

Resolution to Seattle SA Members Meeting Sat, Sept. 15

2pm - 6pm, UW, Savery Hall room 264

It was a mistake for the leadership of the organization to recommend a “yes” vote for the confirmation of Carmen Best as the new Seattle police chief.

This resolution is proposed by:

Markus Berrara-Kolb, Veronica Berrara-Kolb, Manuel Carrillo, Anna Hackman, Linda Harris, Manya Janowitz, Whitney James Kahn, Ramy Khalil, Sarah White Kimmerle, Stephan Kimmerle, Bobby Lambertz, Jerry Liebermann, Rebekah Harris Liebermann, Philip Locker, Ruth Oskolkoff, Sara Parent, Mark Rafferty, Oscar Rosales, Meg Strader, Stuart Strader, Stan Strasner, Jeremy Thornes, Benjamin Watkins, and Bryan Watson

If you'd like to add your name to the list of comrades proposing this resolution, please email stredarts@gmail.com



Documents - not for a vote:

We include below documents for and against the “yes” vote for the new police chief in Seattle.

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Introduction to the SA Debate about the New Seattle Police Chief

By the Minority Group in SA

September 5, 2018

1. On August 13, Kshama Sawant voted “yes” to confirm the new police chief of Seattle, Carmen Best, in a unanimous vote of the Seattle City Council. This was a distinct change from Kshama’s previous “no” vote against Best’s predecessor, O’Toole, in 2014, at that time a vote of 8 against 1.
2. We disagree with the “yes” vote and see it as another indication of an opportunist approach based on fears about the 2019 re-election campaign. However, even more concerning is the lack of democratic discussion within SA regarding this clearly controversial decision.
3. This is a further step away from internal democracy and toward bureaucratic, top-down methods. This path is deeply damaging for building a healthy revolutionary organization that works as a democratic collective of Marxist cadre. It is a barrier to the political education of a new layer of cadre which should be the highest priority of SA at this time.
4. During the three days between being informed of the likely “yes” vote and the vote being cast, we wrote a document arguing that Kshama should instead vote against the new police chief (see below). However the Executive Committee (EC), who knew about this vote long before we did, only released a written statement explaining its “yes” vote *during the City Council meeting* which voted to confirm the new police chief. This is sadly indicative of the low priority the EC places on allowing SA members to give meaningful input on important issues and developing critical thinking cadre.
5. Our original document was written rapidly and mainly for the comrades familiar with the Seattle political situation. This introduction provides further clarification and responds to new points raised in the EC statement (included below) explaining why their decision to vote in favor of the new police chief.

A) The EC avoided a democratic debate before Kshama voted.

6. Kshama and the EC have said that their “yes” vote was the result of extensive discussions. In Kshama’s public speech explaining her vote she said “Over the last two weeks, I have consulted a broad range of allies in the struggle against racism and police repression” (see transcript below).
7. The EC letter says: “In the last couple weeks, we went through a systematic process of discussion with our allies on the left and in the black community, from faith and civil rights organizations to former Black Panthers.” They also write that they discussed with “many National Committee and Seattle CC members” before taking a decision.
8. Yet while these discussions were taking place over two weeks (or more as the EC letter implies) there was no open and democratic discussion within Socialist Alternative. Rather, the national and Seattle ECs had informal conversations with *selected* comrades nationally and in Seattle instead of a democratic discussion in SA’s elected leadership bodies.
9. **The EC’s discussions with “many” NC and CC comrades did not include any of the Minority comrades who are on the International Executive Committee, the National Committee, the Seattle City Committee, or who are Seattle branch organizers. This is the latest example of the EC acting as if Minority comrades are not members with full democratic rights. This is part and parcel of the EC’s drive to exclude the Minority from SA, a *de facto* expulsion.**
10. The first time any Minority member heard that Kshama was likely to vote for the new police chief was at a Seattle staff meeting three days before the vote took place (Friday, August 10). Minority comrades proposed the next day (Saturday, August 11) a special City Committee meeting, if needed over the phone, to allow for a democratic discussion to take place before Kshama

voted (see emails below). Nothing of the sort happened. Nor was there any open discussion in the Seattle branches before this vote took place.

11. After Stephan K. and Philip L. were undemocratically removed from the Seattle Executive Committee (SEC) with the pretense that nothing of substance was going to be changed as a result, the new SEC carried out a series of significant changes to the structures of the Seattle organization. The new SEC wrote “there has been an exaggerated separation between our work in the Council Office and the rest of the organization. We urgently need to overcome this politically, and we feel a part of this should be through a shift in our structures ... to encourage greater participation and responsibility for branches in the campaigns and coalitions currently centered around our Council Office” (*Seattle EC Response to the Seattle Structures Debate*).

12. As part of the debate on the Seattle structures, the Majority claimed they were against top-down, full-timer driven “conveyor belt” methods in Seattle and for encouraging branches to take their own initiatives. *It is now clear that these arguments were a farce.*

13. Far from democratic and collective decision-making, the new SA leadership is working outside the organization’s structures through informal conversations to line up support for the EC’s decisions. The new leadership changed the relationship between our city council office and Seattle SA to prioritize mobilizing members behind city council initiatives while reducing members’ ability to have a say in the decisions of our city council work.

14. Under this new leadership the number of full-timers in Seattle has grown while the number of members has shrunk drastically.

15. This approach has nothing in common with the lively debates SA had in the past, for example, during the Fight for 15 in Seattle in 2014. All key decisions in the Fight for 15 – the proposal to include a three year phase-in for small businesses as a concession to workers consciousness to be able to win a potential ballot initiative, the Collective Bargaining Opt Out for hotel workers – were discussed and decided by the citywide membership *before* moving into action, despite the rapid pace of events.

16. It is a right of a leadership to take snap decisions and be held accountable afterwards. However, it is also a duty of any leadership to put issues to the members in a transparent way as soon as possible. Despite having many weeks notice, the EC and SEC did not hold this discussion.

B) Nikkita Oliver and Jesse Hagopian, two prominent Seattle left-wing Black leaders, were prepared to support Kshama in voting against Chief Best.

17. The EC letter claims, “In the last couple weeks, we went through a systematic process of discussion with our allies on the left and in the black community, from faith and civil rights organizations to former Black Panthers.”

18. However, far from a “systematic” approach, the EC failed to ask the two black leaders in Seattle who were most likely to support a “no” vote: Jesse Hagopian and Nikkita Oliver.

19. In 2014 Jesse came extremely close to being elected president of the teachers' union, Seattle Educators Association (SEA). He's well known as a prominent opponent of police brutality – the SPD was caught on video pepper spraying him at a Black Lives Matter protest, and he leads the successful Black Lives Matter at Schools campaign.

20. Nikkita, a prominent BLM activist, ran a very strong and high profile independent left Mayoral campaign which SA endorsed last year. She won 17% (31,366 votes) in the primary, narrowly failing to make the general election by only 1,170 votes.

21. Yet the EC never asked Jesse Hagopian or Nikkita Oliver if they would publicly stand with Kshama and support her vote against Chief Best.

22. However, two days after Kshama’s vote, Philip talked with Jesse at a teachers' union rally. **Jesse said that he did not support Best, that he would have been willing to stand with Kshama in voting against Best, and that he did not see the support of “the” black community as unanimous in favor of Best as the EC presents it.** He correctly pointed out that in the context of many police departments across the country being run by black police chiefs, there was a important section of

African Americans who were very skeptical, if not outright opposed, to Best.

23. Incredibly, in the discussion on the August 16 NC phone call after the vote, there was a desperate effort by Majority supporters to find any argument to excuse the undeniable political mistake of the EC of not asking Jesse or Nikkita, by denouncing Jesse as an ISO member and claiming that Nikkita Oliver does not have much public support.

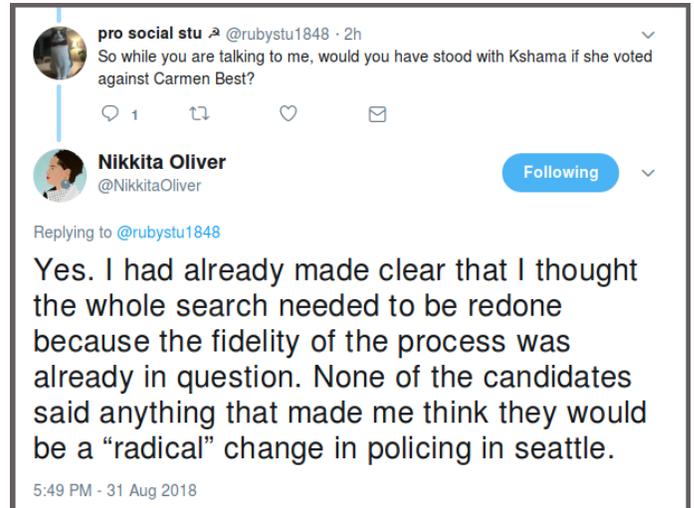
24. Are these the “good methods” the Majority claims to want to educate the organization in? It is definitely not a serious approach to political debate. Like all the black leaders the SEC reached out to, we have political differences with Jesse Hagopian and Nikkita Oliver. Nonetheless the fact is that SA has worked with Jesse on numerous occasions such as recently helping to get the SEA to be the first union to endorse the Kshama Solidarity Campaign. Only a few months ago Kshama’s office arranged for him to speak at a press conference with her in favor of the Amazon Tax!

25. Nikkita ran a very strong and high profile independent left Mayoral campaign last year, and she had already publicly said she did not support Best. To reach out to Nikkita would be an elementary step if the EC was committed to systematically discussing with black leaders to find a prominent figure to support Kshama in voting against Best.

26. Yet the response from EC was to write off Nikkita’s public statement against Best as not strong enough and present her position as a fringe “abolitionist” stance as if she’s totally out of touch with black working-class people. Only a year ago she was the leading mayoral candidate in the black community, in a campaign which featured her BLM and criminal justice positions.

27. It is true that Nikkita’s statement reflects her prison abolitionist position, a view we do not share. However, her statement was not a wild ultra-left stance of opposing any police chief as one would think based on the EC’s presentation. The [Seattle Weekly](#) quoted her statement as “I want NONE of the finalists 2 be Seattle’s new police chief. Best is very nice. However, as an abolitionist, I want a chief w/ a bolder racial & historical analysis willing 2 work their self out of a job & into world where public safety is achieved by meeting ppls social needs.”

