

The class issues in Katie Wilson's Seattle mayoral election victory

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On Thursday, November 13, incumbent Seattle mayor Bruce Harrell conceded the 2025 mayoral election to challenger Katie Wilson. The official vote count put Wilson ahead by just over 2,000 votes, out of over 270,000 votes cast. Both Harrell and Wilson are Democrats.

Wilson's victory in Seattle, coming on the heels of the election of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Zohran Mamdani as mayor of New York City, marks the second time this year that someone calling themselves a socialist has been elected mayor of a major American city.

There is enormous outrage at the two-party system and capitalism as a whole, and growing support for socialism. The vote for Wilson is an expression of the hatred of the current socioeconomic order and the effort of workers and youth to fight against social inequality and the escalating assault on democratic rights under the Trump administration.

Like Mamdani, however, Katie Wilson is not a socialist. Her "bold progressive platform" consists of minor reforms, including building more affordable housing, providing emergency housing assistance to the homeless, the introduction of limited progressive taxes, universal childcare and cheaper mass transit in the city.

Even such minimal liberal reforms are intolerable to the oligarchy and have drawn vicious attacks from the capitalist media. The *Washington Post*, owned by billionaire Jeff Bezos, published an opinion column Sunday night that attacked Wilson's election. Wilson's proposal for modest tax increases for "high earners" in Seattle drew particular ire, with the newspaper claiming that "residents find the city unaffordable because it's long been a petri dish of failed progressive social experiments and absurdly high taxes."

The newspaper, owned by the founder of Amazon,

which is headquartered in Seattle, also levied a veiled threat. "Major employers like Amazon, which was founded by Post owner Jeff Bezos, have relocated thousands of workers from Seattle to Bellevue, right across Lake Washington, because it's safer and friendlier." The *Post* declared that Wilson's plans "will simultaneously accelerate the exodus of businesses while making the city more of a magnet for vagrants and criminals."

The reference to "criminals" is intended to invoke Wilson's earlier support for cutting Seattle's police force by 50 percent, which she adopted amid the George Floyd anti-police killing protests in 2020. During a mayoral debate, she walked back these claims in response to attacks from Harrell and to pacify concern from Seattle's financial elite, stating, "I participated in that conversation, and also I have learned a lot since then."

The Trump administration has responded to Wilson's election by threatening to move the 2026 World Cup out of the city next year because of Seattle's new "communist mayor."

Wilson's political career began in 2011 when she co-founded the Transit Riders Union, a Seattle based non-profit that advocates for reforms concerning public transit, such as free and discounted transit passes. During the ensuing decade, she participated in unsuccessful efforts to introduce a progressive income tax in Seattle. This effort, called "Trump-Proof Seattle," brought her into a coalition with Kshama Sawant, who at the time held a seat on the Seattle City Council.

At the time, Sawant was a member of Socialist Alternative, a pseudo-left organization that operates in the orbit of the Democratic Party. The tax reform was passed in chambers, but this result was overturned by

the courts. Wilson and Sawant, incapable of and opposed to mobilizing support among workers, accepted this result and moved on with their individual careers.

Though she has held no elected office until now, Wilson's career over the past fifteen years within the halls of power in the city of Seattle has kept her in the orbit of business and political leaders. She decided to join the 2025 mayoral race when Bruce Harrell refused to support a business tax to pay for a public housing scheme.

In response to a question from a Seattle reporter concerning her politics and whether she was a socialist, she declared herself to be so, but said, "I'm not out here waving a socialist flag, because I'm not a super ideological person." She continued, "I'm also not sure that label will help me in the general election. But yes, I'm fine with being called a socialist."

She then shared with the interviewer an article printed on August 24th, 2025, in *The Atlantic*, titled "The Real Reason American Socialists Don't Win." She commented, "As a council member, Kshama was trying to tear down the system. ... But mayor is an executive position. You can't run for mayor and say you want to tear down the system. You're asking to run the system."

In other words, Wilson is ready to work closely with the existing political institutions of Seattle.

In her contest with Harrell, Wilson received the support of most Democratic Party representatives in Seattle, including all six Legislative District Democrats and the King County Democrats. In opportunist fashion, US Representative Pramila Jayapal, who had previously only endorsed Harrell, endorsed both Wilson and Harrell for the general election.

For his part, Harrell received enormous support from other sections of the Democratic Party establishment, including endorsements from Biden's Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, Washington Governor Bob Ferguson, then-King County Executive Dow Constantine and US Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA), herself a tech multimillionaire.

During her victory speech last week, Wilson appealed for "unity" with her opponents within the establishment. "To all those who opposed my election and are skeptical of my leadership," she said, "this is your city too. I'm a coalition builder. We are in this

together."

Many workers no doubt see in Wilson a call to fight for their own interests. But the real way forward is not through Democratic Party politics, but by mobilizing independently and turning to all sections of the working class and fighting for a genuinely socialist program.

The social rights of the working class cannot be won, and opposition to Trump's dictatorship developed, without a frontal assault on the wealth of the ruling elite, including those corporations centered in Seattle like Amazon, Microsoft, Apple, Google, Starbucks and others. Their ill-gotten gains must be expropriated, a struggle which must be led by the working class as part of a revolutionary program to overthrow capitalism and establish socialism.



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