

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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## **Build a Voice for the 99%** **And a Strong Socialist Movement**

Most Canadians have many good reasons to want Harper and the Conservatives gone. The Canadian economy is officially in recession and over the last 15 years 600,000 manufacturing jobs have been destroyed. Since Mulroney in 1984, Canada has had government cuts to public services and stagnant living standards. The last nine years under Harper have been especially harsh. Harper has to go.

There are debates about how to get rid of the Conservatives and what policies we need instead of their right-wing agenda. Socialist Alternative argues that to have a good quality of life and a healthy environment, we need to end the control of the economy and society by the 1% and big business. This will be achieved by strong democratic unions and social movements working for a socialist transformation of society.

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# Stop Harper, Turn Left

(Continued from page 1)

## **Strategic Voting**

Some argue that the only priority is to stop Harper and people should vote for any party except the Conservatives. In effect, this encourages voting Liberal, as Liberal supporters rarely call for a vote for the NDP or the Greens.

Strategic voting ignores the Liberals' history of campaigning as progressives, on the left, while ruling for big business, on the right. The last Liberal government, lead by Chrétien and Martin, carried out widespread cuts to public services, slashing \$25 billion in just 3 years, and giving large tax handouts to big business and the richest Canadians.

The Liberals stated that they were critical of the anti-democratic Bill C-51, yet voted with Harper in support of it. How can anyone have confidence that the Liberals, if elected, would be more principled or progressive than in the past?

## **The New Democratic Party**

The NDP is leading in most opinion polls and has some welcome proposals such as a national childcare program. However, its program does not tackle declining job numbers and quality of work, the crisis of climate change, and underfunded public services and infrastructure.

NDP leader Mulcair has ruled out increasing taxes on the super rich, despite them benefiting most from Tory tax cuts and taking most of the income gains of the last decade.

The NDP says it will only modestly increase taxes on big business. The Liberals and Conservatives cut taxes on big business from 28% in 2000 to 15%, transferring nearly \$20 billion a year from public services to private profits. Now Canadian corporations are sitting on over \$626 billion that they refuse to invest.

Many workers and young people have high hopes in the NDP, which has never been in power federally. However, past provincial NDP governments cut public services and recent NDP election failures in BC, Ontario and Nova Scotia are a warning. After the landslide win in Quebec in 2011, the NDP did not build a mass, campaigning

party and did not actively support the huge protest of the 2012 Maple Spring. While the NDP has a progressive past, it is now largely controlled from the top without a large and active membership, as most activists, especially young people, are not attracted to join.

In spite of these limitations, most workers and progressives will vote NDP. Some people, especially young people, will vote Green out of disappointment with the NDP's timidity and encouraged by the Greens' bolder environmental policies. Kicking the Tories out with the NDP as the largest group in Parliament would be the best outcome. This is not because the party's platform meets the needs of working people, but because the NDP could be more open to pressure from workers to make reforms. However, with the economic crisis any reforms will be limited and subject to reversal unless working people mobilize and organize to challenge the rule of the big business elite, which the NDP leadership will not do.

## **Build an Independent Campaigning Movement**

The next government will come under enormous pressure from corporations and their allies to rule in their favour. Labour, environmentalists, social justice campaigners, First Nations and progressives will need to organize and cooperate in campaigns to oppose this, and instead fight for reforms and positive action. This will mean engaging in politics, not limited to party politics, and mobilizing the power of the working class – in particular of the unions that organize 30% of all workers.

If the NDP is in government, it will be tested and workers will learn from this experience, with some concluding that the working class needs a political vehicle to represent it.

In these movements, a strong socialist voice will point to the need to end the domination of big business and provide a path to a society that puts the needs of people and planet before profit – a socialist society.

If you agree with the ideas in this magazine, we urge you to join Socialist Alternative. ★

# Harper's Pipelines to Disaster: We Need a Healthy Environment and Good Jobs

Boosting the production and export of fossil fuels, especially from the tar sands, has been central to the Harper government. Harper's Big Oil agenda is a disaster for the environment and, as recent years have shown, for employment.