28. While the EC never asked Nikkita, on August 31 Stuart asked her if she would have been willing to stand with Kshama in voting against Best. Nikkita publicly responded that she would have stood with Kshama voting “no,” as she “had already made clear.” Below is a screenshot of the tweet.



29. The SEC and EC stressed that they systematically discussed with key black leaders to try to find even one prominent voice who would stand with Kshama in opposing Best. How does this match up with their failure to even ask Nikkita Oliver or Jesse Hagopian? Or that both Nikkita and Jesse have now said they were prepared to support Kshama in voting against Best?

30. At the NC discussion on August 16 Seattle EC member Adam Z. attempted to answer the point about Jesse by saying the Seattle EC was overstretched. Of course, we recognize the huge effort and workload of the SEC and Council office comrades. If it was merely a problem of being resources, they could have reached out to the Seattle City Committee to ask other comrades to help, rather than refusing to discuss it. We would have been happy and able to ask Jesse and Nikkita, as we later did. **Nor does being busy mean it is accurate to tell the organization that the SEC made a systematic effort to find a prominent voice to stand with Kshama.**

C) There was no movement for the new police chief.

31. There were two phases in the appointment process:

- a. The selection of final candidates for the Mayor to choose from
- b. The nomination of Best by the Mayor and the unanimous vote by the City Council to confirm her.

32. The broadest public stirring was during the selection process when the Mayor's lieutenants removed Best from the list of finalists. Though it was far from a movement, there was a public uproar from black, Latino and progressive leaders involved in the selection process who saw the removal of Best as racist. Other activists like Andre Taylor (whose brother was killed by the Seattle police) and Nikkita Oliver also spoke out against this maneuver.

33. This reaction, especially strong in Seattle's communities of color, was absolutely understandable. It was an important factor which needed to be fully taken into account when we worked out how to relate to the nomination of Chief Best. Marxists should have expressed support for the outcry against the exclusion of Best and sympathy towards the mood within the black community of wanting Best to be the first black woman to be a permanent Seattle Police Chief.

34. **Unfortunately when there was the widest public outcry against Best's exclusion, Kshama said nothing at all as far as we can see.** Our council office has a systematic approach to social media, yet not even one post or re-tweet was made during this time regarding the sidelining of Best.

35. However, almost a month later, during the vote on the City Council, Kshama explained in her speech that her vote for Best was a vote of "solidarity and unity with the movement that forced the Mayor to reverse herself."

36. This is incorrect on several levels. There was no "movement" behind Chief Best or against her exclusion from the final selection list. There was a public outcry among key black and progressive leaders against Best's exclusion. And there was a broader sentiment within the black community in favor of Best, but this was entirely of a passive character and far from a deep-seated mood.

37. While this is important to take into account, it is essential that we be precise in characterizing the nature of this support rather than having a vague, unscientific analysis (as is the approach of the non-Marxist left).

38. The support for Best was *not* based on strong illusions and hopes based on Best promising bold reforms to the police and arising from a grassroots struggle. It was a limited support based on the symbolism of having the first black police chief overseeing the racist Seattle police.

39. **If we were attempting to stand in solidarity with the "movement that forced the Mayor to reverse herself," as Kshama stated, why didn't we make a public statement opposing the back-room exclusion of Best when that issue was actually being debated?** It was entirely possible to oppose the underhanded removal of Best from the selection process while opposing Best when the Mayor later nominated her.

40. In fact, Nikkita Oliver did exactly this. **Unlike Kshama, Nikkita was at the forefront of the public outcry against the exclusion of Best. Yet after Best was nominated by the Mayor, Nikkita publicly stated her opposition to Best becoming the new police chief.**

41. The EC also paints a highly one-sided picture of why Best was nominated by the Mayor. There is no doubt, as the EC says, that a key element was the outcry from black, Latino, and progressive leaders against what was perceived as a racist exclusion of Best. But the EC's account ignores a critical factor that was just as much at play, if not more. This was the role of the Seattle Police Officers Guild (SPOG), a [notoriously reactionary](#) force standing against even [the most modest police reforms](#). SPOG has been a strong opponent of Kshama and is likely supporting the two Seattle police officers who are suing Kshama.

42. SPOG has a long standing policy of opposing any "outside" police chief and fighting for chiefs who come from within the Seattle Police Department (SPD). SPOG supported Best not because she was African American, but because she was the only finalist from within the SPD and would be less likely to significantly shake up the status quo in the SPD.

43. In fact, when the Mayor's representatives excluded Best, it was in favor of three other candidates who were not part of the SPD. Of these three, one was African American, one was Latino, and one was white. The candidate SPOG was most against happened to be white, but [was seen by SPOG as the boldest opponent of police racism](#). Comrades can read more about this in an article

from the long-standing and well informed left-wing Seattle journalist Geov Parrish: <https://outsidecityhall.wordpress.com/2018/08/15/the-best-solution/#more-8014>

44. It's not a crime to make mistakes. In fact it is a sign of political maturity and strength when an organization can recognize its mistakes, analyze the basis for them, and draw the necessary lessons for the future. But this is only possible on the basis of an accurate account of the situation which was unfortunately lacking in the EC's letter.

D) It was clear before the City Council meeting that all other councilmembers would vote in favor of Carmen Best.

45. In her speech Kshama framed her vote in favor of Best as an effort "to not stand in the way of Best's appointment." However, this was not the question that was actually posed. Kshama was not in a position where her vote would decide if Best would be confirmed or not.

46. Going into the vote it was absolutely clear Best would be confirmed by the City Council. Best had been nominated by the establishment Mayor Jenny Durkan who is supported by the right wing of the city council. The right-wing police union, SPOG, also supported Best enthusiastically. Two key members of the more liberal wing of the City Council, Lorena Gonzalez and Teresa Mosqueda, both voted in favor of Best in committee.

47. **The question that Kshama and SA were faced with was would the confirmation of the new police chief be a 8-0 unanimous vote (only 8 council members were present because Rob Johnson - a Best supporter - was absent), or would it be 7-1 with the one socialist on the city council registering a warning (explained with sympathy and understanding toward the mood among black community members who supported Best)?**

48. In the end, with Kshama's "yes" vote, it was a 8-0 unanimous vote for Best.

E) The EC document does not mention Kshama's re-election once.

49. Essential to having a meaningful balance sheet and discussion about the EC's decision is the EC giving a transparent report of their actual considerations and the challenges as they see them. Yet the EC's document makes no mention of a central factor at work in their calculations on the police chief vote: Kshama's 2019 re-election.

50. However in the Seattle staff meeting on the Friday before the vote and in discussions afterwards with Seattle branch members, it was made absolutely clear that the re-election prospects were a crucial part of the EC's considerations. This was again confirmed in the arguments of EC members on the August 16 NC phone call on this issue.

51. Yet incredibly, there is *not a single mention* of this in their document! The EC fails to openly and seriously engage with the challenge of how to maintain a clear Marxist position while dealing with the real pressures to maintain a position on a bourgeois city council in a period of low working-class consciousness. A failure to openly deal with these pressures only means we are more likely to fall prey to them.

52. **Unfortunately, this is not the first time that the council comrades have adopted an opportunist approach to the police.** As the Minority and other Seattle comrades wrote in a joint explanation for an [alternative slate for the Seattle City Committee](#) for the 2018 Seattle City Convention:

"Another example of the big challenge of maintaining a principled Marxist program when speaking to a broad audience is when [Kshama called on the Seattle Mayor to deploy the Seattle Police to defend immigrants against Trump's ICE](#). Given our Marxist understanding of the fundamental character of the police in the capitalist state, this call was mistaken.

Of course, there is no crime in making such a mistake and Kshama has acknowledged it was incorrect. Mistakes like this are inevitable and will happen. What is important is that when they are made, the organization is able to

discuss them, correct them, and learn from them. However, there was no open discussion within the leadership or the organization about this mistaken call, despite the fact that a number of leading members repeated it as a model demand.”

53. Another example was Kshama donating \$300 to the “Labor Oscars” earlier this year. This was a gala thrown by the MLK Labor Council where SPOG was lavishly praised and given an award.

[Philip wrote to the SEC](#) earlier this year:

“One of the new co-chairs of the Seattle DSA ... told Stan and I that the [MLK Labor Council] asked Seattle DSA to endorse and give a donation [to the Labor Oscars], which they told DSA was what Kshama had done. However, Seattle DSA members were strongly opposed to donating money to the event when they saw that part of it was celebrating [Labor Council Leader] Nicole Grant's Jon Grant takedown, [Labor Council staffer] Kamaria Hightower for defending the [MLK Labor Council] endorsements against "trollcialists" on Twitter, and the nominations of the Seattle Police Officers union for awards. The Seattle DSA chair said in light of the opposition of their members – which he characterized as an uproar – they told the [MLK Labor Council] they would not be donating to the event.

Is the DSA’s description that the Council Office endorsed the event and donated \$300 correct? Were we aware of the character of the event in terms of the award nominations when we made the decision to endorse/donate or did this come up afterwards?

Given the developments around how DSA viewed the Labor Oscar’s event, I think it would be good to publish an article on the SA website taking up the conservative, pro-capitalist orientation of the event and drawing out what this shows about the politics of the “progressive” labor bureaucracy in Seattle to help educate our members and periphery towards building a class struggle opposition within the Seattle labor movement. If you want, I can draft such an article.”

54. Unfortunately, the SEC never responded. Nor did they publish any article or statement publicly clarifying that Kshama’s endorsement and donation to the Labor Oscars did not mean she

supported their celebration of the Seattle Police or other conservative aspects of the event.

55. This is indicative of the SEC’s fear that doing so would create complications for Kshama’s 2019 re-election by increasing tensions with the union bureaucracy. The way the SEC dealt with these legitimate concerns was at the expense of political clarity and without an open discussion within SA.

F) National Committee Vote

56. Despite all this, the NC voted on August 16, with 16 votes to 5 votes, to support a resolution from Eljeer, Patrick, and Marty which says:

“While we strongly prefer to vote against police chief appointments and other representatives of the state apparatus, we recognize that the vote on Carmen Best is not a matter of principle but a tactical question. Given the consciousness in the working class and black community in Seattle as we are currently able to assess and understand it, the outrage over the racist appointment process, and the weaknesses of the Seattle left, we feel that the tactics of the Seattle EC and national EC on the Carmen Best vote were broadly correct.”

