie presidency. It is no accident that the "centrist" Third Way think tank which is rabidly anti-Bernie recently indicated that Warren would be an acceptable "compromise" candidate.

But even though they are using every trick to try to pull Sanders down, he is still defining the Democratic nomination process. As the first round of debates showed, the 2020 candidates are being pushed to support, sometimes kicking and screaming, proposals that Sanders first popularized. This fake

progressivism is seen as necessary to block Sanders but as he pointed out in his closing remarks it's completely hollow: "Nothing will change unless we have the guts to take on Wall Street, the insurance industry, the pharmaceutical industry, the military industrial complex, and the fossil fuel industry. If we don't have the guts to take them on, we'll continue to have plans, we'll continue to have talk, and the rich will get richer, and everybody else will be struggling."

A Sanders government would come under huge pressure to abandon its program. If it didn't and went ahead and mobilized working people to force change through, it would face unrelenting resistance from the ruling class. In this situation, the limitations of Sanders'

outlook would have to be overcome. To achieve a Green New Deal for working people, for example, would require taking the big energy companies into public ownership. To address the coming economic downturn would require doing the opposite of what Obama did in 2009 when he bailed out Wall Street; it would mean taking the big banks into public ownership.

This is why we support Bernie Sanders - not because we agree with his definition of democratic socialism but because his program, and especially his class appeal, point in the right direction. The question that must be debated out is how we achieve his program and go beyond it to what is necessary, a socialist transformation of society. ✪

# Don't Let Billionaires O

## National Importance of the Kshama Sawant Re-Election Campaign



### Bryan Koulouris

Kshama Sawant was first elected to the Seattle City Council in 2013 with over 90,000 votes, running as a proud Socialist Alternative member back before "Bernie" and "AOC" were household names. Kshama used her 2013 election campaign to advocate strongly for the \$15 an hour minimum wage when no prominent elected officials were talking about it despite ongoing fast-food worker strikes. Kshama's election victory, and the united movement of labor, workers, and socialists made Seattle the first major city to win the \$15 minimum wage.

The \$15 movement in Seattle overcame fierce opposition from the corporate establishment, but after the victory in Seattle, \$15 legislation spread like wildfire across the country. Kshama's 2013 election was also the first big breakthrough for socialists at the ballot box, giving confidence to other left activists that they could defeat corporate power and the political establishment; this was reinforced through Sawant's re-election in 2015.

To win gains for workers, young people and the oppressed, elections are not enough though. Political office must be used by socialists to build movements and increase working-class consciousness to change society, and Kshama Sawant and Socialist Alternative in Seattle have been a shining example of how this can be done.

Countless victories many previously thought unwinnable have been won in Seattle over the past five years. Working-class activists have gained confidence, a voice in City Hall, and an invaluable organizing resource with Kshama in office. Landmark renters' rights laws, the establishment of Indigenous People's Day,

blocking the building of a monumental police bunker - these are only a handful of examples.

Right now, Kshama's re-election campaign is fighting for universal rent control and taxing big business to fund a major expansion of quality social housing. If we can win a massive housing justice victory in Seattle - just like with the \$15 movement - this could open the floodgates for struggles and legislation in cities across the country where working people face a deep housing crisis.

### Housing Crisis and Powerful Enemies

While the Seattle area is home to two of the five-richest billionaires in the world, homeless tent encampments can be found in nearly every neighborhood - except where police brutally tore them down. The for-profit housing market has failed this city, and working-class people are being pushed out by eviction, rising rents, and the most regressive tax system in the country. Seattle leads the country in construction cranes per capita, and big developers are trying to transform the city into a playground for the rich. They know that Kshama's bold call for universal rent control and taxes on the wealthy to fund quality social housing is a big obstacle in their way.

Big business is trying to buy this election. They have put over a million dollars into two corporate PACs to try to unseat Kshama. This money will be spent on endless pieces of mail and professional doorknockers reaching Seattle voters' doors attempting to hide the true intentions of the billionaires and developers behind "progressive" rhetoric. But their aim is clear: they want "anybody but Kshama."

Big business in Seattle is emboldened

right now. Their agenda had been pushed back on many fronts through Sawant's office, the growth of the socialist left, increased labor struggles and key victories on \$15 and renters' rights. However, in the last two years, the billionaire class reasserted themselves with the "Amazon Tax" defeat and the mayoral election.

Last year, Kshama and Socialist Alternative helped lead a big campaign to tax Amazon and big business and use the funding to build quality social housing. Initially, when the campaign proposed this tax, the organized pressure from

renters and working people meant City Council unanimously passed the tax. Then, the richest man in the world - Jeff Bezos - used his economic bullying and corporate lobbying get his way. The Amazon Tax was eventually repealed with a vast majority of City Councilmembers flip-flopping. Bezos was aided in orchestrating this betrayal by Mayor Jenny Durkan who was elected in 2017 with a \$350,000 PAC contribution from Amazon.

