

Canadian Politics Today - the State of the Parties: Whither Left Electoral Politics in Toronto?

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*On the international field, we've seen the rise of left wing movements such as **Bernie Sanders** (USA), **Jeremy Corbyn** (UK), **Podemos** (Spain). On Canadian home turf, there has also been the rise of Quebec Solidaire in Quebec. On the other hand, there has been right wing populism such as Donald Trump (USA) and the increased support for right wing nationalist groups in Europe (the Catalan nationalist movement being a notable exception). At the local level, in Canada, we've seen this year, the success (victory) of [Valérie Plante](#) and her party, *Projet Montréal*, in the mayoralty/Council elections in Montreal, plus the near victory of Jean Swanson in a Vancouver city council by-election. South of the border, on November 7, we saw another almost win from Ginger Jentzen, like **Kshama Sawant**, a member of Socialist Alternative. On the same day, there were significant wins for candidacies of Left Democrats running with the endorsement of the Democratic Socialists of America.*

Two years ago I wrote [an article in *The Bullet*](#) on this subject. The stimulus for the article came from my experience of spending a week in Seattle working on the campaign to reelect Socialist Alternative's [Kshama Sawant](#) as a city councilor. Reflecting on the Sawant victory, I got to thinking about my adopted home town of Toronto and whether it would be possible to repeat the Sawant success here. The two years since the Sawant election and today have seen significant changes in the political situation - internationally, nationally and at municipal level.

The primary focus for this article is on Toronto/Ontario politics with the purpose of arguing the need for a left electoral challenge in Toronto in two possible arenas - the Ontario provincial election of June 2018 and/or the Toronto municipal elections, 5 months later. To get there, frankly, will be an uphill task but I think it's worth raising the question for discussion.

Canadian Politics Today - the State of the Parties

The situation of Toronto/Ontario can't be understood without taking an overview of the national political scene. What is happening to the three main parties can be summarized as follows:

1. Liberals under Justin Trudeau (4 years) - seem to have weathered the buffeting of events of being in government for two years and are still riding high in polls at around 39% (based on an average of three polls conducted in mid-November); Trudeau's personal popularity seems to be slipping but the weakness of the other two Parties is keeping the Liberals well in front.

2. The Conservatives under Andrew Scheer (6 months) - With Scheer, we have a plodding, dull leader so far unable to take advantage of missteps by Liberals; the Tories have been running second in polls since Scheer was elected PC leader in May 2017. Currently the PCs lag behind Liberals by 8 per cent.
3. NDP under Jagmeet Singh (3 months). Despite Singh drawing a lot of media attention, not so much for being a challenger to the left of Trudeau, but more in the all-important category of looks and charisma, the NDP hasn't made a breakthrough. Pre-Singh, NDP were around 15% in the polls; they now stand around 18%. However, there is no evidence of another "orange crush" taking place when the NDP, under the leadership of the late Jack Layton, in 2011 won 103 seats and, for the first time in its federal history, became the official opposition in Parliament.

The most popular politician in Canada is not even Canadian. It's the American Bernie Sanders. Evidence of this came from the event held in Toronto, one Sunday in October, when Sanders came to speak on the question of healthcare. The 1,700 capacity venue was "sold out" in minutes (the tickets were, in fact, free) as 20,000 attempted to get tickets online. The line up (from ticket holders!) to get into the meeting place started at 8am for an 11am start. This, taken with the Swanson campaign, is an indication that Canada is fertile ground for socialist electoral seeds to be sown.

Ontario and Toronto - Electoral Support of the Three Main Parties

Ontario and Toronto polling, conducted on November 23 revealed that from among 843 Toronto voters, that if a provincial election were held that day,

- 33% would vote for the Liberals (unchanged from October: 33%).
- 31% would vote PC (a five-point drop since October: 36%)
- 25% would vote NDP (a two-point increase since October: 23%)

This poll was undertaken before the Ontario PCs' convention (November 25-26) when leader, Patrick Brown, revealed for the first time, his party's election programme - quite a savvy one, not especially right wing, which will undoubtedly draw votes from the Liberals and possibly the NDP too. However, one key right-wing element of the PCs' programme, basing itself on an appeal to small business owners, is to delay the implementation of the Liberals' *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act*, (Bill 148), scheduled to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour in January 2018.

