

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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FIIGHT

RACISM, SEXISM & CLIMATE CRISIS

FOR A SOCIALIST FUTURE

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WHAT WE STAND FOR

Fighting for the 99%

- ✦ Raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour, as a step toward a living wage for all.
- ✦ Free, high quality public education for all from pre-school through college. Full funding for schools to dramatically lower student-teacher ratios. Stop the focus on high stakes testing and the drive to privatize public education.
- ✦ Free, high quality health care for all. Replace the failed for-profit insurance companies with a publicly funded single-payer system as a step towards fully socialized medicine.
- ✦ No budget cuts to education and social services! Full funding for all community needs. A major increase in taxes on the rich and big business, not working people.
- ✦ Create living-wage union jobs for all the unemployed through public works programs to develop mass transit, renewable energy, infrastructure, healthcare, education, and affordable housing.
- ✦ For rent control combined with massive public investment in affordable housing.
- ✦ A guaranteed decent pension for all. No cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid!
- ✦ A minimum guaranteed weekly income of \$600/week for the unemployed, disabled, stay-at-home parents, the elderly, and others unable to work.
- ✦ Repeal all anti-union laws like Taft-Hartley. For democratic unions run by the rank-and-file to fight for better pay, working conditions, and social services. Full-time union officials should be regularly elected and receive the average wage of those they represent.
- ✦ No more layoffs! Take bankrupt and failing companies into public ownership.
- ✦ Break the power of Wall Street! For public ownership and democratic control of the major banks.
- ✦ Shorten the workweek with no loss in pay and benefits; share out the work with the unemployed and create new jobs.

Environmental Sustainability

- ✦ Fight climate change. Massive public investment in renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies to rapidly replace fossil fuels.
- ✦ A major expansion of public transportation to provide low fare, high-speed, and accessible transit.
- ✦ Democratic public ownership of the big energy companies, retooling them for socially necessary green production. A "Just Transition" for all workers in polluting industries with guaranteed re-training and new living-wage jobs.

Equal Rights for All

- ✦ Fight discrimination based on race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, and all other forms of prejudice. Equal pay for equal work.
- ✦ Black Lives Matter! Build a mass movement against police brutality and the institutional

racism of the criminal justice system. Invest in rehabilitation, job training, and living-wage jobs, not prisons! Abolish the death penalty.

- ✦ Defend immigrant rights! Immediate, unconditional legalization and equal rights for all undocumented immigrants.
- ✦ Fight sexual harassment, violence against women, and all forms of sexism.
- ✦ Defend a woman's right to choose whether and when to have children. For a publicly funded, single-payer health care system with free reproductive services, including all forms of birth control and safe, accessible abortions. Comprehensive sex education. At least 12 weeks of paid family leave for all. For universal, high quality, affordable and publicly run child care.
- ✦ Fight discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ community, and all forms of homophobia and transphobia.

Money for Jobs and Education, Not War

- ✦ End the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. Bring all the troops home now!
- ✦ Slash the military budget. No drones. Shut down Guantanamo.
- ✦ Repeal the Patriot Act, NDAA, and all other attacks on democratic rights.

Break with the Two Parties of Big Business

- ✦ For a mass workers party drawing together workers, young people and activists from environmental, civil rights, and women's campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the corporate parties.
- ✦ Unions and other social movement organizations should stop funding and supporting the Democratic and Republican Parties and instead organize independent left-wing, anti-corporate candidates and coalitions as a first step toward building a workers' party.

Socialism and Internationalism

- ✦ Capitalism produces poverty, inequality, environmental destruction, and war. We need an international struggle against this failed system. No to corporate "free trade" agreements, which mean job losses and a race to the bottom for workers and the environment.
- ✦ Solidarity with the struggles of workers and oppressed peoples internationally: An injury to one is an injury to all.
- ✦ Take into public ownership the top 500 corporations and banks that dominate the U.S. economy. Run them under the democratic management of elected representatives of the workers and the broader public. Compensation to be paid on the basis of proven need to small investors, not millionaires.
- ✦ A democratic socialist plan for the economy based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people and the environment. For a socialist United States and a socialist world. ✦

WHY I AM A SOCIALIST

Des Conrads Barista Seattle, WA



Growing up in Utah made things clear to me from a young age that our society wasn't organized particularly well. All the LGBTQ people I knew were dealt bad hands, and as I moved to other rural areas such as Alaska and the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State, I watched myself and my peer group fall prey to sexual violence, trauma, and drug abuse. Some people have to "lose" in capitalism, and it was clear to me early I had been thrown into the "loser" pile. The inherent oppression is something you feel in your gut.

