



The Spread of Socialism in Seattle

The socialist movement in Seattle,  Washington, has not come quietly onto the scene in the form of politicians with clandestine motives slowly changing laws. Socialism in the Emerald City is bursting forth loudly and with pride. The fact that it is being taken quite seriously by many in the Pacific Northwest and has a stronger foothold than ever causes it to require more serious examination — not only by those in the Seattle metropolitan area, but across the nation as well.

With roots stemming from the Occupy Wall Street movement, an economics professor and outspoken socialist is making her mark in Seattle. Stepping into the Washington State political scene first in 2012, Kshama Sawant, a former software engineer from India and a professor of economics at a community college in the city, campaigned for a seat in the state House of Representatives as a member of the Socialist Alternative party. Though she was defeated in that race, she would not remain on the sidelines for long.

In 2013, Sawant ran for a seat on the Seattle City Council. Painting incumbent Richard Conlin as being in the corner for big business interests, she campaigned heavily on a socialist platform and was widely seen to have won the debates. On November 15 Conlin conceded the election — and a new chapter in Seattle politics began.

Having recently come through her first reelection campaign, Sawant is presently leading in ballot counts and is expected to come away with another victory after mail-in ballots are counted. Results are set to be announced on November 24.

After she spent much of her first term working on the \$15-an-hour minimum wage, and promising a coming rent control fight, a reelection to the seat is clear confirmation that her constituents align with her politics.

The election of a self-avowed socialist in the city of Seattle is clearly not an anomaly. It is not the story of a person with deep pockets and political aspirations simply getting lucky. Sawant spent two years doing the exact things she campaigned on.

With the rise of politicians such as Bernie Sanders proudly touting socialist policies on a national level, it may be beneficial to take a closer look at the direction in which Seattle is moving. An economic ideology that would have once drawn the ire of most Americans is now being touted by many as the answer for perceived financial woes in Seattle, as well as across the nation.

Sawant has declared that companies such as Amazon.com should be nationalized. In 2013, when the Boeing Company was in negotiations with unions, she declared: “The workers should take over the factories, and shut down Boeing’s profit-making machine.” When Boeing threatened to move jobs out of the state of Washington, Sawant advised that such an act would amount to nothing short of “economic terrorism” and asserted that if workers took over the factories it would be “democratic ownership.”



Written by [Clinton Alexander](#) on November 17, 2015

That a politician has put forth such astounding statements, and has been taken seriously enough to have been reelected, is astounding in itself. However, the socialist movement in Seattle is not relegated to the rantings of only one person. In the face of small business owners across the city, Mayor Ed Murray, Sawant, and the entire city council pushed the increased minimum wage, and the mayor signed it into law. At the time, *The New American* spoke with a few of those business owners and managers about the harmful effects of such a law, and their comments may be seen in the article "[Seattle's Coming \\$15 Minimum Wage](#)."

To this date the concerns of those business owners have been completely ignored. They have been given no other choices but to either pay up or go under.

The minimum-wage law in Seattle begins at the bottom with the worker receiving a certain wage and works backward from that point. The socialist movement has decided across the board that if a business owner cannot support the wage, then his establishment has no right to remain open.

Another pet issue resolutely championed by Sawant is rent control. In an interview with the *Socialist Alternative* last month, she asserted,

Right now, landlords have the right to raise rents by however much they like: 50%, 100%, or even 200%. People can only take stagnating wages and skyrocketing rents for so long before they fight back.

The basic belief system being pushed is that the workers — not the owners — of a business have the right to decide the wage rate. In the housing market, it is the idea that the tenants should determine rent pricing rather than the owner of the property. The rent control battle goes to the very heart of a fundamental right of all U.S. citizens: the right to do with one's private property as one likes.

Citing income inequality and high rent, the socialist movement is attempting to rewrite our basic economic system. However, socialists have no intention of remaining in one small corner of the nation. According to a Gallup Poll from January 2010, a majority of Democrats and other liberals have a positive view of socialism. While there may not be a large number of socialists in office across the nation, the ideology is spreading.

Socialism has gained a foothold in Seattle not because a professor of economics at a community college managed to secure office and fool her supporters. It has increased in popularity in large part because many young people feel disenchanted with the current economic climate. However, an economic ideology that has been proven to be a failure time and again is not the answer.

The cries have already begun for a national minimum wage to follow Seattle's lead. Healthcare has been nationalized. Politicians such as Kshama Sawant are touting the supposed evils of capitalism.

Meanwhile the answers given from our nation's capital often differ only in their method of dividing up more and more tax dollars.

If the minimum wage increases, small businesses close, and property rights are further restricted, then the result of the socialist movement will be increasingly smaller shares of a shrinking economic pie.

There are indeed logical answers that can move our nation in the right direction: abundant jobs, middle-class wealth, and protections for individual rights, but socialism isn't it. Property rights must be upheld and laws that stifle businesses must be struck down.

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