

Electoral Action Conference: Building Alternatives to the Two-Party System

March 4, 2015



Activists and candidates from around the country will come together on May 2-3 in Chicago to share their experiences and to launch a network for future cooperation at the Future of Left/Independent Electoral Action Conference.

The past few years have seen a significant uptick in independent political initiatives on the left, from election campaigns to new local electoral and social movement formations, to referenda campaigns.

Kshama Sawant's November 2014 election to the Seattle City Council captured the attention of leftists across the country, but a number of other exciting campaigns have also been path breaking, including the Jackson Plan of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and Richmond Progressive Alliance's David and Goliath fight against Chevron in the East Bay. Many recent political developments have brought organizers building alternatives to the two-party system together with those using direct action and referenda to help win gains against fracking, for a \$15 minimum wage, and other important initiatives.

"There has never been a more critical time in history to come together to discuss independent left political action," said Gayle McLaughlin of Richmond Progressive Alliance. "Using my experience in Richmond as a gauge, it is clear people are eager to continue participating in a bold movement for social change. There have been breakthroughs in other places as well. Movements are starting to bubble up throughout our nation. But as long as we remain isolated, the two-party system will continue to weaken our democracy. We need to learn from one another's experiences, and not fear conflicts or differences among us, in order to break through that isolation. There is no time to lose and this conference offers us an exciting beginning!"

"So much impressive political work has been done around the country, but not enough people know about it" said conference endorser Dan La Botz. The Future of Left/Independent Electoral Action Conference is intended to encourage dialogue amongst those who are committed to left politics outside of the two-party system, to share experience and reflections of campaigning, to discuss the purpose of running and challenges once in office, and to explore the relationship between social movements and elections.

This initiative, which was first proposed by Solidarity in the summer of 2014, gained ground after an uptick of left electoral activity throughout fall of 2014. Following the November elections, Socialist Alternative made a public call supporting such conferences in 2015. The conference, which is supported by Solidarity, Socialist Alternative, the International Socialist Organization (ISO), and other left groups, focuses on third-party and independent candidates and grassroots organizers.

Over fifty individuals and organizations have endorsed the call or joined to work on organizing the May conference in Chicago.

The conference will promote independent political action, build issue-based coordination among disparate movements, candidates, and left/progressive parties, and develop and adopt a means for continued networking, conversation, and mutual support. The organizers hope to gather experienced candidates and organizers representing the social movement sectors, people of color, youth, women, LGBTQ, and individuals with disabilities to have strategic dialogue of left electoral strategies and tactics. It will have a mix of plenary sessions, theoretical panels, inspirational talks, and practical workshops. The end goal is to use the conference to build and ongoing support network around electoral issues.

To endorse the call to the conference and be placed on a low-volume announcement listserv, please send your name and affiliation to leftselect@gmail.com.