57. The resolution itself acknowledges that the movers had a limited understanding of the concrete situation when it states “given the consciousness in the working class and black community in Seattle as we are currently able to assess and understand it.”

58. And what exactly do the comrades mean when they say that the tactics of the EC were “broadly correct”? This is quite vague and does not help give the organization a precise understanding of the approach the comrades are arguing for.

59. The alternative motion put forward by Ramy, which got 5 votes was:

“SA should have voted against confirming Carmen Best as the new Seattle police chief. ”

60. Seven NC candidate members voted for Eljeer, Patrick, and Marty’s resolution, and one NC candidate member voted for Ramy’s resolution.

Conclusion

61. All of this leads us to a few unavoidable conclusions.

62. Kshama's vote was not about solidarity with a movement nor our inability to find any black leader to stand with us. In reality there was no movement, but there was public pressure by middle class, liberal, and left black leaders which rested on a passive mood among the majority of Seattle's black community.

63. There were options if we had voted "no" to reduce the perception of being isolated from the black community. Nikkita Oliver and Jesse Hagopian, two important black leaders, were prepared to publicly support Kshama in voting "no."

64. Kshama should have explained her "no" vote in a highly sympathetic way towards the mood of the majority of the black community which was supporting Best, while registering a clear warning by voting "no."

65. **The reality is this vote was a result of short-sighted calculations driven by fear about Kshama's 2019 re-election.**

66. What's most worrying is that the EC and SEC didn't allow for democratic discussion beforehand and afterwards produce a document which obscures the political background to Kshama's vote and a central reason for Kshama's vote.

67. A revolutionary party can, and must, make mistakes - on the basis that it has a robust democracy which provides a mechanism for internal correction and education. Without allowing for that, and with a leadership constructing arguments to rationalize its decisions, this becomes increasingly impossible.

68. **The undemocratic process around this vote was driven by the new SA leadership's opportunist electoral strategy and subordination of the needs of the organization to Kshama's re-election. This is a far cry from the Marxist policies and democratic methods that were the basis for SA's election of Kshama in the first place.**

69. Members in SA urgently need to stand up and demand a return to a principled approach to mass work - a Marxist renewal.

Socialist Alternative and Kshama Sawant Should Vote against the New Seattle Police Chief Carmen Best

This document was written by the Minority Group in SA and signed by the following comrades, some of them later than August 12, when the document was originally sent to the National Committee and the Seattle City Committee.

Seattle, WA co-signers: Markus Berrara-Kolb, Veronica Berrara-Kolb, Manuel Carrillo, Anna Hackman, Linda Harris, Manya Janowitz, Whitney James Kahn, Ramy Khalil, Sarah White Kimmerle, Stephan Kimmerle, Bobby Lambertz, Jerry Liebermann, Rebekah Harris Liebermann, Philip Locker, Ruth Oskolkoff, Sarah Parent, Mark Rafferty, Oscar Rosales, Preston Sahabu (agrees in spirit), Meg Strader, Stuart Strader, Stan Strasner, Jeremy Thornes, Benjamin Watkins, and Bryan Watson

Olympia, WA co-signers: Ben Peterson

Columbus, OH co-signers: Alex Davis, Bianca Davis, Steve Fogle, Kyle Landis

Cincinnati, OH co-signers: Robert Shields

If you'd like to add your name to endorse this statement, please email stredarts@gmail.com

August 12, 2018

1. Carmen Best, the current interim chief of the Seattle Police (SPD) and a 26-year veteran of the force, is set to be confirmed as Seattle's permanent police chief. The City Council will vote on her appointment on Monday, August 13. Carmen Best is being supported by the leaders of African American community groups and by most of Seattle's progressive leaders. This sentiment of support is understandable given that, if confirmed, Best would be the SPD's first ever African American permanent police chief.

2. This sentiment was reinforced by the fact that initially Mayor Durkan and the leading layer of the establishment running the mayor's search committee attempted to secretly sideline Best in favor of their own preferred candidates. This triggered an uproar among black, latino and progressive community leaders on the mayor's search committee who called for the mayor to nominate Best.

3. **On the one hand, Socialist Alternative and Kshama Sawant need to being fully cognizant of this context, and sympathetic to the mood particularly among African Americans who understandably see it as a step forward to have a black woman lead the racist SPD. On the other hand, SA and Kshama Sawant have a political obligation to vote against her nomination and to clearly explain why.**

4. The choice of Best for police chief represents a clear continuity in policy for the

SPD—the same SPD we are in the midst of a struggle with. Best would continue the liberal “reform process,” which has checked some of the worst features of the SPD in order to save its overall legitimacy and preserve the SPD's underlying repressive functions. This inevitably means that the reforms of the SPD will not be able to fundamentally impact the systemic racism and brutality that is inherent in America's policing.

5. Throughout the nomination process, Best has made clear that, while she will continue the liberal “window dressing” reforms of the SPD, she is not in any way advancing even a modest program of real reforms, nor is she making claims of breaking with the previous management or policies of the SPD, nor does she have any intention of fundamental change.

6. Best has declined to acknowledge the concrete problems of racism in Seattle's police force ([Council Questions and Best's Response](#)). During her appointment process, she stated her belief that while there is racism in our society, the SPD is not especially mired in institutional racism, and that the problems of excessive force by the SPD are largely in the past.

7. The media has attempted to portray her as a reformer, highlighting disciplinary actions she has taken against SPD officers. While she is celebrated for firing two officers and two recruits, the reasons were 1) not showing up for work, 2) lying to management, 3) accepting food from the cafeteria

without paying, and 4) a recruit cheating on a test. In another case where an officer used excessive force, Best's supposedly disciplinarian approach meant suspending the officer for a single day! ([Crosscut](#), 7/20/18)

8. It is important to note that Best is being vocally supported by the previous SPD chief, Kathleen O'Toole. Best is also supported by the notorious Seattle Police Officer Guild (SPOG). SPOG has been at the forefront of opposing Councilmember Sawant and is likely behind the police lawsuit against Kshama. Leaders of Speak Out Seattle, the group that played a prominent role pushing for sweeps of homeless encampments and resisting the Amazon Tax, have also come out in support of Best.

9. It does not take a crystal ball to predict that the next atrocious actions by the Seattle police will come sooner rather than later. We should base ourselves on the likelihood that there will be wide disappointment with—and even fury at—Best at a certain stage among people of color and activists in general. Without fundamental change, how long will it take for the next blatant case of police brutality or racist killing to happen under Chief Best? How long will it be until Chief Best oversees SPD repression of protests? Our vote on Best's nomination has to be taken with these future prospects in mind.

10. When Kshama voted against Chief O'Toole in 2014, it was unpopular given how O'Toole was promoted as an accomplished reformer and as the first female SPD chief. The Stranger publicly criticized Kshama for voting “no.” Yet it was not very long until the BLM movement in Seattle had come into sharp conflict with O'Toole, most visibly in the Block the Bunker movement, as well as the police killings of Che Taylor and Charleena Lyles. While voting against O'Toole was initially politically difficult and unpopular even on the progressive left, in the end Kshama's authority to intervene against the Bunker and the police killings of Che Taylor and Charleena Lyles was strengthened by her consistent and outspoken opposition to Chief O'Toole as well as the budget and policies of the SPD.

11. **There is no doubt that voting against Best will not be popular initially, especially in the black community. But we should be clear that the support for Best is of a limited character. The**

support for Best is of a passive, rather than active, character. While we have seen black community, non-profit, and religious leaders endorse Best, along with a wide number of progressive leaders, it does not appear that support for Best runs much deeper than that in any active way. Instead, it has been overwhelmingly a limited support by the layer of liberal and progressive community leaders.

12. The support for Best does not represent a deep-rooted, powerful force. There is no significant movement that is fighting for her appointment as a step forward. While Durkan nominated Best due to political pressure from community leaders, there was no grassroots mobilization or serious struggle from below.

13. Even some of the black community leaders who are supporting Best have been openly skeptical and critical of her. The [Seattle Weekly](#) writes that Katrina Johnson, the cousin of Charleena Lyles, an African American mother who was shot and killed by police in June 2017:

swallowed the news [of Best's nomination] with a dose of skepticism. “Even though I don't see eye-to-eye on some of the things that she's done, I do think that out of the candidates that [Best] was the best one,” Johnson said.

Johnson was disappointed that Best didn't respond to the family's inquiries about details surrounding Lyles' death. She and her family wanted to know, for example, why the time stamps on videos didn't align. At a police chief forum hosted by the police accountability group Not this Time last Wednesday, Johnson questioned Best about a lack of transparency following her cousin's death, and was disheartened by a response that she felt skirted around her inquiries and was dismissive of her family's loss. “I wanted to freak out on that panel,” Johnson recalled.

14. The Seattle Weekly goes on to say Johnson fears “that Best will maintain the status quo.” They also quote KL Shannon, Police Accountability Chair for the Seattle/King County NAACP, as supporting Best while quite correctly warning that:

she does not believe that a policing system that disproportionately impacts communities of color will drastically change under Best's watch. “Chief Best's bread and butter is the Seattle Police Department ... she is going to have to figure out

how to balance the community, Durkan's office, and SPD. It's never going to happen. No matter how good her intentions will be," Shannon wrote.

15. People's Party leader Nikkita Oliver, who ran a very strong campaign for mayor as a BLM candidate in 2017, tweeted:

I heard from the finalist at a meeting Wednesday night at Not This Time. They all essentially said the same thing. They will fire racist police. They will put more training and tools in police officers hands. They will do implicit biased training. They will involve community. None of what any candidate said is new. We have literally heard all of this before and it plays out in the exact same way every time. Black and brown ppl over policed and murdered. I wanna hear someone talk boldly about the roots of policing and how they intend to uproot them.