In 2017, Socialist Alternative had actively supported the independent left People's Party candidate, Nikkita Oliver, for mayor. Unfortunately, a section of labor leaders actively backed Durkan and then opposed the fight to tax Amazon and big business. These dynamics - an emboldened establishment and a divided labor movement - led to Socialist Alternative understanding early on that this re-election campaign would be a difficult battle. The debate in Seattle's unions is of national importance and contains key lessons about the way forward for the labor movement.

### Seattle's Labor Movement

With record levels of inequality, for the labor movement to grow and thrive we need to fight against the big corporations that want to attack our rights, wages, and benefits. This can be best accomplished by adopting bold demands and a fighting strategy, building rank-and-file democracy in the unions, and not limiting ourselves to what's acceptable to big business.

An upsurge in labor struggle has taken place in recent years with teachers at the forefront, and polls show that favorable views of unions have increased dramatically due to this, especially among young people. Reflecting this mood, Kshama is proud to be endorsed by 13

union locals in Seattle so far, representing over 80,000 workers in Washington State.

Unfortunately, some more "pragmatic" labor leaders think we can build our influence by "building consensus" with CEOs and the political establishment rather than understanding that these forces stand in the way of improving the lives of working people. These union leaders, many without democratic process in the ranks of their unions, voted against endorsing Kshama at the MLK County Labor Council.

In the wake of the labor council vote to not endorse Kshama Sawant, Monty Anderson of the King County Construction Trades Council said: "Where we had to break ties is where she started messing with the new police station, the head [Amazon] tax, got in-between the teamsters and UPS. We feel a local politician should not be messing with that. We feel like a local politician should be facilitating business in the city, and she was doing the opposite."

We need to reject this kind of business unionism and base ourselves on a fighting strategy to win rent control, a Green New Deal for working people, greater police accountability, and more.

It's unfortunate that, intentionally or not, a section of labor leaders have made a decision in this election that will effectively further embolden Amazon and the Chamber of Commerce, rather than stand with the interests of working people and people of color. Winning this election and cohering a labor left in Seattle would have national implications for strengthening a fighting labor movement.

### National Importance

More and more self-identified socialists are being elected to office and running campaigns across the country. This has sparked debate on the left about a key question: How can socialists effectively use elected office under a capitalist system? Some argue we should lower our socialist profile only run on Democratic Party ballot lines, yet Kshama's victories are an example of the possibilities for popularizing socialist ideas, running independent campaigns and building movements to win victories. Keeping this seat of struggle for working people in Seattle can be a beacon for the left nationally in the debate about how to change society.

Socialist Alternative's strategy is based on the recognition that the billionaire class will trample on our rights, living standards and planet in pursuit of profit. Only the strength of working people organized and united can change the world. Elections are one tool we can use in this struggle, but just as with a strike or a community campaign, we need to give everything we have in this fight to win! ✪

# Must Seattle's Socialist!

## Green New Deal Takes Center Stage in Seattle Elections

Des Conrads

The momentum behind the Green New Deal and international student strikes against climate change are shaping Seattle's City Council elections. Kshama Sawant and Socialist Alternative have made "A Green New Deal For Working People" a central demand since the beginning of her reelection campaign, proposing:

"Seattle should be a real climate leader by becoming 100% renewable by 2030. Tax the rich to massively expand public transit, making it free and fully electric. Create thousands of living-wage union jobs with a major expansion of wind and solar by Seattle public utilities and retrofitting homes and businesses to the highest efficiency standards. We need a rapid shift away from fossil fuels – bring the big U.S. energy corporations into democratic public ownership and retool them for clean energy."

Then, in late June, two leading environmental groups, 350 Seattle and Got Green, crowded City Hall with over 100 protesters. They delivered a letter to Mayor Durkan calling for "the creation of a transformative Green New Deal for Seattle that will eliminate our city's climate pollution by 2030, address historical and current injustices, and create thousands of good, green, well-paying, unionized jobs."

Facing growing pressure from below, all nine Seattle City Councilmembers signed onto this letter. Now the question is whether the Council is prepared to take on entrenched corporate interests, a vital step if they hope to deliver on the ambitious goal of ending climate pollution by 2030.

### Empty Promises?

Working people have reason to doubt the empty promises of the Seattle establishment when it comes to climate change.

[kshamasawant.org/donate](http://kshamasawant.org/donate)

Kshama has more donations from voters in her district, in Seattle city-wide and in Washington state than any of her five challengers. We don't take a dime in corporate cash, and we don't want the endorsement of these billionaire-backed PACs. We're up against a million dollars though, and we need everything we can get from workers and young people across the country. Many socialists from coast to coast and everywhere in between would love to help doorknock in Seattle, but if you can't - please donate to the campaign to help forward the fight for socialism.

Every mayor of Seattle since 2001 has promised aggressive action to reach zero carbon emissions, but despite an official goal of reducing Seattle's emissions by half by 2030, carbon output has increased 7% since 2012!

Transportation currently accounts for 42% of Seattle's greenhouse gas emissions, and Seattle has the 9th worst gridlock of any American city. This stems from both the lack of investment in public transit and the housing crisis displacing residents further from the center of Seattle, a process disproportionately affecting people of color and other oppressed communities.