Toronto and Precedents for Municipal Left Challenges

On the local Toronto political scene, I wrote [this article](#) four years ago, following the election of John Tory as Mayor. My update to this analysis would be that "Ford Nation" is still a factor in Toronto politics but it is much weaker than four years ago, partly explained by the current flag bearer for the Nation, Doug Ford, lacking the appeal of his late brother and partly by the "Trump effect" being minimal here.

Running as an independent left candidate in Toronto isn't an entirely new concept. There has been a precedent of independent socialists running in city elections. Several Communists were elected to city council in the 1930s and 1940s, most notably [J.B. Salsberg](#) who was elected to city council in 1938 and then again in 1943. Communist Party leader [Tim Buck](#) won 44,000 votes in a city-wide election in 1937.

Even more interesting was [Ross Dowson](#) who ran as an open Trotskyist for mayor 9 times, with his best [result being in 1949](#) when he won over 20% of the vote. In more recent times, the late [Tooker Gomberg](#), more an environmental activist than a socialist (although he had a history in the NDP), ran for mayor in the 2000 municipal election, coming a distant second behind **Mel Lastman** with over 51,000 votes. “In the last days of the 2000 campaign, Lastman appeared with Canadian **PM Jean Chrétien** to promise nearly one billion dollars in social housing funding. After winning, one of Lastman’s first acts was to appoint Jane Jacobs to the City’s Charter Committee which was seeking additional powers for the City (taking them from the province of Ontario). Both moves were generally attributed to the need to respond to Gomberg’s insurgent campaign.”

Toronto Politics Now

If we were to look at the Toronto political scene, four years since the last municipal elections, I would argue that the prospects for an independent left challenge have never been better. And by an independent left challenge I’m not referring to an NDPer like Mike Layton throwing his hat in the mayoral ring to compete against Tory and Ford. The outcome of a two-way race (Tory vs Ford) and a “three way” (Ford, Tory, Layton) in 2018 are examined in this [City News piece](#). Compared with the other two major Canadian cities, Vancouver and Montreal, Toronto starts off with a built-in disadvantage for the left in that there are no municipal political parties. Of course, political ideology is as rampant here as is elsewhere but its outward form is through individuals or non-party labels such as Ford Nation or Downtown Lefties.

It’s also an open secret that the Toronto party machines of Liberals, NDP and PC are in full operation at local election time (the colour of the candidate’s signs is a general indicator of Party affiliation) to promote individuals who are described in coded language such as ‘socially progressive’ or ‘fiscally conservative’. The fact that Toronto council is made up of 44 councilors (to become 47 in 2018) makes an independent left breakthrough even more of a challenge. Compare this to Vancouver which consists of a mayor and 10 councilors, all of them elected at-large, i.e. the whole city-wide electorate votes for all of them, not a sub-set defined through ward boundaries as is the case in Toronto.

The [Fight for 15 and Fairness](#) movement has brought together an amazing group of activists who have become accustomed to outreach activities such as tabling, petitioning, door knocking, using social media. All of these are important for conducting a successful electoral intervention. Less prominent but still significant are the transit focused group, [TTC Riders](#), and anti-poverty, affordable housing activists in [OCAP](#) (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty). These groups alone could provide the backbone for running an independent campaign. They could, but would they be interested? Many of the left in these organizations either have a disdain for electoral politics in favour of “movements from below” or, if they are electorally inclined, favour the NDP. Many in the latter camp could be persuaded to get on board with an independent left campaign but they need to be convinced that such a campaign would be viable and not open to the accusation of splitting the progressive vote to allow a right winger to sneak in.

