

A Workers Fight for a Living Wage? vs. a \$15/hr Poverty Sub-Living Wage!

Kshama Sawant's Socialist Alternative (SocAlt) has joined the International Socialist Organization (ISO), Solidarity and other similar groupings in attempting to abolish the historic program of socialism in the workers movement. In its place they seek to position a program of "sewer socialism" adapted from the fake left wing of the Democratic Party with liberal borrowings from "New Labour"(UK). Standing in stark contrast is the historic program of revolutionary workers as found in the 1912 Socialist Party USA campaign that its candidates, led by **Eugene V. Debs**, took their stand on in organizing and electoral campaigns where the class battles were joined across the USA. Particularly relevant in the present moment is the fight for Jobs For All at living wages. Here is the historic workers program left to us by the revolutionary socialists of a hundred years ago. Eugene V. Debs ran on this platform to eliminate poverty, unemployment and sub-living wages:

"Unemployment:

*The immediate government relief of the unemployed by the extension of all useful public works. All persons employed on such works to be engaged directly by the government under a **work day of not more than eight hours and at not less than the prevailing union wages**. The government also to establish employment bureaus; to lend money to states and municipalities without interest for the purpose of carrying on public works, and to take such other measures within its power as will lessen the widespread misery of the workers caused by the misrule of the capitalist class."*

- From the program of the Socialist Party USA 1912.

How workers are trapped in a fight for a sub-living wage!

\$15 is the populist demagoguery of the fake left of the Democratic Party and the labor-fakers of the union bureaucracy, who actually mean a \$10.10 minimum wage...in a few years. We witness campaigns in various municipalities across the county for other, higher, sub-living wages meant to head off a growing working class demand for decent, living wages. Instead of fighting for decent living wages we get the following "quality" leadership. As a union bureaucrat stated at a recent Iowa City rally: "A frontline fast food worker in Iowa makes about \$8.62 an hour. That is barely a living wage for one person. It is about \$10 an hour less than somebody needs if they are supporting a child to live in Iowa...Iowa City. I mean that is sort of state-wide. So it's virtually impossible...so raising the minimum wage...\$15 would be great. We'll take \$10..." - Iowa City Press Citizen, 12/05/2013

Note how quickly he retreated from the \$18.62 to Obama's \$10.10. These are the pheromones that the labor bureaucracy wafts over the fake socialists entrancing them into supporting the Democratic Party minimum wage program, which has always been a sub-living wage intended to trap millions in lifetimes of poverty, so as to maintain a downward pressure on all wages.

Even CNN's business section, the bosses' press, as well as pundits of the capitalist ruling class, recognize that \$15 is not a living wage and that the minimum wage was never enacted to be one. Indeed the capitalist Green Party program calls for a \$16.00 minimum wage, a position quickly abandoned by their coalition partners the **Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA)**, whose candidate for mayor, **Mike Parker**, stands before Labor Notes today crowing over raising Richmond, California's minimum wage to \$12.30 by 2017. This plan is a bosses' timetable to further impoverish Richmond workers over time, pushing a living wage further away beyond 2017. By then inflation will have slashed those increases and the fight for the next step increase toward the living wage (in a few years) will leave the workers with today's depressed standard of living or worse. This is clearly a scam; it is run by the Community Based Organizations



(CBO's) --employed Democrats--riding the hobby horse that workers making the prevailing rate are not the real membership of the multi-racial ranks of organized labor, but are a caste of white men who are part of the 1%. This falsehood also works to prevent unity of the working class in the fight for decent, living wages for all, employed and unemployed. Indeed the building trades department of the AFL-CIO is in continuous battle in NY and Albany with layers of CBO politicians super-exploiting ghetto and barrio youth, trapping them in local preserves of sub-living wage employment projects, including "affordable" housing construction. Contrast this with the 1912 program for massive government works at union wages.

• Considering that Sawant's political organization, Socialist Alternative (Soc Alt), recognizes that a \$15 minimum wage is insufficient, why would they advance a sub-living wage as a major demand in their platform, abandoning labor's historic demand of a living wage that is the union prevailing wage that has kept pace with inflation?