16. Oliver goes on to say she does not support Best:

I want NONE of the finalists 2 be Seattle's new police chief. Best is very nice. However, as an abolitionist, I want a chief w/ a bolder racial & historical analysis willing 2 work their self out of a job & into world where public safety is achieved by meeting ppls social needs. ([Seattle Weekly](#))

17. This public discussion around the police chief confirmation offers Marxists the opportunity to help activists draw clear conclusions. We should point toward the need to fundamentally restructure the role of the police, call for genuine democratic community oversight, and do everything we can to hamper the capitalist state's ability to use the police as a repressive tool to enforce their rule. We should highlight the massive SPD budget and demand that resources are diverted instead toward social services, job programs, and education. We should highlight the need to build BLM and the movement against police brutality and put forward a series of democratic demands and policies to demilitarize the police and point away from the out-of-control criminal justice system.

18. Under these circumstances, we can most clearly crystallize our position by Kshama voting "no" while at the same time acknowledging the

hopes that progressive leaders and people of color have expressed.

19. The argument that a "no" vote would decisively cut us off from black communities is an exaggeration. We do face real pressures, but we need a sense of proportion. There is no grassroots groundswell or active struggle for Best. Further, the support for Best is coming more from of the black middle class and community leaders, not the depths of the black working class and poor.

20. It is true that we feel those pressures more when we are dealing with council politics and electoral work. However, it's clear that there is also a section of black youth and working-class people who will not accept the SPD's attempt to pretend it solved its problem of systemic racism by appointing a black chief. A "no" vote has real electoral downsides, but in terms of appealing to the more advanced consciousness among people of color in the struggle against racism and capitalism, such as youth who will move into action in the coming period, it is far from a decisive obstacle and will turn into an asset sooner or later.

21. Furthermore, Best's responses to the questions being posed to her by the City Council make it clear that she is downplaying the institutional racism in the police force. After years of a consent decree, even the court-appointed monitor says that the SPD are carrying out racist policing:

Only a few months before Seattle was found to be in compliance of the consent decree, court-appointed monitor Merrick Bobb pointed to continued racially-biased policing in a [June 2017 progress report](#): "The Monitoring Team discovered that the racial disparity with respect to who is stopped and who is frisked in Seattle cannot be easily explained in terms of underlying societal or social disparities in crime, demographics, or socioeconomic factors manifesting in neighborhood or geographic trends," Bobb wrote. "Even after incorporating those factors, an individual's race alone helps to predict the likelihood of being stopped and the likelihood of being frisked by an SPD officer." ([Seattle Weekly](#))

22. What is Best's approach? [She says in her "Confirmation Hearing and Response"](#):

I do not believe that police officers are affected by implicit bias any more than other people. Yes,

there are historical, and current, issues of institutional racism in the criminal justice system, and the SPD is an active participant in local and national efforts to better understand and address these points.

23. Unfortunately, no direct question was posed to Best (as far as we can see) about the new youth jail or the building of a new North Precinct bunker for the SPD. However, Best makes it clear that she sees “years of underinvestment in the facilities” and argues for “funding to hire new officers to maintain patrol staffing,” and “increasing the number of available officers.” (“[Confirmation Hearing and Response](#)”)

24. These policies will not land well with the activists from Black Lives Matter, the No New Youth Jail movement, and the Block the Bunker movement.

Not a Question of Principle

25. We understand that the Seattle and national Executive Committees have argued that this is not a question of principle, that we do not always have to vote “no” on every police chief. We agree.

26. As Marxists we should not approach police issues with dogmatic, abstract answers or simple propagandistic formulas. We do not agree with those that say that we should oppose on principle any chief of a police department or other sections of the law enforcement apparatus.

27. **However, given the objective role of the police and the strong sentiment among activists and the best workers and youth against them, there is a very high bar for Marxists to be able to give critical support to a police chief. To vote for a police chief, there have to be exceptional factors that override our general considerations.**

28. The police (along with the military, courts, and prisons) make up the core of the capitalist state, the front line of the repressive apparatus of the ruling class. It is one of the most reactionary institutions in our society. When workers and young people move into struggle, they quickly come up against a hostile and violent police force which acts to repress them and defend the ruling class. While we are flexible in our tactics, Marxists should generally deploy tactics that most

efficiently expose the reactionary character of the capitalist state.

29. The transitional method aims to raise the consciousness of the working class to understand the need for a socialist revolution. This includes the understanding that the working class cannot take over the capitalist state and run it in workers’ interests. That was the conclusion Marx and Engels drew from the experience of the Paris Commune in 1871. That’s why we do not fight to use the existing repressive state apparatus as a tool for working people. Instead, we fight to help people see that it needs to be completely dismantled and replaced.

30. At the same time, we put forward democratic demands, like a democratically elected community review board to oversee the police, with full powers over their policies and procedures and full investigatory power. Democratic reforms can make it harder for the capitalists to use their state. That’s why we support democratic oversight of the police, abolishing special units like ICE (or the CIA, NSA, etc), and demilitarizing the police force. These demands can also help raise the confidence and expectations of the working class, especially the most oppressed sections.

31. However, all of these reforms need to be linked to clarifying that the working class cannot just take over the police force and use it in the interest of the working class or the oppressed. We aim to make clear that we are not responsible for the actions of the police. In general, we do not approve their budget, their structures, and their leaders.

32. **There are circumstances where a Marxist could vote to confirm a police chief, sheriff, or a district attorney, etc. when the smashing of the capitalist state is not immediately on the agenda.** However, this would need to be based on:

- Working to build an active movement of working class and oppressed people, empowering working-class people to resist and check the capitalist state in an organized fashion
- Including ample warnings about the fundamentally unreformable nature of the capitalist state
- The candidate (or nominee) would have to put forward a clear program of radical reforms such as: community control over the police,

demilitarizing the police, cracking down on racist police, shutting down intelligence and surveillance units which carry out political repression, expanding social services and public programs to alleviate poverty and other social ills, providing living wage jobs for all, etc.

This is not the case with Carmen Best.

33. However, there are interesting cases like Larry Krasner's 2017 campaign for Philadelphia district attorney. He ran as a movement candidate, and a DSA-backed Democratic Party candidate, on a platform of radical reforms. His victory helped raise the self-confidence and expectations of activists and oppressed people, and pointed toward encouraging them to get actively involved in fighting back against the atrocities of the state. This, in a wider sense, helps to empower working people to rely on their own strength to fight for their interests. An election campaign like Krasner's (or even an appointment process) can be taken up by Marxists if it is linked to building workers' power to fight for a fundamental transformation of society.

34. But even in such a scenario, we need to keep our distance. Larry Krasner has quickly come into conflict with some activists who face prosecution. This is not accidental. It is indicative of the reactionary character of the district attorney position in this fundamentally unequal society. That is why we must stress that any radical left campaigns that we could consider critically supporting, or even running ourselves, need to activate ordinary people to fight against the repressive state apparatus, with a full explanation to everyone we can reach of our overall program and how quickly the underlying questions of which side of the class divide they will be on will come up.

35. Angela Walker ran as an independent socialist for Milwaukee sheriff in 2014 calling for radical policies including an end to mass incarceration, evictions, and anti-immigrant policing. She won 20% of the vote with over 65,000 votes. That was an inspiring campaign, and a case could have been made for Marxists to support her.

36. During some discussions on whether we should vote for Carmen Best, some comrades have cited the example of Berlin Police Chief Emil Eichhorn during the 1918/19 German revolution. While this example is absolutely worth studying,

we should be clear that it took place in a vastly different context from the one we face now. Eichhorn was a member of the left-wing socialist (centrist) USPD, and he took over as the police chief, not through a bourgeois vote, but as part of the November 1918 revolutionary uprising, when revolutionary forces occupied the police headquarters to prevent them from being used against the revolution.

37. Having conquered this position, revolutionaries were absolutely correct to oppose attempts by the counter-revolutionary Social Democratic Party-led government to dismiss Eichhorn. Socialist revolution and the replacement of the capitalist state by a workers' state was on the agenda, and his position could provide enormous assistance for the revolutionary movement. When the Social Democratic Party government tried to remove Eichhorn on January 4, 1919 it was seen by the workers in Berlin as a clear counter-revolutionary provocation, and the next day 200,000 workers protested his removal.

38. Comrades should absolutely study these examples and draw lessons from them. But each of these examples are dramatically different than Best's case and do not strengthen the case to vote "yes" for Best. On the contrary, they underline the very limited change that Best stands for.

Re-Election Prospects

39. **Is voting for Carmen Best important in order to get Kshama re-elected? This seems to us to be the key issue in the minds of the Seattle, national, and international leadership.**

40. The leadership of SA paints a dire picture of our prospects for re-election. The gentrification of District 3; the hostility of some major labor leaders towards Kshama; the anger of big business, led by Amazon, about a socialist on the council; the turncoat liberals — all of these factors are real. We cannot allow for any complacency in the organization towards the re-election campaign. Big business and the establishment will vigorously fight to remove Kshama, and we will need an all-out effort to re-elect Kshama.

41. However, we believe the picture that the SA leadership paints is one-sided. In fact, one of our key weapons for carrying out this struggle is the

advantage of a scientific Marxist analysis of the political situation globally, in the U.S., and in Seattle. There is a major swing to the left in urban centers across the U.S., especially among young people. This has been expressed in Occupy, the fight for \$15, BLM, the Sanders campaign, the huge anti-Trump protests, the walk-outs for gun safety, and the explosive growth of DSA. We have also seen a swing to the left in the base of the Democratic Party. Support for socialism is growing dramatically. Socialism is now a point of attraction for left-wing candidates in urban centers, especially among youth. We have seen a slew of socialist candidates elected since Sanders campaign, most dramatically symbolized by the stunning victory of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

42. These trends are sharply expressed in Seattle, a city that is disproportionately young and left-wing, where there is a strong subjective factor in the form of Socialist Alternative. We saw in 2017 for the first time since Kshama first ran in 2012 a broader development of independent left politics with Nikkita Oliver's campaign for mayor and Jon Grant's campaign for City Council. There has been a major growth in the number of activists and the size of organized left forces in Seattle. And not the least, Kshama will be running with the advantage of being an extremely high profile incumbent. Kshama has deep roots and loyal support, established by winning many important concrete reforms.

43. Therefore, while we must run an all-out re-election effort to combat the ferocious effort by the ruling elite to defeat Kshama, we believe we should go into the campaign with confidence.