Another element that could cut across an independent left challenge is that of identity politics. With Black Lives Matter, the #MeToo movement, it would not be surprising to see racialized and/or female candidates declaring but putting issues of race/gender to the forefront and downplaying issues like transit, inequality, housing, challenging corporate power etc. There are rumours that black activist **Desmond Cole** will run for Mayor ([Draft](#)

[Desmond](#) on Facebook). Just before Christmas, prominent Muslim **Asuma Malik**, a TDSB Trustee and NDP member, announced her candidacy for a city council seat.

If the left decides to put its efforts into the election campaigns of “progressive” individuals who are more focused on identity issues rather than the broader ones of class, inequality and challenging corporate power, that would obviously signal the putting of an independent left initiative on the back burner for some time.

What About the Programme for the Election Campaign?

This is not a mere afterthought; it's crucial for this to be thrashed out before you can begin to talk about a left electoral challenge. Drawing on the successful campaigns of independent leftists elsewhere (Seattle, Montreal, Vancouver, Minneapolis) and adding a Toronto twist, I would lay out these three broad areas: housing/homelessness, growing inequality and public transit.

Expanding on these, I would suggest a program that included, but not necessarily be restricted to, these demands – the order of them doesn't denote a hierarchy. Some are provincial in reach, some are municipal and some overlap.



- Affordable Housing/Homeless situation/Rent Control. A mansion tax or “tax the rich to house the poor.” (Jean Swanson's campaign in Vancouver), tax on developers (Ginger Jentzen in Minneapolis)
- Tax the rich – Toronto is home to one quarter of Canada's millionaires. 1 in 4 Torontonians living in poverty
- Expand Public Transit – Reduce TTC fares, increase Government subsidy to transit. Dump the one stop subway. Expand the LRT.
- Expand bike lanes. Reduce congestion.
- Defend/extend public education – end the separate Catholic school system; for one publicly funded, secular education system
- Defend Bill 148 and its timescale implementation of the minimum wage. Add the pieces from 15 & Fairness campaign that didn't get included in the legislation.
- Anti-racism; anti-Islamophobia – end police racial profiling, for community oversight of police; fund youth jobs programs, education, and services for communities of colour.
- LGBTQ, immigrant, native people rights – end discrimination and harassment
- Challenge Corporate Power – from the \$15 and Fairness campaign, we learn that working people cannot limit themselves to what is deemed acceptable by the political establishment and big business. We need to organize independently with clear demands in order to get things done, and there is lots to get done in Toronto.

Distinguishing features about a left campaign and its candidate(s) – They will commit to:

- taking no corporate funds to finance the campaign
- taking, if victorious, no more than the average wage of a unionized worker in Toronto/Ontario and to donate the difference between that and the actual official salary to the funding of social movements.

Features of Recent Individual Campaigns in U.S. and Canada

Seattle and Kshama Sawant As I wrote in my *Bullet* article of two years ago, Sawant emerged as a prominent figure from the Occupy movement which was particularly strong in Seattle. As the activism from Occupy ebbed in Seattle, one of the left groups, Socialist Alternative (SA), proposed that it should test out the electoral arena by running candidates in the 2012 State elections.

“The suggestion did not find an echo so SA decided to run a candidate under its own banner. Even at that time, the Seattle branch of SA had a strong base with some 50 members. Sawant was the lucky one to run. It was against Frank Chopp, Democratic Speaker of the Washington State House and the second most powerful politician in the State. She didn’t win but got a creditable 29 per cent support.

“For the city Council elections of 2013, SA decided to run candidates in three cities – Seattle (Kshama Sawant); Minneapolis (Ty Moore) and Boston (Seamus Whelan). Sawant triumphed with 52% beating a 16 year incumbent, dubbed by THE STRANGER as “a greenwashing liberal fraud.” Moore got 49% – coming within 229 votes of winning the seat. Whelan’s campaign, while it had some local impact, was unable to break out of a crowded field. All three candidates ran as open Socialists and members of Socialist Alternative on an anti-austerity, anti-capitalist, pro-worker position. The latter included fighting for affordable housing, taxing the rich and support for a city wide enactment of \$15 an hour minimum wage, a demand that had first taken off the year previously with strikes from fast food workers in New York.