Harper's government bulldozed away controls on new pipelines: gutting environmental regulations; turning review processes for new proposals into a rubber stamp; attacking First Nations, environmentalists and scientists; and continuing the yearly \$2 billion subsidy to fossil fuels.

Harper supports all five proposed pipelines to move the tar sands bitumen to saltwater ports for export: Enbridge and Kinder Morgan pipelines to the Pacific, Keystone XL to the Gulf of Mexico, and Energy East and Line 9 to the east coast.

Expanding the tar sands will increase the disaster for the environment and people of northern Alberta. If these pipelines are built, they will travel thousands of kilometres under First Nations lands, farms, homes, fresh water and areas of outstanding natural beauty. Both the pipelines and tankers will leak, causing unimaginable devastation.

Burning the bitumen, and the planned increase in coal and fracked gas exports (both extracted in environmentally damaging processes), will increase global warming. The drought and fires in western Canada, melting glacier and polar ice, and super floods in Alberta and Ontario should be warning enough of the dangers.

If Canada is to avoid being the environmental enemy of the world and if it is to stop damaging its own environment and economy there must be major and rapid changes.

Canada could easily produce all its energy needs from clean and renewable energy sources. Energy use could be significantly reduced with major investment in making buildings energy efficient and widespread improvement in public transit and rail freight movement.

A shift to clean energy would provide hundreds of



An Enbridge Pipeline Leak

thousands of jobs. These would be well-paid union jobs with much lower health and safety risks than in the fossil fuel industry. These jobs would be long-term and secure, unlike those in the tar sands. There would be opportunities to export equipment, technology and skills to help the worldwide transition to a sustainable environment.

While the present jobs in the tar sands and other fossil fuel industries would be phased out, most workers would rather not be working in Fort McMurray and other such places if there were good, stable jobs at home.

The biggest barrier to transitioning to clean energy and protecting the environment, are politicians and the control of wealth by a tiny handful of people. Neither the Liberals nor NDP opposes the tar sands. The Liberals support all the pipelines except Enbridge. The NDP opposes some pipelines but seems to support Energy East and is undecided on Kinder Morgan. Even the Greens, who oppose all the pipelines, do not clearly call for phasing out tar sands production.

No major party is willing to confront the fossil fuel industry and the control of wealth by the tiny elite. If the \$35 billion spending proposals for pipelines and the \$2 billion a year in subsidies were democratically controlled these public funds would go a long way towards the transformation needed.

A clean energy economy would be better for employment, health, and the environment. This is a good reason why Canada needs a socialist policy – so people and planet come before profit for a few. ★



# ***Build an Economy that Works for the 99%, not the 1%***

Canada is officially in recession. However, for most Canadian workers this announcement from Statistics Canada merely confirms what they already knew. As Canadian economist, Jim Stanford, noted: “Coming six years into a lacklustre recovery (the weakest since 1945), weary Canadians probably question whether the last recession ever really ended.”

Canadian workers know that over the last 10 years their living standards have either declined or stagnated. Those who have kept their jobs face growing stress and workloads. Well-paid manufacturing jobs have disappeared – 600,000 in the last 15 years – and most new jobs are low-paid, part-time and insecure. For many, including young people, women, Aboriginals and immigrants, the word “precarious” has entered the vocabulary to describe their job situation.

Only in Stephen Harper’s imagination is the economy “healthy and growing”. In fact, most of the 20 industrial sectors contracted during the worst months of this downturn.

Harper claims that his government is a sensible manager of the economy. Yet the Tories ran a deficit almost every year and government debt has increased by over \$150 billion, mainly because of tax cuts for the rich and big business. This year they fiddled the books to balance the budget, by raiding \$2 billion from emergency funds, \$1.8 from Employment Insurance (after cutting the money going to unemployed workers) and \$3.4 billion from underselling public assets.