Ending transportation emissions will require huge investments to expand mass transit alongside planned public housing developments to create stable, affordable communities, where shopping, childcare, schools, and jobs are easily accessible by walking or public transit, leaving no one forced to rely on cars to meet basic transit needs.

### Winning a Green New Deal

Saving the climate lives or dies on the strength of a working-class movement, as we are certain to face pushback from the capitalist class at every turn. We can look towards the Seattle City Council's betrayal when fighting for the Amazon Tax as a likely outcome of the political status quo. If they could not stand up to Jeff Bezos in this instance, why should we take their word that they can stand up to these equally powerful energy behemoths to win a Green New Deal? Reelecting Kshama Sawant and electing others who base themselves on building working-class movements will be vital if we hope to win the urgent struggle to save the environment.

There is no getting around a central truth of the environmental crisis - only 100 companies, overwhelmingly privately owned energy companies, are responsible for 71% of all carbon emissions. Ultimately, we must take these major energy companies into democratic public ownership as part of transitioning the economy to clean energy. To prevent the worst impacts of climate catastrophe, the environmental movement must embrace the fight for socialist change. ☘

## A Socialist Plan for Seattle's Housing Crisis

Ty Moore

Debate over the affordable housing crisis in Seattle is dominating the City Council elections. Seattle tops the charts for new apartments built, and over 90% are "luxury" units. Rents are up 69% since 2010. With nearly 50% of Seattle-area renters cost-burdened (paying over 30% of their income on rent), no wonder Seattle also tops the national charts for homelessness per-capita.

To address the crisis, most Seattle politicians limit their proposals to incremental spending increases, alongside regulatory and zoning changes which still rely on private development. While we support every step forward, this is a failed strategy based on accepting the dominance of real estate speculators, corporate developers, and big landlords.

In contrast, Kshama Sawant and Socialist Alternative argue that private development - where decisions are made to maximize profits - is incapable of meeting the basic housing needs of working people. Instead, socialists fight for the following program:

### Universal Rent Control

Cap rent increases in Seattle to the rate of inflation. No loopholes for new construction, vacated units, or other carve-outs demanded by the landlord lobby.

### End Homelessness

An immediate expansion of safe and dignified shelters, alongside tiny home villages and other transitional options. Full funding for mental health and addiction treatment. Stop the sweeps and criminalization of homelessness!

### A Movement to Tax Big Business

None of this will be possible unless we build a mass movement of working people, renters, and marginalized communities. As a first step, we need to demand big tax increases on Amazon and big business, not working people, to secure the funds needed at the city, state, and federal level.

### Massive Expansion of Social Housing

Build tens of thousands of new publicly-owned, permanently affordable homes to meet the needs of our growing city, linked to an overall Green New Deal for Seattle. Create thousands of union jobs building beautiful, sustainable, walkable communities alongside free public transit options to reliably meet all work, school, shopping, and childcare needs.

### Democratic Planning

Housing policy and urban development as a whole should be organized according to a democratic plan and based on public ownership to ensure affordable, stable, quality housing as a basic right for all. This vision is possible if linked to a wider socialist transformation of society, where the resources now hoarded by the wealthy are used to meet the needs of all. ☘



# Reparations: A Socialist Analysis

**Eljeer Hawkins**

The 2020 presidential elections are in full swing, and all of the Democratic Party presidential nominees have been asked the question, “Do you support reparations?” Several candidates immediately declared their support for reparations like Marianne Williamson, Kamala Harris, Corey Booker, Elizabeth Warren, and Julian Castro. Bernie Sanders who had earlier raised legitimate questions about the demand has also endorsed it recently.

Institutional racism is unfortunately alive and well in the U.S., a country that has discrimination built into its DNA. The black community faces disproportionate police harassment, state brutality, mass incarceration, unemployment, low wages, substandard housing, and lack of education opportunities. In this context, a debate on the demands and strategy necessary to win black liberation is urgently needed.

To make sense of today’s discussion it is worth exploring how reparations emerged in the historical struggle of black people fighting racial oppression before turning to the question of how reparations connects to the struggle to dismantle capitalism and institutional racism today.

## Reparations after the Civil War

The demand to provide financial restitution to redress the damage of slavery on the lives of black people began following the end of the Civil War in 1865 with Union General William Tecumseh Sherman’s “forty-acres and a mule” field order #15 which was approved by President Lincoln. The aim was to divide plantations among 40,000 formerly enslaved Africans providing them the possibility of living a dignified life with economic security post-slavery.

With the defeat of the Confederacy, a period of “Radical Reconstruction” developed in the South, cheered on by the international workers movement, including Karl Marx who wrote that “labor in the white skin can never free itself as long as labor in the black skin is branded.” Freed slaves led the struggle for land reform and many poor whites were involved as well. However, many capitalists in the North worried about this “populist” unrest and united with former slave-owners, stoking and mobilizing racist violence against the forces of progress.

The rotten deal between the planter aristocracy and the industrial ruling class of the North in the wake of the 1876 election was a betrayal of the black population that had fought in support of the Union cause. It meant a new phase of subjugation leading to Jim/Jane Crow southern apartheid, the disenfranchising of black men and waves of state terror and vigilante violence.