44. But if we put aside this difference on perspectives, and for the moment accept the SA leaders' view that Kshama faces a very uphill battle for re-election, does that mean Kshama should vote in favor of Carmen Best for police chief?

45. In a discussion between the Minority Group and Ty Moore on behalf of the national and Seattle EC, Ty agreed that key black community leader allies we have spoken to on this issue, including Gerald Hankerson of the NAACP and Reverend Jeffries, would very likely still endorse Kshama in 2019 even if she voted against Best, though Ty said he did not know for sure and was just speculating. Ty also explained that when SA discussed with

community leaders, some were critical of Best but were unwilling to publicly oppose her.

46. Our question to the national and Seattle EC is: How is this any different from the approach that the SA leadership is taking?

47. **Even if this would have a significantly negative impact on the re-election campaign, Marxists should think this through carefully. There is a good chance that with Best, as with O'Toole before, the hopes in her leadership will dissipate or even be crushed under the lived experience of the reality of the reactionary Seattle police force by the time of the November 2019 election.** The chances are high that a significant section of activists and people radicalized around Black Lives Matter will understand and support a clear stance by Kshama against the SPD's current policies and practices as symbolized by the mayor's nominee for police chief.

48. We recognize this will be a minority of Seattle at this time. But the pro-BLM layer is a significant minority and comprises the core of the best activists, youth and workers that we base ourselves on to recruit and be the active base of any election campaign and future struggles. We should stand strong and explain to the radicalizing activists in Seattle that Best does not represent a fundamental step forward, even if this takes some time to become clear. DSA and BLM activists with their (often ultra-left) approach to the police will be open to hearing our arguments. There is a layer that we can inspire to help us overcome the difficulties that such a "no" vote could cause in other parts of the working class.

49. **Our task is not simply to get re-elected but also to build a strong Marxist organization and educate a periphery around us. For this task, there is no doubt that a "no" vote will help us.**

50. Furthermore, we are in a situation where Kshama has won election to city council twice, and we are in a wider political context where there is now a growing number of reformist socialists getting elected across the U.S., from city council to state Houses and even Congress — and possibly president in 2020. In this new context, **a key factor in our approach is to make sure Kshama stands out from this wider group of socialists with a clear Marxist and revolutionary profile that we can contrast with how DSA officeholders act.**

51. **We need to be arguing within the labor movement, DSA, and within the new socialist movement that socialist representatives need to fight boldly against police brutality and mass incarceration, even when electorally unpopular,** in contrast to progressive Democrats like Elizabeth Warren. Kshama taking a strong stand in a difficult situation like this will give us valuable political capital in the debates that are opening up on the growing U.S. left.

We Face Real Pressures

52. We should acknowledge that there are serious pressures on us to vote "yes" for Carmen Best. A number of black activists and community leaders have urged us to vote "yes," with one even counseling us that it would be "political suicide" to vote "no."

53. **The pressure that we feel is not from Mayor Durkan or the conservative establishment; it is from progressive sections of the middle and working class in Seattle.** Broader layers of activists and progressive workers and youth have a very strong pragmatic outlook, considering any step "in the right direction" to be worth actively supporting. This means that when we have an elected council seat, we feel an immense pressure due to this mood among our own progressive base.

54. A common way this manifests itself today for us in Seattle is grassroots pressure from progressive or radicalizing layers who are genuinely pushing for change and want us to make compromises in order to govern effectively. Many of these people believe the choice is between a "progressive who gets things done" and a dogmatic purist who remains loyal to principles but is ineffective at achieving any real reforms. It is inevitable that we face such pressures as we work alongside people moving into struggle who have pragmatic and reformist attitudes.

55. We must be able to stand against these pressures, while adopting a skillful approach that takes into account this consciousness. We do this in how we argue our position, how we frame things, the reforms we support even though we know they are limited, and making united front-type appeals to left-wing Democrats and middle-class forces.

56. We also can feel opportunist pressures to adapt to the dominant and popular ideas of those

who are moving into struggle, such as the strong identity politics in BLM and #MeToo, or syndicalist moods among union activists.

57. In [SA's recent article about Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) (AOC), we discuss opportunist pressures as follows: "The pressures of elected office are real. Congress is a hostile environment that can isolate genuine working-class representatives and surround them with lying, dirty politicians and hallway-roaming slimy lobbyists." It is certainly true that one source of opportunist pressure on left representatives is the temptation of bribes and pay-for-play backroom deals.

58. But the far bigger danger for left-wing politicians, like AOC, Bernie Sanders, and Marxist representatives, is not corruption from above, but the far more pernicious and powerful pressure of public opinion from below. The biggest source of opportunist pressure at this time flows from the confusion and low level of consciousness amongst the working class and the oppressed. Even the most sincere and dedicated Marxist representatives will come under pressure at key moments to avoid taking principled stances which isolate them.

59. For example, after 9/11, Bernie Sanders voted for the Afghanistan War not because of "slimy lobbyists" but because he felt the massive pressure of public opinion, including left-wing voters who make up his base. **AOC and Marxist representatives like Kshama will also face challenging moments when a principled position comes into collision with their supporters. Such moments require leadership—being willing to swim against the stream and fight to educate progressive workers.**

60. There is nothing wrong with admitting that opportunist pressures exist. In fact, we must acknowledge them if we are going to resist them and be politically armed to point the way forward even if that could create some challenges for our immediate re-election chances. We must set a bold example of what a principled socialist does. In the medium term, this will pay off, including on the electoral terrain but most importantly in our ability to politically stand out and win the best workers and youth to our revolutionary party.

Conclusion

61. Given this background, the argument to vote for Carmen Best as a police chief without any promise of serious reform, without any movement demanding such a step, out of fear for Kshama's re-election is opportunistic. We urge the Seattle and national Executive Committee's to avoid this serious mistake.

62. It is clear that the City Council will vote to confirm Best, and Seattle will have a black woman

as police chief. As with Obama being the first black president, such experiences matter and cannot just be dismissed. However, while taking such sentiments into account and expressing our understanding, we should vote "no" to register a warning against this tokenish change, to maintain and increase our appeal among the best activists and radicalizing forces moving into action, and to be positioned to have the most authority when struggles erupt sooner rather than later against the racist and repressive SPD.

Background articles [Updated from the list sent out on August 12]

- Seattle Left-wing Journalist Analyzes the role of SPOG in Best's Nomination: <https://outsidecityhall.wordpress.com/2018/08/15/the-best-solution/#more-8014>
- <https://twitter.com/NikkitaOliver/status/1018013159322292224>
- <http://sawant.seattle.gov/remarks-on-the-confirmation-of-otoole-for-police-chief-of-seattle/>
- <https://crosscut.com/2018/05/emails-show-uproar-over-seattle-police-chief-picks>
- <https://www.seattleweekly.com/news/communities-of-color-respond-to-police-chief-bests-ap-pointment/>
- <https://crosscut.com/2018/07/interim-chief-best-fired-two-officers-and-two-recruits>
- <https://sccinsight.com/2018/08/02/read-the-councils-questions-for-carmen-best-and-her-responses/>
- [King 5 Video: Who Is Carmen Best?](#)
- <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-city-council-committee-votes-to-confirm-carmen-best-as-permanent-police-chief/>
- [Kshama questioning Carmen Best at City Council hearing](#)

Media Coverage of City Council Unanimous Confirmation of new Police Chief

- <https://www.thestranger.com/slog/2018/08/13/30701768/city-council-confirms-carmen-best-as-permanent-seattle-police-chief>
- <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/carmen-best-confirmed-as-seattle-police-chief/>
- <https://www.seattleweekly.com/news/theres-a-new-police-chief-in-town/>
- <https://crosscut.com/2018/08/carmen-best-confirmed-police-chief-historic-first>
- <https://komonews.com/news/local/best-unanimously-confirmed-as-seattle-police-chief>

Email Exchange between SA Minority Group and Seattle Executive Committee

On Aug 11, 2018 at 2:23 PM, Rebekah Liebermann <rhliebermann@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi SEC,
CC: City Committee

We've heard from the discussion at the SA staff meeting on August 10 that Kshama may potentially vote "yes" for Carmen Best's appointment to be the next Seattle police chief. We would like to hear your arguments on this question, but we strongly feel that if such an intention exists, a special City Committee, at least over phone, should be held before the vote is taken. That means the City Committee needs to meet on Sunday to allow all comrades to hear your thoughts and weigh in. Again, we would like to hear the SEC's thoughts on this question, but so far, we are opposed to such a "yes" vote.

Solidarity,
Rebekah, Manuel, Ramy, Philip, and Bryan for the Minority Group

On Aug 11, 2018 at 6:52PM, Ty Moore wrote:

From: Ty Moore
Date: Sat, Aug 11, 2018 at 6:52 PM
To: Rebekah Liebermann, City Committee
Subject: [CC] Re: City Committee discussion on Best appointment

Hi Rebekah, CC comrades,

As I think most comrades are aware, the EC and SEC has been discussing whether to vote "yes" on the Carmen Best appointment. At an EC meeting this morning, it was agreed we should go forward with a "yes" vote accompanied by a speech clearly warning that Best is not prepared to carry out the kinds of reforms needed.

This afternoon Rebekah sent the note out below indicating that the minority was asking for a CC meeting tomorrow to discuss the issue. While the SEC is open to having further discussion if it larger number of CC members want a meeting tomorrow, given the pressures to prepare the public statement, as well as a letter explaining the decision to the membership, the SEC prefers to have a full CC discussion to review the EC decision on Thursday rather than tomorrow. Obviously this is after the council vote, but there have been a number of discussions with many NC and CC members in recent days, as well as the International Secretariat. I reached out to Ramy this evening to try to try and organize a discussion with minority comrades to explain further the EC's thinking on the issue. Hopefully that can be organized tomorrow.

If more comrades feel a CC tomorrow night is needed, please let us know.

Comradely,
Ty

Letter from Teresa, Thomas J, Preston, Jacob S

To the Executive Committee of Socialist Alternative,

It has come to our attention that the Executive Committee, in discussion with the International Secretariat, is considering a yes vote on the confirmation of Carmen Best as the new Seattle police chief. We would like to strongly urge the EC to not take this course, as it is both incorrect in principle and disastrous in its immediate ramifications.

