

Kshama Sawant runs for Congress posing as an independent socialist

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Kshama Sawant has launched her 2026 congressional campaign under conditions of an acute crisis of American capitalism. The Trump administration, facing mounting opposition from workers and young people and a deepening economic crisis, is intensifying its Gestapo-like assault on immigrants. It is escalating its trade war against the world and overseeing mass layoffs and declining living standards for the broad mass of the American population, alongside staggering increases in wealth for the financial oligarchy. In line with record levels of social inequality, it is carrying out an assault on democratic rights unprecedented in US history.

Internationally, American imperialism is backing Israel's genocide in Gaza, continuing the US-NATO war against Russia, preparing war against Venezuela, and laying the basis for military conflict with China.

It is within this explosive context that Sawant—long promoted by pseudo-left circles as a “revolutionary socialist”—has stepped forward to channel working class opposition back into the safe confines of the Democratic Party and prop up the trade union bureaucracy.

Sawant says her campaign rests on her “record of victories” in Seattle and that these reforms can be “scaled up” nationally. This premise is false. Her decade on the Seattle City Council did not secure significant improvements for the working class and offers no strategy for confronting the oligarchy that dominates American society. Rather, it exposes the political function of Sawant's entire career: to contain social anger within the dead end of municipal reform, electoral maneuvering, and alliances with the Democrats and the union bureaucracy, while blocking the emergence of an independent revolutionary movement of the working class.

A decade on the Seattle City Council

Sawant's decade in office (2013-2023) was not defined by struggles against the Democratic Party, but integration into it. Every initiative she now calls a “victory”—the \$15 minimum wage, the “Amazon Tax,” tenant bills—was drafted and passed with the support of sections of the Democratic Party, business groups and the union bureaucracy.

The \$15 minimum wage was crafted with corporate representatives, City Council members, and union officials by Democratic Mayor Ed Murray's Income Inequality Advisory Committee. It passed unanimously and was phased in over a number of years; major employers were given until 2017 to reach \$15 (2018 if offering health benefits), small businesses up to seven years. Tips and employer-sponsored health insurance counted toward the wage.

A person working 40 hours a week at \$15 an hour earns about \$31,200 per year before taxes. This is a poverty wage. The 2025 federal poverty guideline for a household of four is \$32,150 per year.

\$15 per hour is well below the estimated living wage in the US of

\$19.91 per hour, or more than \$41,000 per year. In more expensive cities and regions, such as Seattle, the estimated living wage is much higher.

Sawant's housing measures were similarly pathetic. The 2016 “Carl Haglund Law,” which would ban landlords from raising rents on housing units that did not meet basic maintenance standards, relied entirely on tenant-initiated complaints and did nothing to impede speculative development. Her 2023 rent control bill was defeated 6–2 and could not have been implemented anyway due to state-level preemption. These were administrative tweaks, not structural reforms.

The 2020 “JumpStart” payroll tax—marketed by Sawant and her supporters as an “Amazon Tax”—was authored by a Democratic councilmember and passed 7–2. Its revenues were swiftly diverted to fill general fund deficits.

Seattle's social crisis continued to worsen. By March 2025, the median rent had reached roughly \$2,026 per month, well above the national median rent of \$1,300. Over the past decade, rents in Seattle have risen at one of the fastest rates of any major US city, far outpacing income growth. These conditions worsened throughout Sawant's tenure, not despite her “reforms,” but because her reforms preserved the economic prerogatives of landlords, developers, and major corporations.

Sawant's political rise was facilitated by the trade union bureaucracy. In her 2013 campaign, she secured endorsements from several Seattle-area union locals, including American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 1789, Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 37083, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 46, and the Greater Seattle American Postal Workers Union (APWU).

These endorsements provided organizational resources and access to union staff who carried out phone-banking, canvassing, and voter mobilization. While not every major union backed her—in fact, key Service Employees International Union (SEIU) locals endorsed her opponent—Sawant's victory depended heavily on sections of the AFL-CIO apparatus that were in conflict with sections of the Democratic establishment but remained fully committed to capitalist politics. She did not rise in rebellion against the unions apparatus, she entered office as one of its sanctioned political projects. Her “victories” were the product of these same forces—and were designed to stabilize, not challenge, the existing order.

A political freebooter

Sawant presents her political evolution as principled, but it is defined by opportunistic shifts between organizations without explanation or accountability.

She began as a leader of Socialist Alternative, then joined the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in 2021—calling it “the most

significant left organization in the United States in many decades.” In 2023, she launched Workers Strike Back as a new “independent movement.” In 2024 she endorsed Jill Stein’s Green Party campaign. In 2016 and 2020 she campaigned aggressively for Bernie Sanders bid to win the Democratic presidential nomination.