In the wake of this historic defeat, individual figures like Republican Walter R. Vaughan as well as organizations like the National

Ex-Slave Mutual, Relief, Bounty and Pension Association of the USA raised the demand of financial restitution through pensions for former slaves. The organization grew to 34,000 members under the leadership of Isaiah Dickerson and Callie House.

Between the World Wars, the demand for reparations was essentially dormant. The demand for reparations and acknowledgment of the long term impact of the slave trade, chattel slavery, and segregation re-emerged during the Civil Rights movement and Black Power era of the 1950s and ‘60s. However, the Civil Rights movement did not include the demand for reparations into their overall struggle to dismantle southern apartheid.

## Reparations in the 21st Century

In 2014, Ta-Nehisi Coates’s “The Case For Reparations” article in *The Atlantic* magazine, played a key role in re-igniting the issue of reparations as a significant demand. The publication of the article took place during the highwater mark of Black Lives Matter, and the exposure of the scale of law enforcement violence in communities of color and the second term of the first black president, Barack Obama.

As the 2016 presidential elections began, the reparations question was posed to the Democratic presidential candidates with a particular focus on Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders who was raising radical demands like a \$15 minimum wage and Medicare for All and calling for a “political revolution against the billionaire class.”

At the beginning of his 2016 campaign, Sanders made a serious mistake by not directly addressing racial oppression. Sanders later developed a strong program for racial justice, however, his initial weakness allowed Coates, corporate media pundits, Democratic political establishment, and more nationalist elements within BLM to attack Sanders with a “race first” approach which focused on reparations as a central demand.

Reparations has emerged again during the beginning of this Democratic Party presidential race but not as a byproduct of a grassroots movement by black workers and youth.

Corporate politicians’ support for reparations in this context is a feeble attempt and naked pandering to win the black vote as if reparations are the key issue on the hearts, minds, and lips of ordinary black workers. The “black vote” in any case is not a homogeneous phenomenon; it has multiple levels of consciousness and interest. In truth, to the extent reparations is a demand “from below,” it is coming more from a layer of middle-class black and white activists.

## What Would Reparations Mean?

The most prominent proponents of reparations, particularly the Democratic Party presidential candidates, are unsurprisingly non-committal on how reparations will be



*The 54th Massachusetts, one of the first black regiments in the Union army.*

implemented by the federal government. In fact there are many existing approaches to financial reparations, including calculating slaves’ role in creating profits in cotton and tobacco, what ex-slaves would have earned in wages, or the value of black wealth lost or destroyed after Reconstruction with the rise of Jim Crow.

The estimated cost of reparations proposals is anywhere between \$5 billion and \$12.5 trillion. For the sake of comparison the U.S. federal budget this year is \$4.7 trillion. So either reparations would be a token program or, if it were more serious, it would run into the determined opposition of the ruling class who have no intention of agreeing to wealth redistribution on this scale. Again change of this type can only be achieved by mass struggle of workers and youth. To win reparations it would have to be linked to wider demands benefiting the whole working class. This is absolutely not what the Democratic Party leadership has in mind.

## A Socialist Alternative is Needed

This August marks the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first 20 enslaved Africans classified as indentured servants to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619.

The struggle to end institutional racism and capitalism requires building a militant, multi-racial, working-class movement with black workers and youth playing a central role in the battle. The history of the militant black freedom movement and the labor movement has compelling examples of social struggle, collective organizing, and militant action that won concrete victories that challenged racism and capitalism head on like the building of the industrial unions in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the National

Negro Congress in the 1930s and ‘40s, and the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and ‘60s.

The reparations question, as framed by corporate Democratic politicians, is based on a liberal moral argument that does not address the systemic crisis black workers and youth face under capitalism.

Calls for reparations should be linked to working-class demands that can positively affect our daily lives and mobilize black workers and youth into action. Policies that could lay the basis for black liberation would include guaranteed living wage union jobs, quality public social housing, a massive investment in education in black communities and free childcare and health care for all. A fighting program would also need to include democratic rights including reversing restrictions that affect black voters, winning community control of the police with elected civilians from neighborhood groups given the right to hire and fire officers, and an end to racist mass incarceration. To win these reforms, we would need a mass grassroots movement capable of defeating the big business interests that benefit from institutional racism.

This system has a hell of a debt to pay to the global working class, poor and most oppressed. The only way to cement any gains we make under this system of violence, oppression, and war is global system change. We fight for a socialist economy that would put the world’s resources in the hands of the working class and poor so they could build a society based on democracy, solidarity, justice, and liberation. ✪

*Read a longer version of this article in the first issue of our new political journal Socialist World!*

# Sudan Protests Demand Removal of Military Government

On April 11, after four months of rebellion in Sudan and five days after the start of a historic sit-in in front of Sudan's military headquarters in Khartoum, Sudanese workers, poor farmers, young people, and small traders ended the 30-year personal dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir. On June 30, millions marched throughout the country in the latest escalation against the rule of the military.

The mass explosion was set off in December when bread prices rose exponentially as grain subsidies were cut in favor of debt service payments. Yet the tinderbox was years in the making. Ordinary people could no longer tolerate mass hunger, unemployment, police and bureaucratic repression, corruption, and selling off public assets and budgets to pay off the IMF.