In principle, a vote to confirm Carmen Best is textbook opportunism. The council office is under immense pressure from progressive petty bourgeois organizations to take a class collaboration approach and adopt unprincipled stances. The class interests that those organizations represent are especially powerful to a party with elected officials because they form a disproportionate percentage of the electorate and can have a similarly outsized effect on election fundraising. In the absence of any black working class organization of repute in Seattle, the voice of the black community is the voice of the black petty bourgeoisie, who does not understand the police as their fundamental class enemy. Their demands are not class demands, for the abolition of the police. Their demands are for their property to have the same protection offered to the white petty bourgeoisie. This is how their answer to police oppression can be the appointment of a black police chief who is a veteran of the Seattle Police Department.

A working class answer to police oppression, however, requires more than Carmen Best brings to the table. She is not a strong candidate from a working class revolutionary left perspective. When we examine Best's behavior as a 'reformer' we see that she is dedicated mostly to legalistic reforms, firing police officers not for 'excessive use of force' but instead for 'misreporting use of force' and breaking other small time department policies. She appears to be fully dedicated to the enforcement of the law. A law which we, as marxists, know is the law of the rich.

Best's legalistic-liberal tendency is not a minor point. Even with the backing of the petty-bourgeois, she seems to have, at least on

examination of the relevant media, at best a tepid support from the black working class. While assertions have been made to the effect that 'the black working class sees Best's appointment as the result of victorious struggle against the status quo,' the articles being circulated by the party do not support this claim. Both Andre Taylor and Charleena Lyles's cousin, Katrina Johnson, express support insofar as they see Best as preferable to the other options, but neither has much else to say on her behalf. Indeed, Lyles' cousin expresses blatant skepticism of Best. In the article 'Communities of Color Respond to Police Chief Best's Nomination', she could only give the statement "Even though I don't see eye-to-eye on some of the things that she's done, I do think that out of the candidates that [Best] was the best one." This resigned statement was followed by Johnson's complaint about her disappointment that Best did not speak to her in better detail, offline, about her cousin's death. This is a wait-and-see approach, not strong support for Carmen Best from the working class.

We recognize that SA is perceived as a white organization without links to communities of color in Seattle, and that voting against the confirmation of Carmen Best will be used as fodder for those attacks. But we cannot abdicate our duty to make a principled stand against the armed wing of the bourgeois state. Bending to those pressures, especially before an election year -- this is nothing but craven opportunism.

Beyond principles and strategy, voting to confirm Carmen Best is a grave tactical error. Just five days after the vote, Joey Gibson has planned a Patriot Prayer rally in Seattle, where a sizeable counter-demonstration will be led by DSA and other left forces. Historically, the Seattle Police Department has forcefully repressed and assaulted anti-fascist demonstrations while giving leniency to violent right-wing provocateurs, and we have no reason to expect otherwise this time around.

In the past, the council office has been absolutely correct in calling out SPD and the mayor when heavily armed riot police were deployed to peaceful

actions. But we will not have the political authority to do that this time around if we vote to confirm the new police chief just days prior. Given that SPD will repress and assault left-wing protesters while protecting open fascists with “Pinochet Did Nothing Wrong” t-shirts, this would be an inexcusable betrayal of the working class.

Further, this vote will set back the general movement against police brutality in the United States. If it is not possible for even the Seattle socialists to vote against a liberal ‘reformist’ police chief what does that say to the silent but angry working class fraction in this moment of reaction? It seems to suggest that a return to business as usual is called for, that now is the time for retreat in general. This vote will have consequences that echo far beyond the narrow concerns of SA in Seattle and could heavily impact our ability to work in other parts of the nation.

Winning and taking up elected positions within the bourgeois state, as the CWI has done on many occasions, creates complications for us as revolutionaries. A uniform position of police abolition has often not been correct for our representatives in office, which has led to the common slander that the CWI protects cops. To build the working class movement from within institutions that will need to be broken up and destroyed, we need to continue adopting nuanced positions and make concessions to consciousness, but even a critical vote to confirm Carmen Best

does not continue this tradition in the strongest possible manner.

A vote against confirming Carmen Best does not constitute a sharp break with consciousness, which is pessimistic towards police reform even if Best is their preferred choice. We should not forget that Best is also the preferred choice of the Seattle Police Officers Guild, which has been a consistent enemy of police reform. A “no” vote will be weaponized by those we want to work with, and a “no” vote could cost us votes in 2019, but it is the correct thing to do. We have to be able to explain to the working class the role that the police play in their oppression, and we cannot do that while confirming any police chief who is not committed to ending policing as we know it.

In solidarity,

Teresa Jimenez, Finance Organizer - Ravenna Branch

Thomas Jones - UDistrict Branch

Preston Sahabu - UDistrict Branch

Jacob Smith, Paper Organizer - UW Branch

Additional Signatories (agrees in spirit)

Stuart Strader

Understanding Our Vote on Carmen Best

Letter to the National Committee and BC members from the Executive Committee 8/13/18

This is an internal document that could complicate our work in Seattle if it was made public. Please distribute this to active SA members as needed while keeping in mind these security considerations.

Following a series of discussions, the EC met Saturday to resolve a complicated tactical decision over how to vote in Monday's Seattle City Council nomination of Carmen Best for police chief. Best is a black woman, a 26-year veteran of the SPD, viewed as a reformer with long connections in the black community. She emerged as the nominee as a result of uproar from black community leaders and anti-police brutality activists against a racist attempt by the Mayor and establishment to push her aside.

After careful consideration of all sides of this issues, considering all options and through collective discussion with the Executive Committee, the International Secretariat (the IS is elected leadership of the CWI), many National Committee and Seattle CC members - and crucially a number of left allies and black leaders in Seattle - we feel confident that the best tactic is to vote "yes." This must be combined with a speech by Kshama before she votes warning about Best's limitations, appealing to step up the fightback against racist policing, and pointing towards to need for an alternative to the capitalist system.

How to vote on this is a tactical question, not a question of principle. It is a question of how we can most effectively win broader support for our program on the police, and how a "no" or "yes" vote will actually be understood - not simply how we intend it to be understood. While a "no" vote on a police chief would be our strongly preferred and default position, it is clear that in the context of either silence or a near unanimous support for Best in the African American community - including among activists fighting police brutality - a "no" vote would not be seen, in the first place, as a clear stand against police racism and repression. For much of the black working class - and a large section of activists fighting police racism - a "no" vote would be seen as dogmatically refusing to

stand with black and brown communities in their attempt to push back against racism in the establishment and police.

We should not be afraid to stand against the tide when this helps us win over a more conscious minority. But Marxists should also not be afraid to make tactical concessions to working class consciousness when this helps us maintain the cohesion of the movement around wider goals and to win the ear of the working class to communicate our wider program. In our fight for \$15 in Seattle, for example, we decided a concession to small business (a phase-in) was needed, given the confusion and positive illusions in small business held by most working class people. This concession was not designed to win over small business. It was to deny our enemies the ability to use workers' confused consciousness to drive a wedge between ourselves and sections of the class, and to maintain the cohesion of the movement to win \$15 and build support for our wider program. There are of course limits in any comparison, but this example helps illustrate the Marxist method we feel needs to be applied to the Best vote.

Background on Best's Appointment

In May, the process to select Seattle's new chief of police blew up into a very public controversy. In a process driven by Mayor Durken, councilmember Lorena Gonzalez, and former council president Tim Burgess, the three finalists announced for the new chief of police didn't include Best. Black community leaders, including the key local figures of the fight against police racism and violence, organized a public outcry against the exclusion of Carmen Best. Referring to the exclusion of Carmen Best, Nikkita Oliver said "this racist mess will not stand."

Facing huge pressure and scandalized by a discriminatory process with a total lack of transparency, Mayor Durken did an abrupt about-face and announced that she was nominating Best as the new chief, pending

confirmation from City Council. What is clear is that, out of this process, the overwhelming feeling among politically conscious sections of the black community and beyond is that Best's nomination is the product of their fight against racism in the SPD and the political establishment. This is a significant difference with the way the process unfolded with the previous police chief Kathleen O'Toole, who was also celebrated as a reformer, and whom we voted against.

Black clergy, community leaders, and even many leading voices against police violence and racism like Andre Taylor (brother of Che Taylor whose racist killing by the SPD sparked protests) are enthusiastic backers of Best. Even those who share our analysis of the police and skepticism toward Best have decided not to make any public criticisms of Best because of the consciousness of black workers around this issue.

Voting yes does not mean we will join in the celebrations of the establishment. Her appointment will not solve anything for black workers and youth and we will make our warnings known. At the same time, we are prepared to make a concession to support the aspirations of an oppressed section of Seattle in order to fight shoulder to shoulder with them through all the experiences that will be needed to help clarify the need for socialist policies. While Best has attempted to claim the mantle of a reformer, saying her number one priority is rebuilding trust and relations with the community, we should have no illusions that she represents a serious break from the status quo of institutional racism or the repressive role of the police in capitalist society. The police union (SPOG) also weighed into the public debate, backing Best as a 26-year veteran of the SPD who had risen through the ranks, underscoring our perspective that Best is not at this stage prepared to go beyond largely symbolic reform measures.

However, in a display of independence from SPOG, in July Best fired two police officers for using deadly force in a simple car theft incident. After the prosecutors refused to press charges on the officers, SPOG is now demanding Best reinstate the officers. Best also has instituted an anti-racist training program for police, bringing in the group Youth Undoing Institutional Racism, which emerged out of the wider BLM movement, helped initiate the No New Youth Jail struggle, and is seen

as a fighting, movement-based group. We should have no illusions that these gestures represent a meaningful break with the status quo, but it helps to understand the support behind Best.

How Our Vote Will be Understood

Our preferred position would of course be to vote "no," as we correctly did against the previous chief O'Toole in 2014 despite significant illusions in her promises for reform. But even with the O'Toole appointment, the EC and SEC then did not treat the question of voting "no" as an automatic thing or a question of principle. We took a meticulous approach to considering how our vote and speech would be understood. This situation has been more complicated and required quite a serious consideration.

In the last couple weeks, we went through a systematic process of discussion with our allies on the left and in the black community, from faith and civil rights organizations to former Black Panthers. Even with the warnings from leaders in the black community about how this would be received, we attempted to build the political basis for a "no" vote. We asked those leaders that shared our criticisms of Best to publically back us if Kshama voted "no," which would have been vital to ensure our reasons for voting "no" would be understood by at least a significant radical minority. However, given the confusion and strength of the mood for Best, no one committed to defend a "no" vote or even to raise concerns publicly about Best.