This is how "sewer socialism" works to keep sub-living wage workers enslaved at the deep fryer, so the bourgeois coupon

clippers can continue to super-exploit oppressed peoples, all the while pointing to those vicious class warriors who increased the workers share from sub-living to just a little higher sub-living wage. The stock market stays happy, because they get away without paying a living wage; the “sewer socialists” are happy because they are the heroes that (while not bringing home the bacon) brought home more table scraps!

• **Why can't these “revolutionary” socialists just be honest and tell the workers what a living wage really is instead of “leading” the working class from poverty conditions into yet more “not enough to live on, just too much to die on” poverty conditions?**

• **Isn't it true that fundamentally workers will win what they are able to win through working class struggle, through the mobilization of the masses, and not through playing in the political and legal sandbox of the ruling class?**

The labor movement was built and social gains won through militant organizing drives, mass picket lines that stopped scabs, sit-down strikes, hot-cargoing (refusing to handle struck goods), flying picket squads, solidarity and general strikes and defiance of the bosses courts, injunctions and laws.

• **Isn't what is required today a mass organizing drive, to organize the low-wage retail and fast food and other workers industry-wide, through class struggle methods?**

• **To fight for a real living wage and union protections and benefits? To fight for a union hiring hall?**

• **Why would a socialist be focused on organizing a committee within the Seattle City Council rather than convening mass assemblies of the Seattle area workers and oppressed to organize a fight for a living wage, for price controls and to organize the unorganized “wall to wall”? Where is Sawant's action plan to win union hiring halls and control over our working conditions?**

To win decent living union wages for all, no substitution is possible for the activity of the masses. Any and all attempts to substitute municipal or other parliamentary decisions results in suppression of the “class-for-itself” activity and demands of the working class; and further validates the forms and the power of the rule by the enemy social class. We do not oppose reforms and join every fight for even the most minimal gain, but at the top of our program stands the survival of the one productive class in society which faces destruction in the forms of impoverishment, unemployment, austerity, environmental degradation and inter-imperialist war.

Today's fake champions of labor, properly named “labor lieutenants of capital” in the old days, face every political question with a bourgeois method. Their method, pushing legislation and city council resolutions with all their miserable compromises, does nothing to mobilize the working class to use class struggle methods to win a living wage and other gains. Rather they rally limited forces of labor, generally bolstered by the left, the union staffers and the CBO's, on the streets, but not for real strike actions that shut industries and services down for more than the 1/2 hour rolling “strikes” at fast food joints. Their method fails to win wage concessions; their method is to build moral outrage of the consumer public, embarrassment of the profiteers and the securing of votes for ballot measures and city council legislation.

This is precisely the method applied when alien class forces control labor. This is the method of New Labour (UK) and Social Democrats generally. They do everything they can to prevent workers actions from developing into united and sustained (more than half hour) strike actions that can win. Thus the RPA, Solidarity, the ISO and the Sawant campaign, et.al., find a happy home together with the “progressive Democrats,” with whom their only quibble is over how much further from a living wage to keep the sub-living wage workers. It should come as no surprise to “Trouble-Makers” that Chicago Teachers Union

V.P., ISO honcho and CORE (the reform caucus) organizer, Jesse Sharkey tells workers the Democrats are “...our strategic partners...” It is no wonder workers witnessed the ISO leader Todd Cherchin petitioning for \$12.25 an hour in Oakland last week, subordinating the workers program of Jobs for All to the sub-living wage program of the Democrats, as well as to their electoralist, parliamentary road to socialism.

A Workers Political Program of Struggle vs. Breeding Illusions in Electoral Reforms

• **Considering that early American Socialist Party candidate Eugene V. Debs ran on a program “squarely and uncompromisingly for the abolition of industrial slavery; the one party pledged in every fiber of its being to the economic freedom of all the people...,” are we to believe that Debs today would run on Sawant's program of a minimum wage, rent control and “tax the rich”? That Debs would think that candidate for Richmond, CA mayor Mike Parker's Bloombergesque regressive and paternalistic “soda tax” would advance the workers movement?**

• **Is sewer socialism what is objectively needed today or mass workers' struggle linked to a historic workers political program?**

The authentic historic workers political program as expressed over one hundred years ago retains all its validity today. To wit...