The revolution has formed grassroots neighborhood committees that organize the resistance and sparked the revival of independent trade unions. Militant young working-class women are playing a leading role in the grassroots uprising. Important strike action has been taken by workers in Port Sudan, oil workers in West Kordofan, and lab techs in the Red Sea state.

The masses want nothing less than freedom, equality, and the complete end of military rule.

The following is a report from activists with Socialist Alternative Sudan (Committee for a Workers International).

## Huge Protests Across Sudan

Despite the threats of violence from Hemedti and the generals, and despite a

month-long internet shutdown, hundreds of thousands of people took part in a day of mass protests across Sudan on June 30 - a "miliyoniya" - a "Millions March" to demand the end of military rule. Huge demonstrations took place in the capital Khartoum, but also in many other towns and cities. This was echoed by a large international solidarity mobilization from the Sudanese diaspora.

The "Millions March" was a resounding success and has shown the determination of the Sudanese people to get rid of the military junta. It has also shown that the latter's savage repression of the revolutionary movement has so far contributed to the masses' courage and revolutionary willpower.

The success of these protests should be harnessed to push our advantage further. It should be seen as the beginning of a renewed, mass revolutionary offensive to bring them down once and for all.

After all this great struggle and revolutionary action, we must not accept the slightest concession from our basic demands. Do not listen to the weak voices that say we should "accept reality"! The revolutionary struggle is the only thing capable of creating the reality we need. The overwhelmingly majority of the Sudanese people reject any power-sharing deal with the "Council of Military Killers," hence we have no reason to accept any agreement negotiated against our will that would go down that road.

## Lessons of June 30

Why not use the momentum to campaign for a new general strike but this time coupling



it with street demonstrations and occupations of workplaces? By waging a struggle to take control of the country's economic activity, the working class can lay the ground for the economic and social revolution that is needed to transform the lives of the Sudanese people.

Even if the generals are forced out of their political niches, everything else will not suddenly improve overnight. Any government that defends the continuation of capitalism in Sudan will perpetuate and worsen the mass poverty and all the social ills which the Sudanese masses have revolted against, while leaving a handful of private capitalist bosses, landlords, and international creditors in effective control of the country's wealth.

Hence the struggle has to continue unabated until a genuinely revolutionary government, made up of democratically elected representatives of the workers and the revolutionary people, can see the light of day. The tasks of the "resistance committees," which have played an important role in organizing the movement, mobilizing in the neighborhoods, defending against the counter-revolution, etc, should be enlarged and coordinated

on a wider level to prepare for that outcome. Those parts of the state forces who sided with the revolution and defended the revolutionaries during the first sit-in, the officers and soldiers of low ranks, should be called upon to build similar committees and link up with the revolution.

The SPA needs to:

- ✪ Prepare for a new general strike, with mass protests and workplace occupations, as part of an agenda of escalating mobilisations until the fall of the junta.
  - ✪ Campaign for a revolutionary government, built through the bottom up by coordinating and structuring all the resistance committees into one national revolutionary council.
  - ✪ Campaign for the main assets and companies belonging to the old guard to be put under public ownership and democratic control of the workers and the people, to start organizing the democratic planning of the country's resources, and the building of a socialist Sudan.
- Long live the Sudanese revolution! ✪

## Brazilian General Strike Against Bolsonaro's Far-Right Agenda

### Alex Souto

On June 14, the metro system of São Paulo, the most populous city in Brazil and one of the largest in the world was ground to a standstill as thousands of transit workers went on strike against President Jair Bolsonaro's attempts to gut the country's retirement fund, similar to Social Security in the U.S. Cities like Belo Horizonte, Salvador, and the capital of Brasília saw total shutdowns of their transit systems. In total, transit systems were shut down in nine out of Brazil's 26 states.

These thousands of transit workers joined workers in education, the steel industry, and other sectors for a general strike estimated to have drawn out 40 million people throughout the country, making

this month's strike nearly as big as the 2017 general strike.

Notably, education workers, in grade schools and universities, shut down practically all schools throughout the country. Teachers are facing barbaric cuts to education at the hands of Bolsonaro's far-right administration. In a country where universities are largely state-funded, many are facing 15% cuts to their budgets.

Much like Donald Trump claiming to "drain the swamp," Bolsonaro ran last year on a platform of ridding Brazil of corruption. But now he has to defend his anti-worker economic agenda in front of the country and it is clear that his policies of cutting taxes and selling public wealth to the rich at the expense of working people and public services is deeply unpopular. Six months

into his term, this president has seen his favorability ratings drop 20%.

In response, mass movements are growing. But the mass resistance of ordinary Brazilians organizing in their schools and neighborhoods won't be enough to force the hand of Bolsonaro and his capitalist cronies without the organized working class bringing their social power to bear. This month's strike actions are a positive step in that direction.

However, the strike's effects were limited because the leadership of the unions did not fully commit. The large federations of trade unions in the country hesitated in following the movement into the strike. In São Paulo, the critically important bus drivers' union backed out of the strike at the last minute.