There are times when it is sound policy for governments, like people, to borrow now to invest for the long-term. Borrowing to do major house repairs or buy a house is running a deficit now for future benefits. With \$350 billion needed to upgrade and repair Canada’s infrastructure, and the economy in recession, this is the time to invest and provide good jobs. Unfortunately, Mulcair and the NDP are campaigning on a platform of balanced budgets.

## **A Jobs Economy**

Canada is a rich country, but the wealth is increasingly controlled by a tiny minority. The rich and big business are sitting on some \$800 billion - nearly \$200 billion hidden in tax havens and over \$600 billion in company bank accounts. If this money was democratically controlled, Canada could have a massive jobs program to upgrade infrastructure, build new homes and insulate existing ones, build public light rail, revise the long distance rail system and transfer to a clean energy society.

All this is possible without running a deficit!

## **Capitalism is a System of Poverty and Inequality**

Over the last 30 years, capitalism has claimed to be the best system around. Yet experience shows the opposite, with widening inequality and increasing poverty.

- The 100 highest paid company executives on average received over \$9 million a year in 2013 – 197 times the average worker’s wage. In the late 1980s, the ratio was only 40 times as much.
- The Canadian economy grew by 50% between 1981 and 2011 but the real median hourly wage increased only by 10%, while the income of the richest 1% grew 37%. Now the richest 1% receive 12% all income, up from 7% in the early 1980s
- Canada’s child poverty rate is over 15%
- The wealthiest 10% of Canadians own 47.9% of all wealth, while the poorest 50% only own 5.5% of all wealth
- 841,191 people use a food bank every month, 25% higher than in 2008

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**FIGHT FOR 15!**



## Canada's Unions

### A Powerful Force for Change: We Need Democratic Militant Unions

Workers are the vast majority of society; very few Canadians have an independent income. Almost all Canadians live by going to work, or rely on the wages of others. Most students, pensioners and people on welfare are part of the working class.

All the things and services needed for life workers produce, transport and provide. Without workers, nothing would happen in Canadian society. This control of economic activity means workers have enormous potential power.

Unions are the key organization of workers. Unions won the weekend and holidays, better wages and conditions at work, and have been to the front of many wider social and human rights' struggles. The organized working class, workers in unions, numbers 4.74 million members in Canada. This is 30% of all workers, probably the largest potential force for progressive change.

When unions are strong and doing well all workers benefit, including those not in unions, as unions push up general standards of work, wages and holidays.

In recent decades, big business has attacked unions to boost their profits and cut the share of wealth going to workers and public services. One of Harper's last acts of government was an attack on unions, Bill C-377.

In spite of some setbacks, the union movement is largely intact; no union has suffered a major defeat. However, to stop the attacks and to start winning better wages and conditions for workers and wider social improvements, unions need to change.

Too often union leaders are out of touch with the members. In the name of "saving jobs" (which usually doesn't work) they sign lousy contracts that include two-tier wages, worse pension plans and other concessions to employers. The support, education and role of members in the life of unions needs to be increased – we need unions run by the members, not staffers. All union officials should be elected and only receive the average wage of its members. Members are the real strength of a union.

There is a desperate need for unions to launch a massive campaign for a \$15 an hour minimum wage and a union for the millions of low paid

workers – over 20% of all jobs in Canada are low paid!

A key lesson of past struggles is that solidarity is vital to victory – workers standing together to resist employers. An injury to one is an injury to all.

The governments of Canada have legislated workers in dispute back to work – this is an attack on union rights. However, when workers stand firm the anti-union laws can be defeated and workers can win. The Vancouver port truck drivers defied a back-to-work ruling – and won. The same was true in the past.

Unions, linking with other progressive movements, can lead the fight for good jobs and services, social justice and environmental protection. ★

#### **End Canada's Cruel Immigration Policies**

Canada's immigration policy has shifted to a pro-business rather than a human needs approach. Processing times for sponsorship applications have soared from 6 months in 2013 to 15 months currently. Since 2006, the number of refugees and family class immigrants has dropped sharply while the number of temporary workers has tripled. Increasingly, the Canadian government treats people seeking to immigrate as cheap labour with few if any rights.