“Such measures of relief as we may be able to force from capitalism are but a preparation of the workers to seize the whole powers of government, in order that they may thereby lay hold of the whole system of socialized industry and thus come to their rightful inheritance.”- (1912 SP USA program)

You would never guess that this workers' revolution of the entire social order would be logically connected to the politics of the nickel-and-dime “socialism” of SocAlt, Solidarity, ISO, RPA, the Greens, or the Labor Notes leaders who try to keep the Troublemakers clueless as to the historic program and social mission of the working class.

Immigrant Rights

How to win immigrant workers rights? Again we see the SocAlt replace the self-activity of the masses with dependence on the offices of the city council.

Sawant's SocAlt platform states: “The council should campaign for immediate, unconditional citizenship rights for all undocumented immigrants. Enact a moratorium on Seattle deportations.” We say this is another demonstration of a method which gives the working class power away and invests it in the capitalists and their institutions. Immigrant workers have already demonstrated that they understand this question better than Messrs. “socialists” and organized by the millions into an immigrant general strike on “A Day Without an Immigrant” action on May 1st, 2006. Had this been a strike of a week or more (i.e. of unannounced duration) and been endorsed and built by the labor federations, “immigration reform” would not be a dead issue stalled in U.S. congressional committee. Rather, significant reforms would today be the law of the land. But to win such reforms an altogether different understanding of the programmatic norms and method is required. Carrying this message and convincing the worker vanguard and rank and file is the historical role of revolutionary socialists.

We must ask Sawant and her new-found allies:

• **How are you going to keep the feds from deporting the undocumented by establishing a “moratorium” if labor does not muster workers defense guards for the communities of the undocumented and oppressed?**

• Is this moratorium for a limited time as the term implies?

• Are we led to believe that capitalist institutions such as the City Government, or the capitalist state, are going to defend the democratic rights of immigrant workers?

• Are we to relegate this task to the ruling class, a class that right now is waging all-out war against undocumented immigrants, through “deporter-in-chief” Obama’s record breaking deportations?

• Or is it the task of the organized working class to mass mobilize to stop these deportations, to engage in solidarity strikes and to fight for full, immediate and unconditional citizenship rights for all immigrants through struggle?

It is an axiom within the workers movement that major social gains were won through class and social struggle and not the ballot box. This has been acknowledged by leftists from Howard Zinn to revolutionary socialists.

• So why are today’s “socialists” creating illusions in electoral reforms rather than using the electoral campaign as an opportunity to raise working class consciousness, militancy, self-organized action, agitating for the workers political class struggles?

• We have seen on You Tube the highly-publicized campaign speech Sawant made to the 751 Lodge IAM members at Boeing, but where was she in the weeks leading up to the January 3rd vote, where the IAM international leadership rammed the concessionary contract extension down the members throats?

The answer is her campaign ended at the ballot box; the Boeing workers were on their own. She did nothing to mobilize the sit-down strike she hinted at in her famous speech and did nothing to get her 80 thousand supporters to help Occupy Boeing and bolster the machinists refusal of the enforcers’ rotten second vote.

Jobs for All vs. “Tax the Rich”

We want to ask each of these prospective “friend of labor candidates” where is your program for full employment?

The NYC central labor council (CLC) slogan for May Day is Jobs for All! And they go on to say together we fight together we win fair contracts fair wages for all working people. Why don’t ostensible socialists like yourselves advance even these imprecise demands?

Where do you explain how to win these demands and make them real?

We think that the Tax the rich slogan, which the NYC CLC also embraces, is completely off target, so we have to ask **Brother Parker:**

• If you were a supporter of the Black Panther Party

and a member of Solidarity, why do you run for office on a reformist and an apolitical program?

• And specifically, why do you think taxing the rich will make any fundamental change in the behavior of the capitalist state?