Through this process it became clear that a "no" vote would be interpreted by key sections of the black working class and activist layers as a dogmatic refusal to stand in solidarity the democratic demands of the community, with our attempt to communicate a principled opposition against police racism and repression deeply obscured.

Nikkita Oliver and those around her have also been largely silent. After loudly organizing to fight Best's exclusion from the nomination process, since the Mayor's reversal Nikkita put out one tweet saying that, "as an abolitionist" she supports none of the options for chief, but included no specific criticism of Best and she has been silent since. Unlike with Kathleen O'Toole, there has been virtually no public criticism of Best from

movement activists, while many black leaders have painted her nomination as a victory of the movement. Importantly, in this concrete situation, support for Best in the black community reflects a wider mood to fight against the whole legacy of qualified black and brown people – and women of color especially – being discriminated against and passed over. But as always working class consciousness is contradictory and we act in a way that doesn't cut us off but pushes forward the most progressive, fighting instincts.

For of those who back Best's nomination, however, it doesn't automatically follow that there are real hopes she can really change things, that the structural racism embedded in the criminal justice system will be curbed on her watch, or that we shouldn't tomorrow begin to fight Best when the SPD acts against working class and oppressed communities. Our position is to side with the black and brown community both in their anger at the establishment's handling of this process and against police racism, and to link our vote to a call to action to continue the fight. The best way to do that is to vote "yes" combined with clear warnings in a sharp statement.

Perspectives and Consciousness

While Best may enjoy a more sustained honeymoon than O'Toole did, we should fully expect that new outrages by the SPD will expose Best's limitations and her support in the black community and more widely will wane. For our ultra-left critics, this will be seen as confirmation that a "yes" vote was a "betrayal." However, the rigid thinking of many on the left is not mirrored in the consciousness of most working people, including most of the black working class. For wider layers, there is no contradiction in Kshama siding with the democratic demands of the black community in her vote while clearly warning of Best's limitations and the need to step up the struggle. And unlike the out-of-touch formal logic of the ultra-lefts, most working people will not see a contradiction when, the next time SPD engages in racist violence or political repression, SA and Kshama sharply criticise and protest Chief Best.

On the other hand, voting "no" on Best risks undermining our authority and legitimacy among black workers -- even many who may generally

agree that the capitalist state is built upon racism and can't be reformed. A backlash from the black community today would undermine our ability in the future to get an ear for our program or action proposals. Even when events would appear to many on the far left to "vindicate" our "no" vote, it is far from automatic that wider layers would see it this way, especially among black and brown workers and activists who felt we'd dogmatically snubbed them previously.

Given that we are not in a position to effect the outcome (all other eight council members will be voting "yes"), then the central question is how Kshama's vote and speech will be interpreted, and how it will prepare the ground for winning over wider layers to our program in the future. With no visible points of support for a "no" vote, this course would be exploited by our enemies in the establishment and could even be cast by many of our allies (Andre Taylor, etc) as snubbing the movement to fight racism in the police and establishment. In this context, a "yes" vote combined with a sharp statement against racist policing and for our socialist ideas is the best way to position ourselves for building future struggles against the SPD and winning wider layers to our program.

As it became clear in the last week that no public support existed for a "no" vote, on Saturday the EC met to take a final decision. We agreed that however Kshama voted on Monday there would be widespread confusion over what it represented, but that a "yes" vote will likely do less damage to our longer-term ability to win over the black working class (and beyond) to our ideas than a "no" vote would. Given that we are not in a position to effect the outcome (all other eight council members will be voting "yes"yes), then the central question is how Kshama's vote and speech will be interpreted, and how it will prepare the ground for winning over wider layers to our program in the future.

The vote would be combined with a clear speech from Kshama skillfully outlining our disagreements with Best, warning that her lack of commitment to serious reforms (much less a socialist program) means that new racist police killings are inevitable, and that only a movement from below will achieve the changes demanded by the community. We will explain our "yes" vote by referencing the racist process led by the Mayor behind closed doors that initially passed over Best,

and the broad community outcry against it, and that despite our warnings we will not stand in the way of the democratic will of the wider movement including important sections of the more conscious

black working class. We will point toward the need for a unified movement demanding accountability and fundamental changes in police policy.

Kshama's Speech to City Council on the Carmen Best Appointment

August 13, 2018

Today's police chief appointment takes place in the context of longstanding and deep-seated problems of racist policing and excessive use of force.

These are not problems of a few "bad apples". There are deep systemic problems here and Seattle, alongside a nationwide epidemic. We see a mass incarceration system rooted in institutionalized racism, which locks up black and brown, working class and LGBTQ people, at highly disproportionate rates.

SPD has a long record of using excessive force, including the brutal killing of John T. Williams. This resulted in a 2012 federal consent decree. Later it led to the appointment of a new Police Chief, Kathleen O'Toole, in June of 2014.

At the time O'Toole was appointed, there were high expectations among many in the community. Every councilmember except for myself voted for O'Toole.

At that time, I warned that O'Toole was not prepared to carry out the kind of fundamental change needed.

Unfortunately, these warnings were borne out by subsequent events.

We saw excessive use of force against Black Lives Matter protesters. We saw the killings of Che Taylor and Charleena Lyles. We saw O'Toole and former mayor Murray deploy SPD officers to the SeaTac airport, effectively defending Donald Trump's racist Muslim Travel Ban against 5,000 peaceful protesters.

I am not convinced that Chief Best is prepared to carry out the kind of fundamental transformation that is needed, as I was not convinced with O'Toole, and I was certainly not convinced by any of the other finalists for this position.

I was stunned by the disgraceful appointment process that was carried out under Mayor Durkan. Ironically, the Mayor's process of shortlisting candidates itself became an infamous example of

the systemic issues faced by black and brown people.

I agree with Nikkita Oliver, and others who called out that process for its undemocratic and racist elimination of Best from the finalists, and who joined in the public outcry and organizing which forced Mayor Durkan to include her.

This anger at the selection process flows from long-standing calls from so many in our community for fundamental changes in the SPD to address the institutional racism and endemic violence. Our starting point is to clearly and openly acknowledge the severity of the ongoing problems of racial bias and excessive use of force in Seattle.

I asked Carmen Best in last week's committee meeting, if she herself acknowledged them. Unfortunately, she was not prepared to agree. I finally asked her for a simple "yes or no" answer, and she said refused, saying it was, quote: "so much more complex than that."

In the committee meeting, I asked interim Chief Best about the incident at SeaTac airport... she responded, quote: "we have mutual aid agreements" unquote and that quote "when it comes to the issue at hand, whatever that issue is, we can't take a position." unquote

"Mutual aid" sounds nice and neutral. But what happened at SeaTac was not nice or neutral.

I personally witnessed what took place: pepper spray in the eyes of completely peaceful protesters, the forceful pushing of bicycles in peoples faces. I saw one woman's hair was yanked by a police officer. People were physically forced out of the terminal, one intimidating step at a time.

I think this gets at something very important about what our movement is up against and the nature of the police and the state under capitalism.

This is not a case of good and bad apples - the whole tree is rotten. The police and the state under capitalism enforce the interests of the billionaire class, and do so with far more brutal and bloody force than what happened that day at the airport.

But even under capitalism there are things that could be done immediately by Chief Best to mitigate some of the worst abuses of this system, if she were prepared to.

One of the most important changes our movement advocates for is to implement a democratically elected community oversight board, with full powers over the police, including over department policy, while having the ability to subpoena officers. Best has NOT advocated for this.

Best has said that she is against the “criminalization of homelessness”. But I have not heard any rejection of homeless sweeps. That is truly unfortunate, because it’s clear that Mayor Durkan is preparing to further expand this totally inhumane policy.

I agree with Nikkita Oliver, who said. Quote: “I heard from the finalists at a meeting Wednesday night at Not This Time. They all essentially said the same thing. They will fire racist police. They will put more training and tools in police officers hands. They will do implicit bias training. They will involve community. None of what any candidate said is new. We have literally heard all of this before and it plays out in the exact same way every time. Black and brown ppl over policed and murdered. I want to hear someone talk boldly about the roots of policing and how they intend to uproot them.” Unquote.

However, while I know this may surprise many, I will be voting “yes” today on Best’s nomination. As I’m sure is already clear from my comments, my “yes” vote does not represent a vote of confidence that the fundamental system changes will be carried out.

What my vote does represent is a vote of solidarity with my black and brown fellow community members who, overwhelmingly, have urged me to not stand in the way of Best’s appointment. Over the last two weeks, I have consulted a broad range of allies in the struggle against racism and police repression. Many of them share my skepticism.

At the same time, without the movement activists standing up and protesting the secretive and racist selection process which initially sidelined Best, we would be having a very different conversation today. I can understand the feeling of many in the African American community in Seattle who see Best’s appointment as the city’s first permanent black chief, against the initial resistance of the

establishment, as a blow against the status quo and against the racist record of this department.

My vote today is a vote of solidarity and unity with the movement that forced the Mayor to reverse herself, and it is also an appeal to stay united in stepping up the struggle.

I hope others who back Best’s appointment will join me in making absolutely clear that, if anything, the movement’s victory over the Mayor’s selection process – the fight that got us here today – should give everyone confidence in our power to win far more important and fundamental changes. It will require organizing and action far beyond what Chief Best will be prepared to support.

In voting “yes” today, I do so with this clear warning to our community and to our movement: We should in no way view this appointment with any illusions that it will lead to fundamental change.

Our movements will be the key to holding the Seattle police accountable. We will need to be organized and determined and relentless in our struggle.

We will need to continue to fight against youth incarceration and the New Youth Jail. We will need to fight for a democratically elected community oversight board with full powers over the police. We will need to fight to tax big business and the wealthy to fully fund quality K-12 public schools, and free college and vocational education, for a major expansion of youth jobs programs to provide a future for young people under this broken system and to address the poverty and massive inequality that are at the roots of crime.