In contrast, Canada has easy entry policies for the rich; it is easy for people with \$2 million to invest in Canada to become residents. Most other applicants, due to government policies, must wait an inhumane length of time before having a decision on their application.

The current refugee crisis in Europe has exposed Canada's selective immigration system. Four years into Syria's suffering, Canada has admitted fewer than 2,500 refugees, out of 4 million. Refugees and asylum seekers are at the mercy of an often cruel and bureaucratic process.

As a country with one of the largest immigrant populations in the world, Canada has been cruelly unwelcoming of refugees and asylum seekers fleeing death and suffering. Under Harper, Canada's immigration policy is discriminatory and unjust and ignores the plight of those who most need help. ★

# Strengthen Public Services for all Canadians

Stephen Harper famously said that “*you won’t know Canada when I am through with it*”. Since coming to power in 2006, he has systematically set out to further weaken Canada’s social safety net, cut essential public services, and eliminate agencies and programs that engage in advocacy, public policy and promote democratic engagement. Harper’s austerity agenda follows the wave of cuts begun in the mid-1990s by the federal Liberals under Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin.

If re-elected, there is worse to come. Harper has planned cuts of \$43.5 billion in health spending. Reduced health care transfers to the provinces over the coming years will seriously undermine health services and result in the loss of national health standards. Decrying this, the editorial of the Canadian Medical Association Journal, opined:

*Recent years have seen Canada’s health care system race to the bottom of quality rankings compared with peer nations that have prudently invested in maintaining a strong social safety net... Of great concern is the change in the federal philosophy behind funding — areas that are more aligned with business interests are increasingly favoured.*

The Harper government implemented callous cuts to the Interim Federal Health Program for refugees and increased privatization through wasteful P3s. Public service cuts, including those to employment insurance, Veterans’ Affairs, immigrant services, environmental protection and more – affect those who are vulnerable to a greater extent: women, refugees, the unemployed and those on social assistance. (See [socialistalternative.ca](http://socialistalternative.ca) for more details.)

In addition, there has been little or no action on public services that benefit women, immigrants and older people including a national child care program, a national pharmacare program and better home care and long-term care for our aging population.

Socialist Alternative recognizes that good public services are vital to most Canadians. We campaign for the following:

- 1. Health Care:** Strengthen public health care, stop privatization and P3s. A renewed health accord that provides universal public health care, including pharmacare, eye and dental services.
- 2. Housing:** Establish housing as a right. Establish a national housing program to ensure affordable and accessible housing for all Canadians.
- 3. Workers:** Fix Canada’s broken Employment Insurance (EI) system to ensure that those who pay into the system receive the benefits they deserve. Provide a living income for those who are unemployed, disabled, stay-at-home parents and unable to work. For veterans, provide needed rehabilitation and support.
- 4. Children and families:** Establish an affordable, accessible national child care program. Increase the National Child Benefit Supplement and transfer payments to the province to eliminate poverty for everyone.
- 5. Seniors:** Increase the Canada Pension Plan, the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) for low-income seniors and restore eligibility for old age security to 65. Establish a national home care and long-care program for seniors (under a renewed Health Accord).
- 6. Women:** Provide accessible abortion services throughout Canada, support transition houses and work to end violence against women. Call for a national inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women.
- 7. Education:** Provide fully funded high quality public education from early childhood to university. Abolish tuition fees and end growing corporate domination of universities.
- 8. Environment:** Provide access to clean water, healthy food and an environment protected by scientists and other workers who are not stifled and censored by government.

We invite you to join with us in working for a Canada for the 99%: working for quality public services, accessible health, housing, education and other supports that enable all to live well. A Canada that we’d like to recognize even if Stephen Harper does not. ★



## Putting Women's Issues on the Political Agenda

Despite the Conservative and NDP leaders attempts to shut down debate on women's issues, there are many good reasons to ensure that women's issues are on the political agenda including: violence against women, reproductive rights, child care, poverty, and pay and income inequality. These issues, among others, disproportionately affect women, especially Aboriginal women, women of colour, immigrant women, and women with disabilities.