“The demand for 15 really gained traction in Seattle and, over the next few months, it came to be identified with Sawant and SA. In the airport area of Seattle, Seatac, a movement for 15 ran concurrently with her campaign and the vote for that initiative, on the same day as Sawant’s Council victory, gained a narrow majority. In Seattle itself, Sawant was originally the only candidate calling for 15, making it her main campaign demand. At the same time the SEIU affiliate, Working Washington, was demonstrating and striking over it, so that by late September 2013, both candidates for Mayor had jumped on the bandwagon – but they didn’t do it until then, while Sawant and SA had been campaigning on it since April.”

Montreal and Valérie Plante Of the four left candidacies being examined here, that of Valérie Plante is probably the least radical and the one with more conventional social democratic elements attached to it. *La Presse de Montréal* said of her “spectacular victory” that it “enlivens Quebec Solidaire’s electoral hopes and energizes the NDP in Ottawa.” Both Montreal and Vancouver are rarities in Canada for having municipal political parties to which the mayor and city councilors belong. Plante’s party, Projet Montreal, (PM) has a history going back 13 years. Created by environmental activists in 2004, it was not specifically established to promote a mayoral candidacy. In the [2013 Montreal municipal election](#), PM doubled its number of seats within city council, going from 10 to 20. It became the official opposition against [Denis Coderre’s](#) “Party” (Équipe Denis Coderre pour Montréal).

As well as Plante being victorious in the mayoralty race of 2017, PM also won a majority of seats on the city council. Yet, at time of her winning the leadership of the party, a year go, Plante was virtually unknown. Coderre was the incumbent and no incumbent from a first term had lost in Montreal in the previous 40 years. This switch of going from 2nd to 1st

place happened in the very last month. Plante did not win the leadership of PM by a big margin. Her opponent inside the Party was a pro-business, bland politician. He would have been the “continuity” choice of having another bland “competent” leader for PM after it’s founder had deserted to join Coderre’s team in 2014. ([CBC news](#))

As with a lot of environmental focused parties, its politics are not necessarily pro-worker or socialist. There are a few socialists, e.g. Craig Sauv , who declared for \$15 minimum wage 18 months before his party adopted it as its official position. Undoubtedly, many left forces saw the potential for Val rie Plante: union organizers, community based organizers, affordable housing committees. The party has grown from a thousand members in 2015 to some 6000 members today.

Plante placed a big emphasis on public transit – cheaper fares for low-income earners and committed to making public transit 40% cheaper for anyone in Montreal living under the poverty line. She called for expansion of the Metro – a new Pink Line otherwise known as “la ligne diagonale,” to cut through downtown up to Montreal’s north-east end. On housing, to ensure families have the space to live on the island of Montreal, she argued for the imposition of a new policy on developers, making 20% of units in new condo construction projects have at least 3 bedrooms, so parents and children both have space. She proposed building 12,000 new units of social and affordable housing but didn’t say how they’d be financed. She also appealed to small business by promising to foster commercial arteries.

There was nothing about taxing the rich. Despite the public transit additions and plans to expand social housing, Plante said that taxes wouldn’t be raised to pay for these initiatives. She claimed that Montrealers were already paying enough in taxes. Despite the relatively mild proposals, Plante and PM attracted and energized many activists from the NDP and QS. Her victory has to be considered a leftwing breakthrough, if not having the same weight for socialists as the campaigns of Sawant, Jentzen and Swanson. This [article](#) from *La Presse* gives some good background on Projet Montreal and the source of activists in the Plante campaign.