• We think California will just build more prisons to house and enslave the oppressed black and brown working age populations. Don’t you? The social composition of your City will want to know your answer.

• Why do you think that additional tax funds made available to the bourgeois state will lead to such social gains as environmental remediation if you do not fight for the expropriation of the Chevron behemoth in your own back yard?

• Do you think that the Chevron Robber Barons can be made to run their facilities in an eco-friendly way by municipal regulatory reform and taxation?

• When did you drop the historic program of the working class for nationalization of the commanding heights of industry under workers control? With Debs, we call for nationalization of Chevron and all major corporations under workers control and without compensation to major capitalist shareholders.

• When Richmond workers look at the Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA) record they have to ask when will you get rid of the Veolia privatizers who have degraded the municipal water system and fired the SEIU 1021 members and are still passing along increased costs to the city and the homeowners?

• Have these folks made their peace with those who tell us progress is made in nickels and dimes?

So long as you do not answer these questions your campaign is an embarrassment to the working class.

Working Class Political Independence vs. Left Tails of the Democrats

To win, workers need their own political party that fights for a workers government. The workers own government is required to secure the workers’ objective needs, ranging from partial and immediate, to the entire socialist re-organization of society commencing the era of the ownership and control of the means of production, distribution and establishing egalitarian consumption. The workers party must be politically independent of capitalist ideology, projects and schemes. It must develop a system of demands corresponding to concerns of the workers present mass consciousness and leading uninterruptedly through experiences in the class struggles to embracing demands which guide the working class and the oppressed, organized for themselves, to win political power and build a state of our own.

Should workers/labor run candidates who will administer the austerity for the capitalists or do we run candidates on the program of workers control of the economy enforced by a workers’ government?

ABOLISH WAGE SLAVERY FOR A GUARANTEED LIVING INCOME FOR ALL!

Today, here and across the country, minimum wage workers are taking a stand for their right to a living wage. We have no need to recite the facts as regards the real unemployment, the multimillions living at or below the poverty level, the failure of the economy to meet the needs of the people as regards education, medical care, housing, jobs, clean air, clean water, and safe abundant food. Minimum wage workers testify to their inability to make ends meet on these sub-living wages. So, while workers produce everything needed in society, enough so all can live well above a poverty level and millions more workers are standing by idle waiting for an opportunity to produce even more goods, the economy organized in this anarchistic-capitalist mode of production, is incapable of eliminating unemployment, poverty or of guaranteeing a living income for all! The slave-wage system is rotten and poverty is its proof!

The ongoing economic crisis forces the class of capitalists, who while some individuals may reap record profits, collectively they confront a long term crisis of profitability, which they logically respond to by hoarding capitals, casting about for profitable opportunities, all the while driving down the price of your labor power (the main variable in the formula of profitability.) This diminishes your ability to purchase, and in turn expands unemployment, pressuring each to work for a penny less. The minimum wage appears to prevent the bosses from paying that penny less, creating an inviolate floor that *appears* to prevent the race to the bottom. But capitalism is versatile so the race to the bottom violates the legal floor. Individual capitalists cheat workers out of wages, millions are mis-categorized as independent contractors, paid subminimum wages as domestics, farmworkers or waiters; years pass without Cost of Living Allowances, and corporations secure stock gains by outsourcing to lower wage countries or hire the undocumented in sub-minimum wage conditions, and steal Social Security and Medical taxes from these workers and the government, keeping these funds as extra profit! So we know the minimum is not the minimum and that the fight against a life of enslavement to the wage system cannot be overcome without a **GUARANTEED LIVING INCOME FOR ALL!** To achieve this we must win **JOBS FOR ALL! AT A LIVING WAGE DEFINED BY LABOR, WORKERS AND THE OPPRESSED! Workers must fight to win control over wages and prices!**

The minimum wage has for a lifetime been kept far below a living wage and today that distinction must be addressed by the labor movement, by all working people and the oppressed. This is a question of life and death for our class.