Violence against women is widespread. Incidents such as those at Dalhousie University last year point to the pervasiveness of misogynist attitudes towards women in our society. The high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women is unacceptable and must be addressed, including holding a National Inquiry.

We call for provinces, such as Prince Edward Island, to address the lack of accessible abortion services – this undermines women's reproductive rights.

A national, affordable, and accessible childcare program is imperative if mothers are to have equal access to the workforce. This will help significantly many working women and families, and is long overdue. The Conservatives' child tax credit favours the well-off and is totally inadequate. It is time that the Canadian government make the needs of women and their families a priority.

Lastly, there is an urgent need to address the issue of poverty and low pay for women. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Alternative Federal Budget for 2015 points out that the Canadian gender pay gap is the eighth largest among OECD countries. Women's median employment incomes are 34% lower than men's incomes. Women are over-represented among low-wage earners – accounting for 59% of all minimum wage workers in Canada.

Socialist Alternative believes that these women's issues are critical and must be on the political agenda. Women's equality in all aspects of society: in the home, at work, or in public is crucial for a society that is based on justice and democracy. ★



## Education - A Basic Right

An educated and well-trained workforce is a benefit to all of society.

Since 1990, the cost of living has increased 62%, while the cost of post-secondary education has gone up nearly 300%, mainly due to government spending cuts. Public funding for post-secondary education fell from 80% to 57% of total expenditure in the last two decades. Tuition fees have mainly replaced this cut funding. Now, the average student debt on graduation is \$27,000. This, at a time when good paying jobs are becoming rarer.

The high cost of education is a major barrier to students from low and middle income families. They face the prospect of starting their adult life with a huge burden of debt, which will affect future life and work choices.

Increasingly universities are run like private companies and dominated by the interests of the corporations. This narrows the fields of teaching and research, and limits open inquiry and academic freedom – vital to knowledge.

### We Say:

- Fully fund high quality, free public education from early childhood to university
- Abolish tuition fees and provide a living grant for all students
- End the growing corporate domination of universities ★

# Québec: Waking Up the Quiet Revolution

Since British imperialism gained control of Québec in 1763, the majority, French-speaking (Francophone) population has been an oppressed nation. The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries saw repeated attempts to assimilate the Québécois population and up to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Québec was dominated by Anglophone capitalists. Most workplaces had English-speaking bosses and Francophone workers were told to “speak white”.

The Quiet Revolution, beginning in the 1960s, saw dramatic changes in Québec. The right-wing government of Duplessis was defeated and the Catholic Church’s domination of society was weakened. Unions grew in strength, from organizing 30% of workers in 1961 to 44% in 1981, using illegal strikes to win union recognition in the public sector. In 1972, Common Front, involving most unions, fought and won many benefits, despite the imprisonment of union leaders. At its peak over 500,000 workers were on strike. The Quiet Revolution resulted in the strongest unions and the best social policies in Canada

Alongside the social and labour movements, calls for Québec national independence grew and the sovereigntist Parti Québécois (PQ) and the Bloc Québécois were established. In 1980 and 1995 there were sovereignty referendums, both narrowly defeated.

The emergence of a Francophone capitalist and middle-class, the passage of laws defending French in Québec and bilingualism laws in Canada, have reduced the most blatant forms of national oppression.

Recently the main parties in Québec, the PQ and Liberals, have moved to attack the gains of past struggles. The mass movement of the Maple Spring of 2012 shows that Québec’s radical traditions are alive. Such militancy is necessary to defeat government attacks.

Many Québécois continue to see themselves as a distinct nation, especially as Francophones remain a national minority in Canada, continually defending their language and culture. There is still significant support for sovereignty.

Socialist Alternative supports the right of all nations to self-determination as it is a democratic expression against oppression. All nations, including Québécois, have a right to independently determine their political, economic and cultural future.

The objective of the PQ and the BQ has always been a politically sovereign Québec with a capitalist economy. *Alternative socialiste* - the Québec section of the CWI - opposes this capitalist nationalism, as it would primarily benefit Québec’s big business while attacks on workers’ living standards and the environment would continue.