Vancouver and Jean Swanson Unlike Toronto, there’s [a distinct political party tradition in Vancouver](#), where such entities as the *Non-Partisan Association (NPA)*, [Coalition of Progressive Electors \(COPE\)](#), *Vision Vancouver*, and *OneCity* have, over the years, put up mayoral and council candidates for city-wide elections. From a left wing perspective, COPE is the most interesting. It was formed in 1968, “originally as the ‘Committee of Progressive Electors’, when a number of left wing community groups and social justice organizations joined with the city’s Labour Council to organize more effectively against the NPA – a centre-right political party which had dominated civic politics in Vancouver. Frank Kennedy of the Vancouver & District Labour Council and Harry Rankin, an outspoken lawyer and city councilor, were key figures in shaping the coalition, along with activists from the BC NDP and the BC Communist Party.”([Wikipedia](#)). COPE has had its ups (winning control of City Council in 2002) and its downs (formation of split off groups “Vision Vancouver” in 2005 and “OneCity” in 2014).

When it came to the 2017 by-election, contested by Swanson as an independent, the main parties in competing were:

- the centre-right NPA,
- Vision Vancouver (the ruling party in Vancouver for the last 9 years),
- OneCity (“a soft-left party established by the right wing of the NDP and union

bureaucracy to take over when Vision inevitably faces defeat” [Socialist Alternative article](#))

- the Greens.

Jean Swanson entered the contest with a record of being “a tireless anti-poverty and housing campaigner in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside for decades.” ([Rabble](#)). She also had a political record, having ran for mayor of Vancouver in 1988. COPE didn’t field a candidate of its own and decided to endorse Swanson. She also had some other heavyweight political support – former MPP Libby Davies and Seattle’s Kshama Sawant who spoke at one of the [major campaign events](#). When it came to election night, a low turn-out of 11% produced the following result:

- Hector Bremner, NPA: 27.8%
- Jean Swanson, Independent: 21.4%
- Pete Fry, Green Party: 20.3%
- Judy Graves, One City: 13.2%
- Diego Cardona, Vision: 11.3%

The demographic analysis of the vote showed that Swanson picked up support in the working class and poorer areas of the city “Swanson did well in the Downtown Eastside, Strathcona, and Grandview Woodlands, where she got over 40 per cent of the vote. She also picked up votes in Mount Pleasant and Hastings Sunrise, and got the most votes in the renter-heavy West End. The election results were an upset for Vision, Vancouver’s centre-left ruling civic party. Their candidate, Diego Cardona, came in fifth, and faced competition on the left from Swanson and Judy Graves (OneCity). Swanson and Graves’ combined vote totals surpassed Bremner’s.” ([Vancouver Metro News](#))

Minneapolis and Ginger Jentzen Jentzen and Socialist Alternative had built a strong basis in Minneapolis going back to the struggle for the \$15 minimum wage campaign. She had experience as as a restaurant worker and became the executive director of *15 Now Minnesota* in 2015. That campaign led the struggle and was largely responsible for “gathering the thousands of signatures necessary to place a minimum-wage referendum on the city’s 2016 ballot. The move was so controversial that it set off a legal battle, with the city council turning to the courts to block the referendum. The battle went all the way to the state Supreme Court, which effectively killed the referendum.” Despite that, the 15 Now group “organized across the city, establishing committees in every ward to promote the policy. The group also sent activists to DFL (Democrats) caucuses, threatening to launch electoral challenges against conservative Democrats who refused to support the wage increase. In June, the city council approved a plan to gradually increase the minimum wage to \$15 by 2024. ”Kip Hedges, who worked for decades at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, as a baggage handler and was fired when Delta Airlines discovered he had given an interview critical of the wage situation at the airport, argues that “Ginger was at the heart of all that. That was what she understood and pushed for. This is about not just 15, but about moving the needle, shifting the balance of power in favor of workers in Minneapolis,” (read more about this in [Intercept article](#)).

During her 2017 election campaign, hundreds of volunteers came out and \$175,000 was raised (most of it in small donations). Minneapolis business interests mobilized against her. On election night, she obtained a majority of first preference votes, but with the distribution of second and third preference voted, under the ranked choice voting system she ended up

in second place. For more, read [this](#).

The Challenges in Toronto

The problems of launching a campaign in Toronto are many. Each of the cities mentioned above had their own unique features but there were some things in common.