Socialist Alternative stands in solidarity with Liberdade, Socialismo, Revolução (Liberty, Socialism, Revolution - CWI Brazil). LSR calls for the local unions and national trade federations to mobilize the indignant mood in the country into organized groups, in every factory, office, classroom, and neighborhood. These will be necessary to prepare a more decisive general strike including a complete shutdown of key pillars of the economy, from schools and city transit to commercial transportation, the steel industry, and the shipping centers across the country's coast where workers load and unload billions of dollars worth of international trade. This is the way that Bolsonaro's attack on the pension system can be defeated, the first step in defeating the entire reactionary agenda of the right. ✪

# West Virginia Teachers Fight Privatization

**Zachary Peterson**

In the wake of the historic strikes led by West Virginia teachers, Republican legislators in the Mountain State have passed a retaliatory “Omnibus Education Bill” in a special session of the legislature. Among other things, the bill would introduce the first charter schools to the state, and threatens to undermine the power of the WV teachers unions who have played a key role in reigniting labor struggle in the U.S. In a continuing show of strength and solidarity, teachers from across the region have been gathering at the Capitol building in Charleston to oppose the bill.

The bill was introduced after West Virginia teachers struck twice in the last two years. The historic nine-day strike in February 2018 triggered a wave of similar strikes by teachers across the country from South Carolina to Los Angeles. In many cases, teachers and other education workers have won significant wage gains and in some cases pushed back against corporate privatization. The struggle also opened the space for other workers to take action including the New England Stop & Shop grocery store workers who struck in April.

After the Republicans introduced a similar bill in March, which was widely understood as retaliation for the strike last year, the legislature was defeated when the teachers went back out on strike for the second time in under a year. But the determination of the Republicans to deal a blow to the teachers was shown when the legislature reconvened for a special

session in June to introduce a nearly identical bill after schools had closed.

WV teachers and their supporters gathered at the capitol over several days to protest the bill and defend the gains of the 2018 strike. Implicit in the gatherings is a threat of further strikes in August when classes resume.

## Widening the Struggle

What is urgently needed is an offensive push by the teachers to widen the struggle. Even if they defeat this attack by striking in August, there is nothing stopping the reactionary Republican-dominated state government from trying again. Only an escalation by the workers can result in a lasting victory, one which can build the fighting organizations of the working class.

There is enormous potential now to build on the momentum of workers in the public sector to defeat this bill and many others. “I think as this movement gains momentum, we’re seeing more and more working class people realizing that this struggle is all of our struggle,” said Jenny Craig, a teacher in Wheeling and a member of the West Virginia United Caucus, a rank-and-file caucus in the teachers’ unions advocating for more



*Demonstration at WV Capitol in Charleston, June 2019*



democratic structures within the unions and focusing on progressive politics. “If they can do these things and pass these measures, especially the anti-strike and anti-worker provisions of this bill, to the largest workforce in West Virginia, then who’s next?” ☘

# Chattanooga: Another Defeat for UAW

**Justin Harrison**  
**CWA Local 13000**  
**(personal capacity)**

On June 14, the United Auto Workers (UAW) union suffered a major defeat in its efforts to organize the Southern auto industry when 1,700 hourly workers at the Volkswagen (VW) plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee voted against union representation 833 to 776.

This is the second loss for the UAW at the Chattanooga plant and follows a multi-year string of defeats for the UAW in the South, most significantly at Nissan’s Canton Mississippi plant where 60% of the workforce of 3,500 voted against the union in 2017. In 2015, the UAW was able to win a small unit of skilled workers in the Chattanooga plant but was unable to win a contract for them in the face of VW’s illegal failure to bargain in good faith. With this new loss the UAW is back to square one at VW.

VW management used all the classic union busting tactics. In addition, state politicians openly lobbied against the union and conspired

with VW management to threaten workers that the plant would lose up to \$500 million in state subsidies and close if they voted for the union. These tactics should not have surprised the UAW since the same vicious semi legal methods were used in the Nissan election, as well as at the new Boeing plant in South Carolina.

Despite the all-out offensive of the local political establishment and VW management, the vote was close. You could see the effects of what amounts to economic terrorism by VW. According to Chris Brooks, a correspondent for Labor Notes: “It was a bad sign. On the day voting began at the Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee... a sea of workers passed quietly through the turnstiles wearing the blue anti-union ‘One Team: I Am Volkswagen’ shirts provided by the company... Union supporters were visibly outnumbered by as much as 20 to 1.”

All the reports indicate that UAW ran a poorly organized top-down secretive campaign, hiding embarrassing details of their contracts from the rank and file committees, and placed

a heavy reliance on media and consultants instead of mobilizing around wages, benefits, and workplace issues.

The UAW leadership’s real problem is that it isn’t fighting to win gains for its existing members. While UAW members still have higher hourly wages than non union workers, the gap is closing. And with two-tier contracts in place from the Obama-administrated Corporate Bail-out packages, older workers are surrounded by a growing number of younger workers with no pensions and lower wages. If the UAW can’t point to strong contracts with decent wages, benefits and conditions in its “home turf,” why would VW workers put their jobs on the line?

