

Socialist Alternative loses close Minneapolis city council race

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Socialist Alternative's candidate for City Council, Ginger Jentzen, lost Tuesday's Ward 3 election to Democrat Steve Fletcher in a tightly contested race. Minneapolis elections employ rank-choice voting where voters rank their top three choices, their later choices transferring to that candidate when their top choices are eliminated. Jentzen won the most first choice votes but lost in the third round by a margin of 55.8 percent to 44.2 percent, totaling 3,844 votes.

Minneapolis municipal elections took place in amid widespread hostility to incumbent Mayor Betsy Hodges, who was humiliated in Tuesday's vote, winning just 18.1 percent of first choice votes and did not make it past the first round. Initially elected as a progressive member of the Democratic Farmer Labor Party (DFL), Hodges is now reviled for overseeing the crackdown on protests following the police murders of Jamar Clark and Justine Damond earlier this year. Hodges has protected the police from public outrage.

The fact that Jentzen, former director of the trade union coalition 15Now, won a significant amount of support is an indication that broad sections of voters remain interested in candidates who call themselves socialists. Though Jentzen's campaign was a milquetoast brand of liberal reforms, including defending the Affordable Care Act, raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, and introducing rent control, she won support from voters attracted to her decision not to take money from corporations.

Socialist Alternative billed Jentzen's campaign as a continuation of Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders' campaign for the Democratic Party presidential nomination in 2016. Jentzen had the endorsement of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), who also backed Sanders' campaign.

In April, Jentzen published an election statement

laying out Socialist Alternative's orientation to the Democratic Party. Like Socialist Alternative City Councilperson Kshama Sawant in Seattle, Jentzen claims socialists must form a block with sections of the Democratic Party:

"We should strongly oppose the city establishment's efforts to oust the few on City Council who stood with low-wage workers. I will continue building the movement for \$15 alongside Cam Gordon [Green Party] and Alondra Cano [Democratic Party], and I want more pro-worker City Council members."

No Democratic politician stands with low wage workers. Jentzen's efforts to tell workers to trust the supposed "progressive" wing of the Democratic Party is a death sentence for workers and the fight for social equality. This shows the real purpose of Jentzen's campaign: to block growing discontent with the Democratic Party from developing in a revolutionary socialist direction. As she put it, "Elected officials need to use their positions as an organizing tool for social movements." In other words, elected officials need to collaborate with the Democrats to guide social opposition into safe channels that will not threaten capitalist property relations.

Jentzen proclaims that this alliance between the pseudo-left and sections of the Democratic Party must be based on the trade unions.

In her run for city council, Jentzen received endorsement from union bureaucracies, including the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA) and the Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 7250. A significant factor in the MNA's support for Socialist Alternative lies in the fact that during the 2016 strike of 4,800 nurses, Socialist Alternative had members on the bargaining committee, which pushed concessions contracts on defiant nurses and sought to

prevent the Minneapolis nurses from linking their struggle with other nurses on strike throughout the country.

Socialist Alternative's strategy is to integrate itself into the trade union bureaucracy. On November 4, the group's website announced that Ryan Timlin, a Socialist Alternative member, won an unopposed race to become president of Minneapolis's Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1005, whose 2,600 members drive the city busses.

In the face of growing hostility to the Democratic Party, reflected in Hodges' Minneapolis defeat, Socialist Alternative is playing an increasingly prominent role in shoring up support for the local Democratic Party. This is the flip-side of efforts by the Sanders faction of the Democrats to recruit the pseudo-left into a coalition that will provide it with electoral legitimacy.

The *World Socialist Web Site* wrote on the recent "Democratic Autopsy" that proposed the party "build relationships" with groups that operate in the left orbit of the Democratic Party. It was notable that the autopsy—written by Democratic politicians—cited the "fight for \$15" as an example of "the power of union activism teaming up with non-union advocates for workers...That growth would certainly help to expand the middle class and, with it, support for the [Democratic] party."

Socialist Alternative is one of the sections of "non-union advocates" to which the Democratic Party is referring. Just as Socialist Alternative's Seattle City Councilperson Kshama Sawant has, the group's strategy is to build local coalitions in open alliance with sections of the Democrats to both provide the Democrats with a left crutch amidst growing social opposition and allow Socialist Alternative's network of "activists" and aspiring trade union bureaucrats to gain access to the levers of local political power.

Those interested in socialism should view Socialist Alternative's alliance with the Democratic Party as everything socialism is *not*.



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