Endorsers of this conference as of Feb. 28, 2015 include: **Gayle McLaughin+** (Richmond City Council; former Mayor, Richmond CA); Tim Meegan (2015 Independent candidate for alderman, 33rd ward, Chicago), Bruce Dixon (Managing editor, Black Agenda Report and co-chair of the Georgia Green Party), **Kshama Sawant +** (Seattle City Council), Howie Hawkins (Candidate for Governor of New York , Green Party*), Jorge Mújica (2015 Socialist candidate for alderman, 25th ward , Chicago), Ellen David Friedman (Vermont Progressive Party*), Dan LaBotz (Co-founder Teamsters for a Democratic Union; Editor, New Politics; Socialist Party* Candidate for U.S. Senate, OH 2010), Mike Parker (Co-author *Democracy is Power*; Coordinator, Richmond Progressive Alliance*), Gloria Mattera (Co-Chair, Green Party of New York*), **Eduardo Martinez +** (Richmond City Council), Lance Selfa (author of *The Democrats: A Critical History*), Bhaskar Sunkara (editor of Jacobin), Angela Walker (Candidate for Milwaukee Sheriff, 2014), Kali Akuno (Cooperation Jackson*, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement*), Jess Spear (Climate scientist and 2014 Socialist Alternative candidate for Washington State House); **Jovanka Beckles +** (Richmond City Council), Cindy Sheehan (Anti-war activist, 2012 vice-presidential candidate, 2012, Peace and Freedom Party*), Rosa Clemente (Hip hop activist, Vice-Presidential Candidate, 2008, Green Party*), Jill Stein (Presidential Candidate, 2012, Green Party *), David McReynolds (Socialist Party* candidate for President 1980, 2000), Glen Ford (Journalist, Black Agenda Report), **Marsha Rummel+** (Madison WI Common Council. Progressive Dane*), Ty Moore (Socialist Alternative candidate for Minneapolis City Council, 2003), Debra Reiger (State Chair, California Peace and Freedom Party), Mimi Soltysik (Socialist Party USA Male Co-Chair, 2014 candidate for CA State Assembly), Joanne Landy (Co-Director, Campaign for Peace and Democracy, Editorial board member, *New Politics*), Art Kazar (Local Executive Committee Member, Chicago Socialist Party), Robert "Gabe" Gabrielsky (Green Party* candidate, New Jersey Second Congressional District in 2000, for State Assembly in 2001 and for State Senate in 2003) , Ann Menasche (Disability rights activist and attorney, Green Party* candidate for Secretary of State 2011), **Jason West +** (Mayor of New Paltz, NY, Green Party*), Todd Chretien (International Socialist Organization; Candidate for U.S. Senate (California), 2006), Ian Schlakman (Green Party candidate for Congress MD 2014), Linda Thompson (Co-Chair, Green Party of CT), Margaret Kimberley (Journalist, Black Agenda Report), Bill Onasch (kclabor.org; Previously served on the Labor Party's Interim National Council and Electoral Policy Commission), Isa Infante (2014 Candidate for Governor, Green Party of TN), John Halle (Green Party, previously New Haven Alderman), Nicole Deane (Dan Siegel for Oakland 2014 volunteer coordinator), Carroll Fife (Dan Siegel for Oakland 2014 campaign coordinator), Mike McCallister (Secretary, Wisconsin Green Party), Ellis Boal (Green Party MI*), Steve Early (author and labor journalist), Joanna Misnik (Treasurer, Chicago Socialist Campaign; Solidarity), Bryan Koulouris (Socialist Alternative), Rick Kissell (past candidate for Milwaukee Treasurer, past president of the AFL-CIO Translators' and Interpreters' Guild), Robert Caldwell (Ebarb Tribal Council, Louisiana 2011-2013), Karl Belin

(Socialist Alternative), Thomas Harrison (Co-Director Campaign for Peace and Democracy*), John Strinka (Socialist Party USA Male Vice-Chair, 2012 Socialist Party USA candidate for IN House of Representatives), Leon Bailey, Ph.D. (Department of Sociology, Roosevelt University), Ian Swanson (2014 GP MI candidate for the U. of Michigan Board of Regents and ISO), Mark A. Lause (Board member, The North Star), Marilyn Langlois (Coordinator, Richmond Progressive Alliance)

Against the Current (<http://solidarity-us.org/atc>), International Socialist Organization (<http://www.internationalsocialist.org/>), Campaign for a United Socialist Party, Chicago Socialist Campaign (<http://www.chicagosocialistcampaign.org/>), Chicago D.S.A., Chicago Socialist Party (<http://chicagosocialistparty.org/>) eMerge (<http://www.emergeleft.com/>) Jacobin (www.jacobinmag.com), *New Politics* (<http://newpol.org/>), *The North Star* (<http://www.thenorthstar.info>), Ohio Green Party (www.OhioGreens.org), Peace and Freedom Party (<http://www.peaceandfreedom.org>), Socialist Alternative (<http://www.socialistalternative.org/>), *Red Wedge* magazine (redwedge.com), Socialist Action (<http://socialistaction.org/>), Socialist Party of Texas, Solidarity (<http://solidarity-us.org/>)

Bold+ indicates sitting elected official; * organizational listing for identification purposes of the individual endorsers only