It's just very obvious to me that society should be organized in a more equitable way. The lessons are so blunt in Seattle. Everyone always told me I should move here because we're this LGBTQ-friendly town but I get here and everyone has a boot over their head. Yeah, there's less hate, but it's even harder to maintain a quality standard of living or even pay rent. It's this "progressive utopia" but we have an enormous homeless crisis. Last summer the smoke from a forest fire clogged the sky for a week and on some days you couldn't really see the sun. I believe most people understand something has gone quite wrong and that's why I've decided to spend my time organizing and helping other people draw out those subconscious conclusions.

But it does require a fundamental change. Many people have suggested to me that if

people just, you know, "understood" trans people we'd be better off, but no amount of understanding makes the necessary health care cost less. It requires fighting for Medicare for All, which requires understanding why insurance companies reap in massive profits, which should lead you to the conclusion that this profit motive probably should just be thrown away all together.

There's a trillion good ideas we could pursue rather than all this nonsense and you should really sit down and let yourself day-dream and let them unfurl. If you grabbed a random array of ten or so working people and asked them to make a better model than what Jeff Bezos is up to I think we'd realize we're all capable of something wonderful.

I am a socialist because when I walk outside I observe that humanity is very cool but it's being fettered by some older, bad ideas we could overcome through struggle. We could all just be having a much better time than all of this. ✦

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Trump Appointment Threatens Roe v Wade

Stop the Drive to Push Supreme Court Further Right

Keely Mullen

A chill went down the spines of millions of Americans, women in particular, when Anthony Kennedy announced his resignation from the Supreme Court in June. This acute fear is due to the prospect of another seat on the Supreme Court being handed to a Trump appointee. Kennedy was seen as the “swing vote” on the Court, and the appointment of a conservative Justice in his stead would more firmly push the Court further to the right. In particular it would represent a direct threat to set back women’s rights given Trump’s deal with the Christian Right to dismantle Roe v. Wade.

Last month Donald Trump announced his pick to replace Kennedy: Federal Judge Brett Kavanaugh. Kavanaugh’s conservative record is entirely unsurprising and, if he is appointed, he threatens to take the Court even further to the right. While Kavanaugh poses a substantial threat to Roe v. Wade specifically, he also represents the general threat of more anti-LGBTQ, anti-labor, and pro-corporate decisions being taken in the coming years. While there is a laundry list of decisions Kavanaugh has taken as a judge that have been bad for working and oppressed people, he has recently come under fire for a particularly brutal position he took in 2014.

That year he wrote the dissenting opinion in a case involving the death of a SeaWorld employee who was drowned on the job. In his dissent he claims that responsibility for her on-the-job death did not lie with her employer but rather with her for not assuming that the job carried a life-threatening risk. If taken to its logical conclusion, Kavanaugh’s dissent means that bosses bear absolutely no responsibility for conditions faced by their employees.

Kavanaugh’s record is clearly abysmal and he poses a real threat. The right wing, including the Federalist Society, have been developing of reliable right wing judges for years. This is how Trump got his famous list of possible Supreme Court appointees. However we should be clear that the Court before



Trump nominated conservative Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court.

Kavanaugh was far from a beacon of progressivism. Even with Kennedy, the Court has taken a whole series of reactionary decisions in recent years. The 2009 Citizens United decision, in which Kennedy wrote the majority opinion, gave corporations the right to contribute endless cash to political campaigns. Recently the Court ruled that a cake shop owner in Colorado had the right to refuse service to a same-sex couple, a decision that was supported by Obama appointee Elena Kagan. And just this year the Court handed down a major blow to public sector unions in the Janus decision.

But this in no way diminishes the point that Kavanaugh on the Court represents a ramping up of conservatism and his appointment should be fought to the end. With 49 Senators, the Democrats need to find only one dissenting Republican to block Kavanaugh, yet despite Chuck Schumer’s stated intent of fighting this nomination “with everything I’ve got,” he appears to already be backing down.

What Would it Take to Defeat Kavanaugh?

While the Democratic Party leadership has been widely critical of Kavanaugh, this has not translated into any real struggle to prevent his appointment. They initially planned

to boycott individual meetings with the appointee yet are now backtracking and intend to meet with him later this month. This is just one example of their thoroughly toothless approach. With a handful of Democratic Senators up for re-election in states that went handily to Trump, they fear that voting against Kavanaugh’s appointment would cost them seats.