- Prior tradition of “broad left” electoral work, especially with COPE in Vancouver and, to a lesser extent, with Projet Montréal;
- A strong socialist group providing a nucleus, especially SA in Seattle and Minneapolis
- strong local candidates with roots/respect in the community.
- ability to enthuse/mobilize volunteers
- ability to raise money and get some union endorsements

These clearly shows the challenges in mounting a viable campaign in Toronto, especially as electoralism is not even a twinkle in most Toronto lefties’ eyes.

In my *Bullet* article of two years ago, I stated “electoral politics is not an obvious comfort zone for many on the left. Meetings, demonstrations, selling papers, flitting from one hot issue to the next seem to be the more natural fit. Yet there is no logical or principled contradiction between issue based activism and electoral interventions.” The politics of the street and those of house to house door knocking are not in competition - they can and should complement each other. And for those leftists, who are indeed comfortable with door knocking during election time, they are confronted with some stark choices:

Option 1. Go along with the ABC (An But Conservative) strategic voting approach which means, essentially, you are canvassing either for a Liberal or an NDP candidate;

Option 2. Try to maintain your independence by going for an “issue based” campaign (be it “\$15 minimum wage with no delays” or “a people’s transit” or whatever), but not recommending a vote for either of the two non-PC parties.



Kshama Sawant and Jean Swanson (Source: The Bullet)

Option 3. Maintain your independence and organize for a vote for a new left party or candidate. In other words, you'd be following the Sawant/Jentzen/Swanson model (Plante is not recommended). You'd also be following the dictum of the great American socialist, Eugene Debs, "I'd rather vote for something I want and not get it than vote for something I don't want and get it." As for the justification of strategic voting - to stop reactionaries getting elected, Karl Marx himself dealt with this issue almost 170 years ago. Back in 1850, Marx and Engels, found themselves trying to breathe new life into the Communist League, an organization that they had helped to establish 3 years previously. Following the revolutionary events in Europe of 1848-49 which saw the consolidation of bourgeois democratic parties and the weakening of independent workers' movements, Marx and Engels [wrote to the Central Committee of the League](#):

"The speedy organization of at least provincial connections between the workers' clubs is one of the prime requirements for the strengthening and development of the workers' party; the immediate result of the overthrow of the existing governments will be the election of a national representative body. Here the proletariat must take care: 1) that by sharp practices local authorities and government commissioners do not, under any pretext whatsoever, exclude any section of workers; 2) that workers' candidates are nominated everywhere in opposition to bourgeois-democratic candidates. As far as possible they should be League members and their election should be pursued by all possible means. **Even where there is no prospect of achieving their election the workers must put up their own candidates to preserve their independence, to gauge their own strength and to bring their revolutionary position and party standpoint to public attention.** They must not be led astray by the empty phrases of the democrats, who will maintain that the workers' candidates will split the democratic party and offer the forces of reaction the chance of victory. All such talk means, in the final analysis, that the proletariat is to be swindled. **The progress which the proletarian party will make by operating independently in this way is**

infinitely more important than the disadvantages resulting from the presence of a few reactionaries in the representative body.” (my emphasis, Tim H.)

There will be the greatest pressure from mainstream Labour to take the ABC route, Option 1. Route 2 looks attractive but it would be difficult to organize and maintain (do transit activists do their thing while 15 & Fairness folk do theirs?). Naturally, I favour option 3. So where does this lead in practice?

In the provincial area of politics, Toronto is dominated by Liberals and NDP. There is one PC hold out: Raymond Cho, carpetbagger MPP for Scarborough Rouge-River (at one time or another, he has been involved in all three mainstream Parties). Following the military maxim of “maximum strength at the point of attack,” I would argue that the limited forces of Toronto’s left wing activists should be concentrated there for the June provincial election. However, I am open to be persuaded that another area of the city could be more fruitful. Working in Scarborough would have the added attraction of countering the common notion that Toronto lefties are a bunch of privileged downtowners who look down their noses at the Ford Nation types in the suburbs. Scarborough could be the test run. Depending on how it goes, we can then make a decision as to where to concentrate our resources for the city elections in November. If enough people consider this a worthwhile initiative, the first couple of months of 2018 should be spent in bringing folks together to hammer out a programme and choose a candidate. That’s when the fun begins.