Québécois’ struggle for independence needs to build a popular movement to break the elites’ domination of society and economy – whether Québécois or foreign.

Despite widespread support in Québec, the idea of independence is often considered reactionary by many people, especially Anglophones and Allophones in Québec and Canada. The fight for national liberation should be a fight against all forms of discrimination - linguistic, ethnic or economic. This also means respecting the minority rights within Québec and across Canada.

The struggle for an independent Québec is a means to improve the life of the majority of the population. To eradicate oppression requires a struggle for economic democracy – to end the rule of the corporations. Therefore, while respecting the rights of minorities, we strive for the maximum unity of workers, regardless of their different backgrounds. The struggle for socialism and national independence go hand in hand. ★



**Alternative Socialiste**  
section québécoise du Comité pour une Internationale Ouvrière (CWI)

**Pour en savoir plus au sujet du Québec et du travail d'Alternative socialiste, visitez:**  
[alternativesocialiste.org/](http://alternativesocialiste.org/)

**For news about Québec and the work of Alternative Socialiste go to:** [alternativesocialiste.org/](http://alternativesocialiste.org/)



## Aboriginal Peoples: Idle No More in Calls for Action

Harper's Conservative government has done nothing to alleviate the woeful legacy of colonialism borne by Aboriginal peoples. The Conservatives have refused to hold an inquiry into murdered and missing Aboriginal women. Imagine if 1,200 rich white people had disappeared in Canada – Harper would have declared a state of emergency. The government has failed to address First Nations' demands for adequate education funding or to tackle the poverty, inadequate housing, and lack of clean water on reserves.

Harper's "apology" to residential school survivors system rings hollow, especially when a year later he stated that Canada has "no history of colonialism". The abuse and indignities suffered at residential schools has caused intergenerational trauma, magnified by the *continuing* neglect of the federal government.

In addition, the government's resource extraction agenda – oil and gas extraction, fracking and mining - is threatening the sovereignty and land rights of all three groups of Aboriginal groups recognized by the Canadian constitution: Indians (often referred to as First Nations), Métis and Inuit. Many First Nations, across the country, are standing their ground against proposed pipelines. Inuit and Innu, in Nunavut, Nunavik, and Labrador, are fighting against resource developments in their communities. The Nunavut community of Clyde River is challenging the National Energy Board in federal court on plans for seismic testing for oil and gas in the waters of the eastern Arctic.

After years of fighting, the Métis won a Supreme Court victory in 2013 that found the federal government had failed to follow through on the land grant promise it made to the Métis people in 1870. This victory recognizes Métis rights to land and resources, paving the way to negotiations.

With a growing aboriginal population, and the increasing strength of Aboriginal culture and society, governments cannot continue to ignore and defy the wishes of Aboriginal peoples. The emergence of the grassroots movement, Idle No

More, in 2012 demonstrates the rising anger among Aboriginal peoples toward government actions. What began as a series of teach-ins throughout Saskatchewan to protest parliamentary omnibus legislation (Bill C-45) that erodes Indigenous sovereignty and undermines environmental protections, has changed Canada's social and political landscape. Today, Idle No More continues to speak out on issues of aboriginal sovereignty.

Socialist Alternative supports the aims of the Idle No More and the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples for sovereignty over their land, resources and culture. To this end, we call on the federal government to give control over education to Aboriginal peoples with funding at the same level as other Canadians. Treaties should be respected, negotiations conducted on a nation-to-nation basis, and traditional land rights of First Nations, Métis and Inuit recognized. The federal government must act on the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission including the call for a National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women. It is not too late to end the disgraceful legacy of colonialism. ★



*Idle No More calls on all people to join in a peaceful revolution, to honour Indigenous sovereignty, and to protect the land and water.*

# ***For a Party that puts the needs of Millions before the Dictates of the Millionaires***

Whatever the outcome of this federal election and whichever party forms the next government, the real rulers of Canada will still be the corporate elite. They control the economy and heavily influence the government.