The strategy of the party leadership in the face of this has been to encourage these Democrats to stay quiet as long as possible. This approach is based on the assumption that only “centrist” Democrats can win in “red” states. Yet Bernie Sanders’ crushed Hillary Clinton in “red states” like West Virginia in the 2016 primary. In Missouri, where Claire McCaskill faces a tough re-election, voters recently rejected an anti-labor “right to work” law by a 2 to 1 margin. If the Democrats were to show real leadership and take bold steps to fight the appointment of such a starkly anti-labor, anti-woman nominee — its possible they would be better positioned to win re-election in states that went to Trump.

The Democrats should link up with major unions and women’s rights organizations and call for demonstrations against Kavanaugh’s appointment. One positive indication in the fight to prevent

Kavanaugh’s appointment is the 10-city “Rise Up for Roe” tour organized by Planned Parenthood and NARAL Pro-Choice. This is a good first step and these organizations should build on this by organizing demonstrations out of each meeting they host. The Women’s March could join them in this and call for marches and rallies in major cities across the country. They should aim to organize high profile occupations of the offices of key Senators who have not yet committed to voting against the appointment.

Only by ramping up mass resistance will there be any chance of defeating Kavanaugh’s appointment. However until this point there has not been a serious or coordinated effort by the Democratic Party. If Kavanaugh is appointed without a real fight it would be a disgrace and a betrayal. This would be another chapter in the Democrats failure to seriously resist Trump’s attacks.

Pushing Back Against a Conservative Court

While Kavanaugh on the Court does pose a real danger, many in the establishment and mainstream media are taking a fatalistic approach, assuming that his appointment will lock the Court into a reactionary majority for a generation. However that outlook

entirely leaves out the pressure of social movements which have historically forced the hand of even the most conservative Courts and administrations.

The Burger Court of the ‘70s was full of conservative Nixon appointees and many feared that they would roll back landmark cases like Brown v. Board of Education. However, the tide went in quite a different direction and it was under the Burger Court that Roe v. Wade was passed. Was this because the nine Justices had a dramatic change of heart? Of course not. It was the immense pressure placed on the court by the women’s and youth movements that forced the Court to take bold steps forward.

Beyond the Court

The Supreme Court as an institution is designed to act as a check on the democratic will of the people expressed in Congress. In reality, it is an unelected body which is there to defend the long term interests of the ruling class. Defending those interests, however, means that at times they make concessions in the face major shifts in society over the heads of capitalist politicians.

This was the case with the recent ruling legalizing same-sex marriage across the country. Having Justices on the Court who have made a commitment to defending women’s rights, union rights, the rights of LGBTQ people and people of color can make winning temporary victories easier. However, that by itself is no guarantee that the Court will act in the interests of working people.

As the struggles around Roe v. Wade and Brown v. Board of Education demonstrated, it is only with a decisive movement of ordinary people committed to disrupting business as usual that the Supreme Court is forced to make concessions. In challenging the appointment of Brett Kavanaugh and in fighting for broader gains in the coming years, we can look to history for proof that what is ultimately needed is a decisive, coordinated, and united movement of working and oppressed people willing to stop at nothing in fighting for our rights. ☪

Trump's Trade War: What's the Socialist Alternative?

Tony Wilsdon

The past couple months have seen the unfolding of Trump's promise to use tariffs as a weapon to make the U.S. "great again." What will be the consequence of these policies? More importantly, will they help turn around the U.S. economy for working people? If not, what policies are needed?

Trump started with tariffs on imports of vacuum cleaners and solar panels. Then came a devastating 25% tariff on steel and aluminum. Trump then imposed tariffs on goods from the European Union and Canada. At the same time he implemented a 10% tariff on \$34 billion of imports from China. Since then Trump has announced tariffs on a further \$200 billion from China, with the threat of a tariffs on the entire \$500 billion worth of goods imported from China.

Impact of Tariffs

In a surprise to no one, except perhaps Trump himself, there has been reciprocal retaliation from all injured parties with similar tariffs on U.S. goods. The outlines of a major trade war are there for all to see.

Contrary to Trump's simplistic view that threats can improve the economic situation in the U.S., tariffs on incoming raw material and intermediary products have a knock-on effect on all products that use those materials. Businesses could raise prices – as is already happening with cars – which could both harm sales and contribute to rising inflation. Tariffs on American agricultural exports is already starting to have a dramatic effect on farmers. The National Association of Home Builders warned in April that these tariffs were putting a cost squeeze on builders and making new homes pricier. The Federal Reserve is promising to raise interest rates. Another serious problem is the uncertainty which Trump's on again, off again tariffs are causing which affects investment decisions. All of this could possibly be a trigger for a new recession.

