

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Produced by volunteers &  
printed by union labour

Suggested  
Donation **\$1**



## **517,000 workers, plus their families, would gain from a \$15 minimum wage**

Seattle won \$15 in 2014. Since then, support for \$15 has swept across the US and into Canada. The call of “Fight for \$15” has been vocal in British Columbia since its launch in November 2014. Now, this voice is growing as the campaign to raise the minimum wage in BC to \$15 spreads across the province.

With record poverty and inequality in BC, this is no surprise. In BC over 120,000 workers earn only the present minimum of \$10.25 an hour. The recent government announcement of 20 cents an hour raise is an insult to people who work full-time and are still in poverty.

The myth is that most low paid workers are teenagers living at home in temporary jobs. The reality is very different, with over 25% of BC’s workforce, over half a million workers, earning less than \$15 an hour. Airport baggage handlers, child care workers, retail and service sector workers, food and catering workers, cleaners and security guards – the list goes on – are all low-paid. Widespread

poverty wages are the major reason nearly 20% of BC’s total population live in poverty.

Most evidence shows that raising the minimum wage does not destroy jobs. If low-income people get a raise they will spend it locally, providing more business for local stores. In contrast, giving tax cuts to the super-rich, as BC’s current government did, does not go back into the local economy, instead the money goes abroad on luxury goods, holidays, etc.

Many small businesses want to pay above the minimum wage as they value their staff. Unfortunately, they are under-cut by large corporations – such as **McDonald’s, whose head gets over \$9,000 an hour** – who can easily raise wages. Companies with over 20 workers employ 65% of minimum wage workers. Raising the minimum wage improves quality of work, reduces employee turnover and makes for a better workplace environment – all features valued by small business.

---

Continued on page 2

## Fight for \$15

continued from page 1

The BC Federation of Labour (BC Fed) launched the Fight for 15 and supports this growing campaign. This is truly a coalition as the BC Fed, unions, political organizations, think-tanks, anti-poverty and student groups are all taking part and pouring vital energy into the cause.

Rallies, petitions and protests are great tools for gaining publicity and raising public awareness. Already 75% of British Columbians support a “significant and immediate increase to the minimum wage”. To force the BC government to change we need a widespread, democratic, grassroots movement that builds the momentum and motivation of low-wage workers, activists, and the broader public to work together. Local campaigns can organize local actions, press local targets, and sink roots in the community.

Whether you are a low-paid worker, a student piling up debt or a union member who has seen things at work get worse, this is a campaign for you to change BC. This campaign can strengthen the wider workers’ movement through substantial political engagement and challenge the rule of the 1%.

Socialist Alternative Vancouver has, from the start, put energy into the campaign and is now helping to establish local Working Groups of the campaign throughout the Lower Mainland – at this point primarily in Surrey, North Burnaby, and on the Sunshine Coast. As this is a provincial matter, groups need to be created across the province. Join us, and together Fight for \$15!

## Kshama Sawant & Socialist

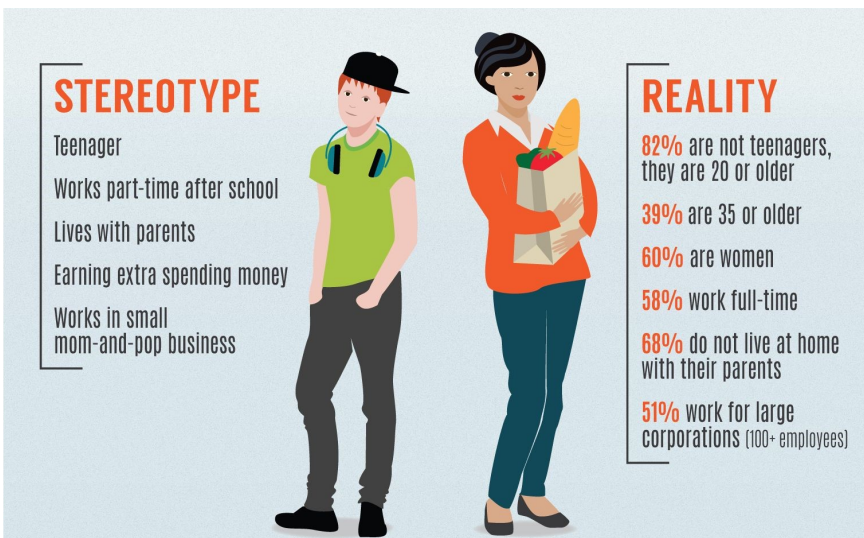
On November 29, 2012, a few hundred fast food workers held a one-day strike in New York for a \$15/hour minimum wage. On June 2, 2014, Seattle City Council agreed to \$15, the first major US city to do so. How did the fight for \$15 go from a small protest to a resounding victory in just 18 months?