The fight against the North Seattle Police Precinct, or police bunker, is an inspiring example of what will be needed. Led by anti-police brutality activists, that fight brought together a large coalition, calling itself “Block the Bunker,” and built unity against the construction of this \$160 million, bomb-proof facility, and argued instead for that money to be spent on social needs: on affordable housing, homelessness services, youth jobs. The movement organized with determination and faced down the whole Seattle establishment, and ultimately we won – at least for now. And a part of that coalition went on to fight for that money to be used to build 1,000 homes instead, to keep the bunker permanently blocked. We did not

win everything we fought for, but scored a huge victory in winning \$29 million for affordable housing.

We will have to continue the fight against the bunker - because it's clear the establishment is itching to go forward with it.

We will have to continue our fight for justice for Che Taylor and Charleena Lyle's families. We will

continue the fight for an end to the system of mass incarceration, locally, nationally, globally. We will win change through building powerful mass movements, not by placing our faith in any part of the state, the police, or the political establishment. And we will have to fight for an alternative to capitalism, which has racism, misogyny, homophobia and violence built into its core.

Appendix

The Carmen Best Vote: My Thoughts

On September 13, Ty sent this contribution to the Seattle SA Membership

By Eljeer Hawkins, National Committee Member and Harlem/Bronx Branch Organizer

"Without a correct strategy, the victory is impossible. But even the most correct strategy cannot give the victory under unfavorable objective conditions." - Leon Trotsky

Comrades,

Our yes vote on the new police chief of the Seattle Police Department (SPD), Carmen Best, wasn't a vote taken with any pleasure.

As I put forward in my resolution to the NC, while we strongly prefer to vote against police chief appointments and other representatives of the state apparatus, we recognize that the vote on Carmen Best was not a matter of principle but a tactical question. And given the consciousness in the working class and black community in Seattle as we were able to assess and understand it, the outrage over the racist appointment process, and the weaknesses of the Seattle left, I feel the tactics of the Seattle EC and national EC on the Carmen Best vote were broadly correct.

Here are my further thoughts on the Carmen Best vote.

Consciousness and the Black community

The Black community is not a monolith; it has different experiences and struggles under this corrosive system. I do believe in order to understand the discussion and debate in front of us; we should examine how we got here. To be clear, this will not be a full analysis, but a snapshot of why I think the tactic of voting yes and issuing a sharp statement was correct and why Kshama's speech was crucial in the current situation for planting seeds and positioning us correctly to play a role in future battles against racism and law

enforcement violence by the SPD, and develop stronger roots in the black community.

We are living in a period of profound crisis of the system, its institutions, and leadership. A new generation is coming into political consciousness through the crisis of capitalism. The birth of Black Lives Matter (BLM) during former President Obama's second term challenged the public relations Madison Avenue "post-racial" America mantra highlighting the deep fissures of racism and law enforcement violence in the United States. BLM became and still remains a life-affirming banner for millions in this country and around the world.

BLM's rise took place during the highest expression of the ascendancy of the black mis-leadership class with the first black President of the United States and countless black faces in high places within the system. The power of BLM is undeniable as it became the rallying cry for young people even more so for black and brown youth carrying the brunt of systematic oppression on a daily basis. The political and social character of BLM is different in every city and state across the country, its failure in my viewpoint is its inability to sink deep organizing roots in the black working class, poor and middle class and present demands that would broaden out the struggle to not only challenge law enforcement violence but capitalism.

The presidency of Trump and the growth of the far right, despite being small in total numbers and internal contradictions, has seen BLM pushed back a bit. Horrific events like more law enforcement killings, racist vigilante violence, and Trump being in the White House will ignite people to organize and protest. The question for me is how we can build a sustaining mass movement against racial and law enforcement violence that encompasses more black workers and youth?

This is the 50th anniversary of the revolutionary year, 1968. I don't have the time or space to cover all of the significant political and social events that defined an explosive year of struggle at home and

abroad. I will remind you that that was the year of the public assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Hoover's escalation of the Cointelpro program against the radical black freedom movement and its activists. The counter revolution by big business against the black freedom movement, socialism, and social movements as a whole in the 1960s and 70s combined with the movement's theoretical and organizational flaws facilitated the rise of the black mis-leadership class. There was a drawing back of the radical consciousness in the black community over the years. Even segments in the Black political establishment and community supported reactionary policies like the War on Drugs and Bill Clinton's law and order doctrine, that has destroyed working class communities of color for the past 40 years.

What took up the vacuum after the defeats of the 60s and 70s was a politics rooted in N.G.O/Democratic Party, academic/corporate identity politics, business unionism of the labor movement, and postmodernism. Many of the leading black activists within BLM were politically educated under that political paradigm. Despite today's current explosive political radicalization it is still at a low level and embryonic stage of development. Within the black community consciousness and grassroots organizing is hugely heterogeneous. Corporate Democratic Party politics remains an anchor in the community coupled with the emergence of black nationalism, grassroots identity politics or an open disregard for politics as a whole alongside a growing curiosity around socialist ideas and organizing.

Our organization and international (CWI) strives to understand the mood and consciousness of the working class as it is in order to develop our action program and demands in the class struggle to assist in raising consciousness. The Carmen Best vote was grounded in our attempt to understand and assess the broader consciousness of the black working class, the state of BLM and how Carmen Best is viewed in the black community.

Kshama's Speech: A Forewarning of the Crisis Ahead

"My vote today is a vote of solidarity and unity with the movement that forced the Mayor to reverse herself, and it is also an appeal to stay united in stepping up the

struggle. In voting "yes" today, I do so with this clear warning to our community and to our movement: We should in no way view this appointment with any illusions that it will lead to fundamental change." -Kshama's speech to the City Council on the Carmen Best appointment, 8/13/18.

Since the election victory of Socialist Alternative and Kshama Sawant in 2013, we have been at the forefront of some of the major battles for economic, racial and social justice for working people, poor and most oppressed in Seattle. I would like to remind comrades, Kshama is being sued by two former law enforcement officers for slander because of our uncompromising defense of Black Lives Matter and denouncing the killing of Che Taylor by law enforcement.

Kshama's speech on 8/13 in which I played a small role in crafting with other comrades, had to be a forewarning of the crisis ahead, sympathetic to the consciousness and mood of the black working class, highlight the real character of law enforcement under capitalism and how we must continue the struggle to eradicate racism and capitalism. The speech had to stand in contrast to the celebratory mood of the day and invoke the policing history of SPD in the most vulnerable communities in Seattle.

The selection and appointment of Carmen Best were drowned in a controversy that we had to address as it was perceived by the black community as a slap in the face after Best wasn't included in the original pool of possible candidates by Mayor Durkan. Kshama quoted Nikkita Oliver at length, the BLM activist, spoken word artist and former independent mayoral candidate, about the flawed and racist selection process. It was that outcry by the black community and broader forces within law enforcement that forced Mayor Durkan to reverse course and put Best at the top of the list. The Carmen Best appointment as the first black female SPD chief was akin to the Obama moment of 2009 in my viewpoint. We disagree with corporate identity politics and glass ceiling arguments, but we must take into account what is the perception and consciousness of the working class and particularly the black working class after the process was flawed in the eyes of many and how events unfolded. Kshama makes this point, *"Over the last two weeks, I have consulted a broad range of allies in the struggle against racism and police repression. Many of them share my skepticism... At the same time, without the movement activists standing up*

and protesting the secretive and racist selection process which initially sidelined Best, we would be having a very different conversation today. I can understand the feeling of many in the African American community in Seattle who see Best's appointment as the city's first permanent black chief, against the initial resistance of the establishment, as a blow against the status quo and against the racist record of this department."

The economic crisis, Occupy movement, and BLM helped to wipe away the shine off of the Obama presidency for thousands of young people who believed he would change the politics of American capitalism and imperialism, although the election of Trump has allowed for a certain mythological rehabilitation of Obama. Yet, the Obama moment, capitalist crisis and Trump presidency have led us to this current surge of social struggle and interest in socialist ideas.

It will be through events, social struggle and the consistent active participation of the genuine forces of Marxism in the class struggle, that the working class can raise their consciousness and understanding about the role of the police, Carmen Best, SPD, Amazon and political establishment as stalwart defenders of racism and capitalism. The building and sustainability of our movement against law enforcement violence, institutional racism, and economic terrorism are crucial.

The speech raised the question of how does our movement make the SPD accountable to the working class and address the legacy of racism and economic exploitation in the emerald city. Kshama correctly states, *"We will need to continue to fight against youth incarceration and the New Youth Jail. We will need to fight for a democratically elected community oversight board with full powers over the police. We will need to fight to tax big business and the wealthy to fully fund quality K-12 public schools, and free college and vocational education, for a major expansion of youth jobs programs to provide a future for young people under this broken system and to address the poverty and massive inequality that are at the roots of crime...Led by anti-police brutality activists, that fight brought together a large coalition,*

calling itself "Block the Bunker," and built unity against the construction of this \$160 million, bomb-proof facility, and argued instead for that money to be spent on social needs: on affordable housing, homelessness services, youth jobs...We did not win everything we fought for but scored a huge victory in winning \$29 million for affordable housing."

Our yes vote was a tactical decision of the highest order, made with a conscious recognition that our enemies would seek to use our position as a wedge between us and the black working class. Our speech was a rallying cry to stay focus and prepare for upcoming battles. Kshama's speech based on events has the potential to be two steps forward.

Carmen Best will have a temporary honeymoon period until the next horrific event of law enforcement violence, she will be tested, and we will be there. As a Marxist organization, our starting point is the not criticism of the "left" or social media "Marxist" commentary, but the living breathing class struggle, the consciousness, potential power and fighting capacity of the working class. We must aim to triple our efforts to make inroads into the small black community in Seattle; I firmly believe Seattle is a tinderbox around the issues of racism, law enforcement violence on top of the deep levels of income inequality and poverty.

As Leon Trotsky correctly stated during meetings with C.L.R James and Socialist Workers Party (SWP) members in Coyoacan, Mexico 1939 about the consciousness, struggle of black workers against racism and capitalism, the inability of the SWP to make inroads among the black working class, *"If it happens that we in SWP are not able to find the road to this stratum, then we are not worthy at all. The permanent revolution and all the rest would be only a lie."* - Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, p.62

Ultimately comrades, events, and the working class will be the grand arbiter of the correctness of our analysis, program, and strategy.