The aims of this tiny elite are contrary to the hopes and needs of the vast majority of Canadians. We want good jobs and public services, a healthy environment, affordable quality housing, and a secure future for our children and our old age. Big business, in contrast, wants the maximum profit for themselves, without controls by government, unions or society.

Most of the reforms of the past – health care, pensions, women’s rights, and many more, were won by campaigns, strikes and mobilizing people. It is still the case today that to defend these reforms and to win the changes we want it will take mass movements. This requires strong democratic organizations – unions, social justice, human rights, student and environmental movements.

Socialist Alternative also believes we need a political party that is committed to fundamental change. A party that starts with the needs of Canadians, rather than the limits dictated by big business, and that has a vision for a better society. This party would be democratic and controlled by its members; members would elect the leadership and decide policy. It would respect different viewpoints while seeking unity through discussion. The party would campaign, not just during elections, but continuously on the many issues people face, supporting workers, Aboriginals, women, environmentalists and human rights activists in their struggles. The party’s life would combine activism, political education, cultural activities and solidarity.

This vision of a party is very different from all our mainstream parties, whose main purpose is to

support politicians to win elections. We envision a party that is rooted in communities and grassroots organizations. Of course, one of its purposes would be to contest elections – but all elected representatives would be responsible to the party and only paid the average wage of a skilled worker. Our idea of a party has no place for careerists – being an elected representative would be an honour rather than the road to a high-paid career.

This future party would include the active involvement of unions, community groups, environmentalists, women’s organizations, Aboriginals and others who struggle for a better society.

There is a deep suspicion of political parties, especially among young people, because of the careerism of most politicians and the many sell-outs that workers have suffered – politicians promise one thing and then do another. We need a very different party.

Such a party does not exist in Canada today, but Socialist Alternative

believes it is needed to win a fair and just society. We will support the processes to build this new party – it will probably take some time. We have seen the developments of new radical parties in several countries such as Spain, Germany and Brazil, as well as the potential of Quebec Solidaire. These parties were formed by new activists joining with some members of old left parties that have abandoned progressive policies.

We will argue within the pre-party alliances and the new party, when formed, for a socialist program to take over the big corporations that control and dominate society and to have a democratically planned economy that puts the needs of people and the planet first. ★

**For news, analysis and reports from around the world, written by local activists go to: [socialistworld.net/](http://socialistworld.net/)**



# The Difference an Elected Socialist Makes: Kshama Sawant Leads the Fight in Seattle

Most people are deeply suspicious of politicians. They are seen as making empty promises and having a good career. We need a very different kind of elected representative.

One elected socialist on Seattle City Council, Kshama Sawant, shows what is possible. Sawant won the 2013 election promising to fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage. Once elected, she did not sit in council meetings trying to cut backroom deals. Instead, alongside unions, Socialist Alternative and grass-root campaigners, she helped lead a mass movement. This movement forced the City Council to agree to \$15 in June 2014. This will add about \$2.5 billion to the pay of 100,000 workers over the next 10 years. Now the campaign for \$15 has spread across the US and Canada.

The major difference between Sawant and many left politicians is that she uses her position on council to build mass movements. She knows that real change happens when people mobilize rather than waiting for politicians to pass some laws.

Sawant also takes the average wage of a skilled worker, \$40,000 a year, rather than the \$117,000 a year that Seattle councillors pay themselves. Socialist Alternative believes that all elected representatives – politicians, union leaders, etc – should take the average wage. All our elected representatives around the world do this. Sawant



For news and analysis about Sawant and the US, go to: [socialistalternative.org/](http://socialistalternative.org/)

has fought for and won an increase in Seattle’s budget to raise the wages of low-paid city workers. She won the renaming of Columbus Day to Indigenous People’s Day. She helped build the campaign to stop a 400% rent increase for low-income tenants.

Now Sawant is leading the fight for rent controls, the construction of city owned affordable housing, a tenants’ bill of rights and a developer tax. She is also fighting for re-election to council.