The Fight for 15 in the US came on top of the Great Recession of 2008, the Occupy movement and the burning anger about poverty and inequality. Socialist Alternative in the US identified the political opening to build an alternative to the big business parties of the Republicans and Democrats. In a long, hard-fought campaign, highlighting \$15 and without taking any corporate money, Kshama Sawant was elected to Seattle council. Sawant’s campaign pushed the mayor and councillors to change from opposing \$15 to saying they were in favour.

Unlike establishment politicians, Sawant took the average wage of a worker rather than the huge councillor salary. She used her elected position to build a powerful grassroots movement, 15 Now, linking her, the unions, Socialist Alternative and community activists. 15 Now set up 11 neighbourhood action groups, did local tabling, organized multiple rallies and marches, and had a major presence at important rallies. These local groups, organized in a democratic structure, meant activists had ownership of the fight for \$15.

The movement of working people and socialists forced \$15 onto Seattle’s agenda. The Democrat Mayor Murray and his big business friends wanted a weak \$15 minimum wage “that would work for business.” He and the business and political establishments fought a battle, right up to the final day, to insert pro-big business loopholes.

### Who would Benefit by raising BC’s minimum wage to \$15



Thanks to Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

Continued from above right

The financial crash of 2007-08 and its drastic implications for the world economy are still fresh in everyone's memory. Canada, despite not being hit as brutally by the financial crash as Europe or the US, has seen an economic decline. Numerous tax cuts to the rich and corporations have not produced investment. In fact, corporations are sitting on \$626 billion of ‘dead money’, which they refuse to invest. The result is stagnation and a growing wealth and income inequality.

Rising income inequality means that people have less money and fewer opportunities. A growing number of people have slipped beneath the now precarious social safety net: poverty, hunger, low incomes, dependence on

## Alternative: Winning \$15 in Seattle

Councillor Sawant moved resolutions, with mass support, to remove these loopholes. Although the Democrats may talk more progressively than the Republicans, the Democrat



**Socialist Alternative's Seattle Councillor, Kshama Sawant**

councillors voted for these gifts to the corporations.

A stronger \$15 minimum wage could have been won. If the Seattle unions had put more of their energy into building the grassroots movement, instead of orientating towards the mayor's negotiations with businesses, the pressure would have forced the councillors to reject the loopholes.

The victory in Seattle means that workers will receive an additional \$3

billion in wages over the next ten years. The victory has inspired workers across the United States and Canada. Now we are calling for \$15 louder and in more numbers than ever before!

While the laws around the minimum wage are different in BC than in Seattle, the key lessons of building local action groups, mass campaigning and not cutting deals with big business parties are as true here as they were in Seattle.

Full article at: <http://socialistalternative.ca/posts/1005>

## The Rich are Getting Richer - Growing Inequality in Canada

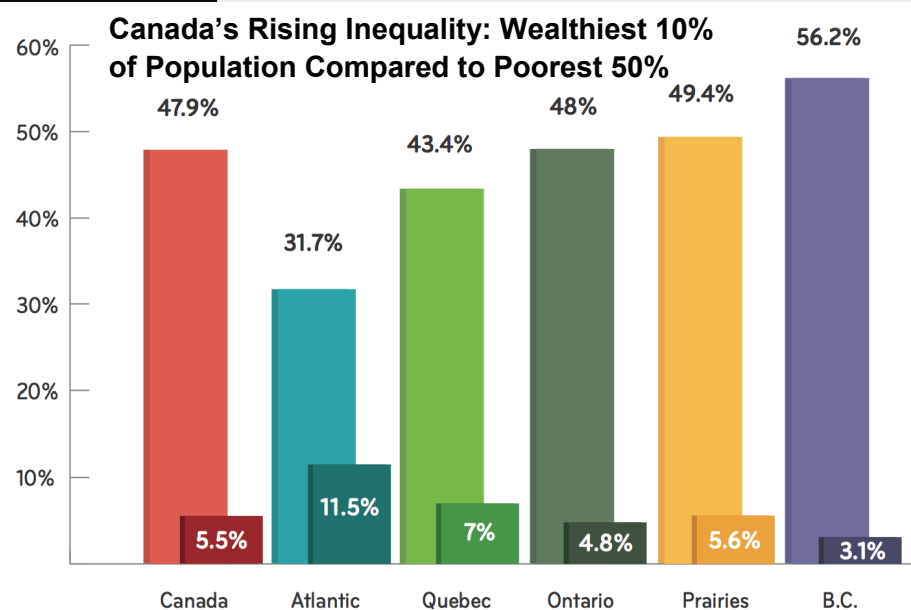
The rich are getting richer, while most of us are getting poorer. While this may not be news to many of us, it is startling how highly concentrated wealth and income are among the rich elite.