Conclusion

A left electoral challenge is crying out to happen in Toronto. The objective factors are there – the issues, a leftward mood, notwithstanding ABC pressure to channel that mood into supporting Liberals/NDP. Unfortunately the subjective ones are missing: no recent history of electoral interventions, no municipal political parties à la Vancouver or Montreal, no obvious candidate, no cohesive left. But we have to start somewhere and if not now, when?

A provincial intervention in Scarborough Rouge-River in June could be considered as a trial balloon. Getting a vote of 10% or more would constitute a success and could then be followed up municipally in November. But one should not get ahead of oneself. If something serious and worthwhile is to happen, respected figures and organizations on the Toronto left have to get on board and convene a meeting to explore the feasibility of doing something. And if the answer is ‘not now’, so be it.

In October last year, such a meeting was convened in the Bay area, California. The Facebook description of the event was as follows:

Is the Bay Area Ready for a Socialist City Councilor?

Hosted by [Democratic Socialists of America: San Francisco](#) and [Socialist Alternative Bay Area](#)

The Bay Area isn’t working for working people. With attacks from Trump threatening to displace us and local politicians giving free rein to developers to build luxury homes at our expense, we just can’t afford to live here anymore. Is the answer candidates for office who don’t take corporate & developer money? What about a candidate who will fight for socialist policies? Join us for a discussion on how we can make the Bay Area a place for working people, not

just for the rich.

Speakers include:

- Erin Brightwell - National Committee Member of Socialist Alternative and founder of the Campaign for Renters Rights
- Jovanka Beckles - Corporate-free candidate for Assembly District 15 and Vice Mayor of Richmond
- Dan Siegel - Former Oakland School Board Member and Mayoral Candidate for Oakland in 2014
- Teresa Pratt - Member of the steering committee of the San Francisco chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America
- Jessica Hansen-Weaver - Social worker in San Francisco, Bay Area native and long-time member of the International Socialist Organization.

I'm inspired by both of the left candidates who didn't win the first time round in 2017. From [The Georgia Straight](#) (equivalent of Toronto's *NOW*) there's this end of year prediction that Jean Swanson will be elected to city council in 2018:

"There's a growing appetite among millennial voters for ecosocialist candidates, which was demonstrated south of the border by Bernie Sanders almost winning the Democratic presidential nomination. This puts Swanson in a good position to be elected in October. Socialism may be a dirty word for many older voters, but the alternative - runaway, greenhouse-gas-spewing capitalism that threatens the future of humanity on Earth - doesn't look very appealing to those who are having trouble meeting the rent and worry about the state of the planet. Swanson's focus on taking from the rich to house the poor clearly resonated with a significant number of voters in the 2017 by-election. She's giving every indication that she's going to run again in 2018 and when she's elected, expect to see a motion on the council floor debating whether to ask the province for the right to charge progressive property taxes."

Then, there's this [optimistic message](#) that Ginger Jentzen sent out to her supporters, a couple of weeks after her election where she stated that "our movements must learn lessons from both victories and defeats." Barring a miracle, it is safe to predict that there will be no independent left electoral victories in Toronto this year. That is not the point, "I am not here to tell you that defeat is a part of life: we all know that. I am here to tell you that there are people who have never been defeated. They are the ones who never fought." (Brazilian writer, Paulo Coelho)

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(Tim Heffernan ran for local office in 2014 as a candidate for Toronto District School Board Trustee in the ward of Scarborough South-West, coming in 5th out of 10 candidates with 5% of the vote. He now has no aspirations for political office of any kind.)

Tim Heffernan is a member of Socialist Alternative, Canada. He is a retired teacher and former Executive Officer of the Toronto local of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

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