With all these factors working against them, the VW workers showed significant courage in nearly voting in the union. It shows that despite the corruption, and weak tactics and strategies of the UAW, workers are increasingly ready to organize and fight back after years of watching the super rich get richer and richer at our expense while we struggle to pay our bills. ☘

## Chicago Educators Consider Fall Strike Action

**Push for Gains with All Out Public Sector Fight Back**

**Nick Wozniak,**  
**SEIU 73 Steward**  
**(personal capacity)**

Nearly thirty-thousand Chicago teachers, educators, and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) workers have ended the school year, but their contract fights are heating up. Both major unions at CPS, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and SEIU 73, have filed legal paperwork to allow for strike action in the fall. Due to the trailblazing 2012 teachers’ strike, Chicago is seen as central to the nationwide fight for public education. With the #Red4Ed gains at their backs, a victory in this struggle would continue the momentum of the teachers’ revolt.

While the 2012 strike set back the corporate “education reform” agenda, the political establishment was able to regroup and resume its ferocious attack on public education. In the schools, there is a mood of deep frustration and demoralization over funding cuts and working conditions which, as CTU’s slogan says, are students’ learning conditions. This is especially acute in schools in poor neighborhoods.

Both SEIU and CTU are coming to the table with strong demands that would improve the lives of educators and students alike. These include enforceable class-size limits, increased staffing, a moratorium on charter expansion, no non-mandatory testing, as well as living wages and benefits for all CPS workers. The corporate Democratic establishment has long fought demands like these. However, if they take a hardline with Chicago’s education workers they will have to reckon with the growing opposition of working-class people to the attacks on public education. Educators can’t wait on new Mayor Lori Lightfoot and should be organizing now to take action if necessary.

This contract struggle will also pose a test for the CTU Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE) leadership and the wider labor movement in the city.

To win their demands, the SEIU and CTU will need mass community support and participation. The Chicago corporate elite are united in fighting us, we need to unite to fight them. ☘

# U.S. and Iran Plunge Into Conflict

*continued from p. 3*

election he took a hard line against Iran but more broadly vowed to stop U.S. involvement in “endless wars.” The rapid preparation and then cancellation of airstrikes raises questions of who in the Trump administration is calling the shots.

The Democrats at the moment oppose the escalations of tensions in Iran. The party leadership generally favors rejoining the nuclear deal that John Kerry negotiated and Trump abandoned. This isn't a sign of the Democratic Party's anti-war or anti-imperialist credentials. They have enthusiastically supported bombing Syria and savage sanctions against Venezuela to force regime change. They are motivated to maintain stability in the region and improving U.S. relations with the EU, most of whose leaders want to keep the deal in place.

## No to War

Despite the heightened tensions, an invasion or full-scale war with Iran not in the cards at this point.

On an international level, a U.S. invasion would face strong opposition, even from many of its allies. An invasion would lead to a massive antiwar movement internationally. There is also no appetite in the U.S. population for such a conflict.

Nonetheless, given the instability of the Trump administration and global capitalism, a serious military confrontation between the



*Iranian General stands over downed U.S. drone.*

U.S. and Iran remains a very real danger. Socialist Alternative stands against all U.S. imperialist aggression against Iran. We are for ending the sanctions which overwhelmingly hurt ordinary people. We don't support the repressive, reactionary regime in Iran or Iran developing nuclear weapons. But U.S. imperialism is not interested in liberating the Iranian people but in maintaining its position in the region including overall control over the flow of oil. We call for Iranian working class to bring down the regime. Iran has a long history of working-class struggle.

The Iranian population is facing a desperate economic situation in large part due to the sanctions. The economy contracted last

year by 4.9% and inflation is over 50%. In response, there has been a rising wave of protests and strikes involving teachers, truckers, factory workers, shopkeepers, farmers and pensioners. The potential exists for a serious challenge to the discredited regime but the reality is that the attacks by the U.S. will tend to rally sections of the population behind the regime and its nationalist appeals.

Through international solidarity and the building of independent working-class organization, we can change not just an individual regime, but end the whole capitalist system which generates mass inequality, ecological catastrophe, and endless war. ☪

## Historic Victory for New York's Housing Movement!

### Brian Grady

United under the banner of Housing Justice for All (HJ4A), tenant organizations and progressive groups in New York State have recently won a raft of rent law reforms that will protect working-class renters for years to come. The reforms passed by the state legislature close most of the rent regulation loopholes that have contributed to the loss of more than 300,000 rent-regulated apartments since 1994. The biggest win for tenants in New York City in more than a generation, these reforms are a vindication of the tireless efforts of the New York tenant movement over several decades.

The Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act of 2019 contained historic victories, although further steps are

needed to solve the housing crisis. The new laws are permanent and no longer contain a “sunset” provision. Rent stabilization is opened up as an option to every county in a housing crisis - not just NYC. Units can no longer be removed from stabilization because the rent exceeds \$2,774, and landlords can't raise rents by 20% when tenants vacate.