The richest 10% of Canadians have almost half (47.9%) of all wealth while the poorest 30% of Canadians have only 1% of all wealth. The poorest 50% have less than 6%. The poorest 10% have no wealth, in fact, they are in debt. BC has the greatest inequality in Canada. The richest 10% have 56.2% of wealth while the poorest 50% of British Columbians have only 3.1% of the wealth (see below).

The picture for income is the same. Incomes are as concentrated in the hands of the richest 1% today as they were in the Roaring Twenties. From 1997 to 2007, a decade of high growth, Canada's richest 1% (the 246,000 privileged few whose average income was \$405,000) took almost a third (32%) of all growth in incomes. Yet, in the 1950s and 60s, when the economy grew as fast, the richest 1% of Canadians took only 8% of all income growth.

Canadians have lived under the dark shadow of neo-liberalism for the past 30 years – in which corporations and government have robbed the poor and workers to subsidize the rich. Real living standards have stood still. Governments have attacked the gains in wages, benefits, working conditions, labour laws and social programs that the working class won in the post-war period.

Continued below left



Thanks to Broadbent Institute

food banks, high student debt and homelessness are some of the obvious signs.

Socialist Alternative is fighting against inequality and the neo-liberal corporate agenda. The Fight for 15 is an important struggle. Raising the minimum wage to \$15 would reduce poverty and inequality and would boost the confidence of working people to fight back. This important step is the beginning of what is needed to ensure that all Canadians have equal access to the wealth generated by the workers who have toiled long and hard to create a commonwealth.

## What We Stand For

- An end to poverty wages and raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour
- A 35 hour working week without loss of pay
- A living income for those unable to work
- Reverse the cuts and privatization of public services
- Massive public investment in clean energy, mass transit, healthcare, education, and affordable housing to create good unionized jobs and fight climate change
- Fully funded, high quality, free public education from early childhood to university.
- Phase out the tar-sands and nuclear power
- Higher taxes on the rich and corporations, lower taxes for working people
- Democratic unions run by and for the membership, with elected union officials paid the same wages as those they represent
- End discrimination, full equality for all
- Equal rights for, and solidarity with, immigrants
- The right to self-determination and self-government for all Aboriginal peoples, and respect for historical treaties and resource rights
- Scrap NAFTA and other exploitative trade deals
- Democratic public ownership of key sectors of the economy, banking, utilities and resources
- A socialist transformation of society to allow for the democratic planning of the economy based on the interests and needs of the overwhelming majority of people and the environment

Full list: <http://socialistalternative.ca/what-we-stand-for>

## About Socialist Alternative

Socialist Alternative Canada has supported the Fight for 15 from the very start.

Socialist Alternative supports every campaign to improve people's lives. However, we recognize that in a capitalist society the rich always want more wealth and power and constantly seek to undermine social well-being and the social gains we have. The richest 1% of humanity own as much wealth as all the other 99% of humanity.

The large corporations have more power than many elected governments and they use this power to increase profits at the cost of workers' well-being and the environment. Capitalism breeds war, poverty and discrimination. In addition, capitalism is wreaking havoc with the environment with global warming, pollution, and record loss of habitats and species.

Socialist Alternative works to resist capitalist attacks and instead improve living standards for the majority on a healthy planet. However as long as capitalism exists we will have to keep fighting these struggles again and again.

We are for democratic socialism where ordinary people will have control over our daily lives. This would lead to a good quality of life for all in a healthy environment.

Socialist Alternative has members across Canada and works closely with Alternative Socialiste in Québec and Socialist Alternative in the US.

Socialist Alternative is part of the Committee for a Workers' International, a worldwide socialist organization in 47 countries, on every continent. **Find out more and Join us!**



Join the BC Federation of Labour's  
**Fight for 15**

- Website: <http://www.fightfor15bc.ca/>
- E-mail: [bcfed@bcfed.ca](mailto:bcfed@bcfed.ca)
- Phone: 604 430-1421



**Join Socialist Alternative Canada**

- Website: <http://socialistalternative.ca/>
- E-mail: [contact@socialistalternative.ca](mailto:contact@socialistalternative.ca)
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/socialist.alternative.canada>

**Stop Press: NDP win in Alberta promising \$15: <http://socialistalternative.ca/posts/1350>**