These shifts were not made on the basis of a socialist program or perspective. They reflected Sawant’s continual adaptation to shifting layers of the middle class and to the changing tactical needs of the Democratic Party.

Her relationship to New York mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani exposes this political freelancing with exceptional clarity. For months in 2025 she celebrated Mamdani’s mayoral campaign, calling his potential victory “earth-shattering,” praising him as someone “relentlessly going for his demands,” and holding up his DSA affiliation as proof that “socialist victories” could pressure the Democratic Party.

After Mamdani met with Trump on November 21, Sawant erupted on X: “What the actual f__k? ... We’re supposed to take these ‘progressives’ seriously when they call Trump a fascist and an existential threat at the same time they’re proudly building an alliance with him.”

But Sawant herself had promoted Mamdani and the DSA as tools for pressuring the Democrats. She stands exposed as a political opportunist, not a socialist.

Reformism in the guise of socialism

Sawant calls herself a revolutionary while insisting that every social issue can be resolved through electoral victories and policy tinkering. This is not Marxism—it is liberal reformism dressed in socialist language.

Her national program—\$25 minimum wage, rent control, Medicare for all—is presented without any strategy to confront or overthrow the financial oligarchy. She never addresses how these reforms can be enacted under conditions of bipartisan austerity, the domination of Congress by corporate interests, and the escalating drive to world war. She never raises the need to expropriate the corporations and banks. She never explains how workers are to defeat the political and economic power of the ruling class.

Workers Strike Back operates on the same bankrupt political foundation. Its demands—\$25 minimum wage, unionization drives, 30-hour week—are severed from any revolutionary strategy. It does not build rank-and-file committees. It does not fight the union bureaucracy. It functions as the activist wing of Sawant’s electoral machine.

To proclaim such a perspective “revolutionary” is absurd. It is precisely the perspective Marxism was created to overcome.

The nationalist politics of Kshama Sawant

Sawant’s worldview is fundamentally American nationalist. Her appeals to “fight the billionaires” are disconnected from an internationalist understanding of capitalism, war, and class struggle.

Her posture on Gaza consists of moral outrage and calls for a ceasefire, not a socialist strategy linking Israeli and Palestinian workers in a struggle against imperialism, Zionism and the Arab bourgeoisie. She offers no analysis of imperialism, the historical role of the US in the Middle East, or the capitalist roots of the conflict.

Significantly, she is silent on the US–NATO war against Russia. Silence denotes consent. She does not expose NATO expansion or the role of US

and European imperialism in instigating the reactionary invasion of Ukraine by the Russian bourgeoisie. This is not an oversight, but a political choice: exposing the Ukraine war would require confronting the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy—institutions on which she depends.

Sawant never warns of the danger of fascism or dictatorship. She does not analyze or expose the Trump administration as fascist, and her campaign website makes no reference to the real and growing threat of authoritarian rule. The attacks on immigrants, the assault on democratic rights, and Trump’s open moves to extra-Constitutional power are treated as policy disputes, not as components of the collapse of American democracy and the turn by the ruling oligarchy to dictatorship and fascism. This silence is political: acknowledging the danger would require exposing and breaking from the Democratic Party and the trade union apparatus. As with her silence on the US–NATO war against Russia, Sawant leaves workers unprepared for the mounting threat of dictatorship.

Her politics, in form and content, remain within the national framework of US liberalism in its death agony. She speaks for a privileged middle-class layer seeking limited reforms to bolster their own privileges within capitalism—not for the international working class.

Kshama Sawant’s congressional campaign is not a step toward working class emancipation. It is a political mechanism for absorbing the growing radicalization of workers and redirecting it into the dead end of Democratic Party politics, electoral reformism, and the union bureaucracy. Her record in Seattle, her alliances with the DSA, Socialist Alternative, Workers Strike Back, Cornel West’s “People’s Party,” the Green Party, and her recent posturing over Mamdani all point to the same conclusion: Sawant’s politics serve to contain, not unleash, the independent power of the working class.

The working class confronts unprecedented dangers—war, dictatorship and social collapse. None of these can be confronted through municipal reforms, pressure campaigns, or appeals to “progressive” Democrats. The decisive task is to break from all forms of middle-class pseudo-left politics and build a revolutionary leadership rooted in the international working class.

That means forming rank-and-file committees in every workplace, independent of the union bureaucracy, and joining the fight to build the Socialist Equality Party and the world Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International—the only political movement advancing an internationalist, socialist program against capitalism, war and dictatorship. Only through such a struggle can workers take power and reconstruct society on the basis of equality and human need.



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