State legislators and Governor Andrew Cuomo failed to deliver on a key part of HJ4A's “universal rent control” platform - prohibiting eviction without “good cause.” This demand was linked to spreading rent control to all renters in New York State by creating the right to a renewal lease with limited rent increases set by a local price index. This and the campaign's demand for 20,000 additional

units of supportive housing for homeless people were also left out.

The fight must now expand, not only to end “apartment improvement” scams and win good cause eviction, but also to renew and expand New York City's public housing stock, and put an end to the city's wasteful and cruel homeless shelter system.

With a broad mass movement tied into a newly revitalized labor movement, tenants could fight for and finally win lower rents for rent-stabilized tenants, and could point toward making housing a guaranteed right rather than an asset for wealth accumulation.

### Housing for the 99%.

Capitalism and the profit

motive have dismantled affordable housing for the working class, poor, and oppressed. Such housing has almost always been an afterthought in U.S. policy making. The 2008 housing crash and waves of foreclosures led to a six percent drop in homeownership, increasing the ranks of the more than 43 million American households who rent.

But to permanently end capitalism's housing crisis, reforms like those above should point the way toward making housing a guarantee for all and make landlords obsolete. Only when housing is built, administered, and maintained by the communities who need it will we truly be able to guarantee stability and housing justice for all. ☪

## SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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# FIGHT FIRE WITH A WORKERS' GREEN NEW DEAL

**By Karen P. Schwartz**

Early June 2019 threw Californians into our new normal: hot, dry summers and longer wildfire seasons. Cool, wet winters no longer mean less chance of fires, even in early summer. The growth from last winter's rain and snowmelt is now drying up and turning it into as kindling for yet another dangerous summer of wildfires and poor air quality. Temperatures in many parts of the state rose to 30 degrees above normal as residents faced sweltering heat.

Residents of Northern California's Yolo County have already faced flames and smoke, with the Sand Fire in June burning over 2,500 acres and 125 homes being evacuated. 600 firefighters were needed to bring it under control. This was just one of the 240 fires recorded in the state. The upcoming wildfire season will require workers to prevent and control the spread and damage. In previous years, California has used volunteer firefighter and prison labor to do these grueling dangerous jobs. The use of prison labor needs to end immediately and firefighters must be given fair and decent working standards and pay.

As families and working people continue to rebuild after last year's deadliest fire season on record, state and federal officials

are warning that this year is certain to see new disasters. It's been estimated that 11 million, or 1 in 4, residents live in high-risk areas. Elevated temperatures that come with climate change mean prolonged droughts, longer fire seasons, bigger and hotter fires, and, consequently, dangerous air quality. Extreme weather conditions are being seen all over the country with dangerous heat waves, massive flooding, and tornadoes. Interstates have been closed due to flooding in Nebraska and Oklahoma.

On a larger scale, global warming means glaciers are melting at a rapid pace. Recently, scientists discovered that the permafrost in the Canadian Arctic is thawing 70 years earlier than previously predicted. "It's an indication that the climate is now warmer than at any time in the last 5,000 or more years.", said Vladimir Romanovsky, a professor of geophysics at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Recent statistics show that 100 corporations, overwhelmingly privately owned energy companies, are responsible for over 70% of global emissions since 1988. Corporate profits have dominated the use of global resources. Fossil fuel companies have a short term outlook so they will continue with the current carbon intense methods of energy production because it's good for profits. These corporations, not individuals, are responsible for global warming.

## Capitalism is the Problem

Corporate America and Donald Trump want people to believe that action on the climate is not in their economic interests. Liberal "solutions" feed this narrative. This is seen in previous attempts to slow global warming with things like gas taxes and challenging individual consumer choices. The individual consumer decisions of ordinary people is not enough to undo the damage that's been done to the climate. The only way to combat climate change is by restructuring the capitalist economy and changing the real root of the crisis: corporate domination of resources and production management. We don't have a lack of resources and wealth, rather a profound mismanagement of those resources by the corporate elite and the politicians they fund.

We can't look to the free market to slow rising global temperatures. Energy production and resource management need to be taken from the hands of corporate CEO's and put into the hands of the 99%. The only way forward is with an economy that is planned with workers deciding what is in the best interest of the planet and humanity; an economy planned with the long-term in mind rather than on the basis of capitalism's short term logic.

The Green New Deal as it's currently posed

by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez would be a tremendous leap forward, but it does not go far enough in taking on the energy giants. What we need is a democratically planned Green New Deal alongside a broader socialist transformation of society. This means workers in the fossil fuel industry being re-trained and moving into well paid and safer union jobs that would be created by the massive overhaul of the nation's infrastructure that would be required. There also needs to be massive investment in high quality public housing and public transit as part of an integrated plan for urban development so people can live closer to their jobs. As a result we would have far fewer cars on the streets. This is in stark contrast to today where the shortage of affordable housing has led to long commutes for many Californians and to high-polluting traffic conditions.

By enacting and enforcing a Workers' Green New Deal on the basis of a full scale break with capitalism, we can transition not just away from carbon-intensive energy and high emissions but also create a genuinely equitable system of production and resource management. The capitalist system cares nothing about the environment, only about profit. We need a bold socialist plan to manage decisions to protect the planet. ✪