Imagine in Canada if we had even a few dozen elected campaigners like Kshama Sawant. ★

## Build an Economy that Works for the 99%...

(Continued from page 4)

### Policies for Jobs and Human Well-being

It is a scandal that millions of Canadians suffer mass poverty, and millions more struggle to make ends meet. Poverty and inequality inflict enormous social and economic costs on people and society. In 2011, the National Council of Welfare (now closed by the government) stated that poverty costs the federal government alone \$24 billion a year. If the tax handouts worth \$20 billion a year were reversed, Canada could easily provide a comprehensive social services and anti-poverty program (see public services article).

Socialist Alternative’s proposals for a jobs-based economy would have enormous employment, social, environmental and economic benefits for the vast majority of Canadians. However, there is a reason why this will not be implemented as things stand now – it is because the system is controlled and run for the benefit of the 1%.

This is the reason, we in Socialist Alternative call for the development of a working class party that will end the rule of profit and campaign for:

- The democratic public ownership of the banks and major companies
- A socialist economic plan to meet the needs of all while protecting the environment ★



## Internationalism

We live on one connected Earth. Economic problems in China impact every continent. Climate change is a global environmental crisis. The internet spreads news instantly around the world.

Big business has its tentacles in every corner of the planet, moving jobs and money around, ever seeking the greatest profit. Capitalism exploits people and the environment everywhere; it knows no borders in its greed. Capitalism creates war, environmental damage, hunger and misery.

Harper is a loyal servant of the corporations. He resists any meaningful action to tackle global warming, supports mining companies that ignore human rights and the environment, has ordered military action in several countries and refuses to support Palestinians' human rights.

In contrast, there is a growing international wave of radicalism against rising inequality, austerity, cuts to public service and environmental destruction. In Britain and the US, Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders are rocking the political establishment.

In Greece, the election of Syriza and then a 61% No vote in the referendum are both a clear rejection of austerity. However, the recent capitulation of the Syriza government to the brutal attacks demanded by European banks demonstrates that a desire to end austerity is not enough. We need political parties with a clear strategy to fight against big business.

Socialists are internationalists, in support of struggles for peace, human rights and a better world. We understand the connections among struggles around the world and work to build links and solidarity.

Socialist Alternative in Canada is part of the Committee for a Workers' International, an organization with members in 45 countries. We work closely with our colleagues in Alternative Socialiste (Quebec) and Socialist Alternative (US). Our members are MPs, union leaders, councillors, human rights campaigners and grassroots activists.

We are involved in struggles for better wages and conditions and basic union rights; to protect the environment; for women's rights; and fighting racism and oppression. We work towards a world that puts people and planet first.

## Join Socialist Alternative!

If you agree with the ideas in this magazine, join Socialist Alternative.

We are a small but rapidly growing organization. We tripled our membership in the last 2 years, with members from coast to coast. We are active in workplaces, universities and in communities. We are busy fighting pipelines, supporting workers' struggles, organizing international solidarity, campaigning for a \$15 minimum wage and many other activities. We work in many alliances and coalitions.

We fight for every reform, while we point to the need to end capitalism and its profit-greedy destruction of the environment and human well-being. In its place, we work for a democratic and just society that puts the needs of humanity and the planet first. With the diversity and fertility of nature, the endless energy of the sun, and the ingenuity of humans we can build a world without war, hunger, poverty, injustice or environmental destruction.

Such a socialist society would have nothing in common with the dictatorships of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union – socialism is about the full flowering of human democracy and potential. We would see the end of the dictatorship of big business in our society.

We organize political discussions and education. We need to learn from the past victories and defeats of the working class to successfully challenge the most ruthless ruling class in history. The people are the majority and have the power to transform society.

The past we inherit, the future we will win.

### For more about Socialist Alternative

There are longer versions of several of these articles and many more articles on our website. To join or find out more about Socialist Alternative

- Website: [socialistalternative.ca/](http://socialistalternative.ca/)
- E-mail: [contact@socialistalternative.ca](mailto:contact@socialistalternative.ca)

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