The over production of Capital turns into its opposite, the under production or lack of distribution of the essential goods and services needed by the masses. The ideology of the capitalists and their intention to control the Capital directs the capitalists' government that they are not obliged to put their vast hoards of capital to productive use to employ the masses, meet human needs and clean up the environment. Their ideology is driven by the market, which demands that their hoards of capital compete in the mega-speculation markets, where Capitals are concentrated, millionaires and billionaires are created and destroyed. Despite the non-productive nature of the speculators recovery, the media touts the economic turnaround, which we see has not hit main street, the industrial or manufacturing sectors. Millions remain out of work with no prospect of work. But there is work to be done and idle capital! This was the contradiction that occurred during the Great Depression as we were taught in 11th grade economics. Idle hands and empty factories! A formula that was only resolved by WWII which destroyed billions in Capital internationally at the cost of near 60 million lives. Today we face the same contradiction and the struggle of low wage workers is right in the forefront.

But there are those in ranks of labor and among the so-called friends of labor who do not want you to fight for a living wage, they want to keep you enslaved to a new improved, higher, but still sub-living wage. Some, like Obama say \$10.10 by 2015 . Others tell us to Fight for Fifteen; still others tell us Fifteen is not enough, that Sixteen is the magic number, or that Fifteen plus medical and pension is required. But when you look at the various calculators assembled by the various universities that study the conditions of labor, the actual living wage varies city by city and is closer to \$30 per hour than \$15. The fake friends of labor run from the call for a living wage for all to be defined by labor (union prevailing wage where it has kept pace with inflation) and thus bolster the capitalists' position by convincing workers they should not fight for a living wage but rather should accept the ever-so-reasonable sub-living wage instead, **because**

it is doable today in the world of real politics. Their analysis of the cause of the crisis, based on a banking screwup by greedy financial houses and mortgage lenders, turns the structural crisis of capitalist decay into an episodic mistake by a bunch of bad players whose "bad decisions" can be rectified by proper Keynesian fixes instead of requiring revolutionary working class solutions.

If it were merely a question of "good" people in Washington, those "friends of labor" our unions told us to elect, wouldn't they have already imposed massive programs to put us all to work, lift us out of poverty, to replant the forests, to put millions to work building clean energy projects, to put millions more to work cleaning up the environment, when they had the majority in both houses and the executive? But big capital cannot see profit in that kind of investment, and they, more than your unions ever did or could, own the politicians in congress, lock stock and barrel.

To win a living wage labor needs its own independent politics, based on the mass mobilization of the workers in every job place to organize the unorganized, to revitalize the unions where they exist, build new unions and build solidarity among all workers to strengthen the entire class, as opposed to the current state of atomization of labor, of business and craft unionism, which today is in many places degenerating into corporate unionism and captive unionism.

To do this we need a workers party with a fighting program that unites all workers, from the best paid to the poorest. This can be accomplished when the organized sector takes up the demands **JOBS FOR ALL -SHARE THE WORK -THIRTY HOURS WORK FOR FORTY HOURS PAY! FREE QUALITY UNIVERSAL HEALTHCARE, EDUCATION AND PENSIONS ARE A RIGHT!**

These demands can be won by **forming rank and file class struggle caucuses in our unions that bring back the class struggle methods that built the unions in the first place, like job site occupations, general strikes and political strikes.** Thus our fight today is not to reform a decaying mode of production ready for the dung heap of history. Our fight must be for what we need to lift all of us out of poverty! **Only a workers' government can guarantee a living income for all because only a workers' government will relieve the capitalists of the hoarded capital and put it to work. Only a workers government can or will tell big capital that if you cannot provide for all, we (the assembled working class) will nationalize the commanding heights of industry without compensation and run them under the workers own self-management and plan.** But a workers' government will not come about without a struggle, a struggle in the unions, the factories and job sites **led by a worker's party with a revolutionary program, which by its very nature must confront the multi-national corporations and thus be internationalist and build the fight for workers power in solidarity with a revolutionary workers international party!** This is what it takes to end poverty in our time! **Build mass workers assemblies! Form the workers party that fights for a workers' government and the historic program of the working class. ABOLISH WAGE SLAVERY!**

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