The Failure of Neoliberal "Free Trade" Policies

A key reason for Trump's election was his sharp political attacks on establishment policies of the last thirty years. In particular, he posed as a defender of workers' interests and opposed free-trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement, signed by Bill Clinton in 1994, which contributed to the loss of millions of manufacturing jobs in the U.S. Decades of coded, racist messaging by Republicans had



Trump signs tariff legislation as steel workers look on.

prepared the ground for Trump's nationalist and racist campaign to tap into anger at the state of the economy, jobs, and society.

The issues Trump speaks to are real. As is the widespread increase in inequality and poverty in the U.S. But Trump was not the only candidate who rallied around these issues. Bernie Sanders also opposed corporate trade deals like NAFTA and TPP, winning support from millions of working-class people, out polling Trump repeatedly in the primaries. While Trump projected virulent nationalism and blame on immigrants, Sanders correctly pointed to billionaires as responsible for the crisis.

The billionaires finance the politicians and insist that they push through a pro-corporate agenda. Over 30 years of relentless neoliberal attacks drastically weakened the unions and shattered the social gains working people won through massive struggles in the 1930s and 1940s.

Job protections have been slashed, public spending on affordable housing savaged, education cut to the bone, and states and corporate watchdog agencies were starved of funds. Huge tax cuts for the super-rich and corporations and deregulation of industries have led to a massive transfer of wealth from the working class and middle class to millionaires and billionaires. Free trade agreements opened up the world economy to even deeper exploitation by the huge corporations. This allowed them to plunder new markets, and drive small businesses from the field of battle.

Trump's right-wing populist message offers nothing for working-class people. The promise of a \$1 trillion program to rebuild infrastructure to create jobs has evaporated in a flood of policies aimed at boosting

corporate profits. While calling for tariffs to protect U.S. jobs might sound like a pro-worker policy, at best it rewards some corporations and hinders others. But for working people there are no gains, only losses, since it reduces the level of world trade and slows down the world economy. An orgy of tariffs imposed by Congress contributed to prolonging the Great Depression of the 1930s.

In contrast to Trump, Bernie Sanders called for a "political revolution against the billionaire class." He offered alternatives that would benefit working-class people like a massive investment in green technology to create jobs. As a self-described democratic-socialist his demands broke open a national discussion about a socialist alternative to the destructive policies of neoliberalism.

Capitalist System is to Blame

Enriching corporate owners is the whole purpose of capitalism. Unless forced to do otherwise, capitalist owners will always put their money where they make the highest rate of return for their owners, irrespective of the social consequences.

At a time of saturated world markets and huge international competition, why would CEOs decide to put billions of dollars into expanding production. This is especially true today when it's much easier for the capitalists to put their money into the stock market or into other areas of speculation. In reality, the system is increasingly parasitic. It creates vast inequality but shows no way forward to solve the burning problems facing society.

Even before Trump, protectionist measures were rising sharply after the Great Recession. The U.S. ruling elite is especially worried about the rise of China on the global

stage and how quickly it is catching up in the development of new technology. Big business doesn't agree that a trade war is the best means to go about challenging China but they agree with Trump that China should be pushed back. These increasingly sharp geopolitical rivalries are also a sign of the decay of this system and the severe dangers we face if it isn't replaced.

Socialist Policies

This is the brutal logic of capitalism. Throwing more money at U.S. steel producers, for example, will not result in them increasing production when the steel market is glutted. Look at the Trump tax cuts. Instead of being invested in production, almost all of it was used by CEOs to buy back shares in their own companies, thus boosting the wealth of rich shareholders. This is why socialists say that as long as the key industries in the U.S. are run for profit and controlled by billionaire shareholders, workers will see no real improvement.

The socialist alternative is that the economy needs to be run in the interests of the working people and the poor – the vast majority of the population. Offering financial incentives or passing friendly legislation won't cause corporations to do something that is not in their economic interests.

Socialists say that the only way to change the situation is for the ownership of the big banks and corporations that dominate the economy to be transferred into the hands of the majority of the population. Only then can the economy be run for the needs of the majority.

- ✦ No to tariffs; no to corporate free trade agreements.
- ✦ For a massive investment in rebuilding the nation's infrastructure based on renewable energy which will provide millions of green jobs and address climate change. For retraining of workers in displaced industries so they can find jobs at a comparable wages and benefits.
- ✦ For failing industries, fossil fuel-based industries, and banking to be taken into public ownership to redirect the economy in the interest of the majority.
- ✦ For the economy to be run based on a democratically agreed plan instead of in the interest of profit of a tiny minority of billionaires. ✦

Read the full version of this article
at SocialistAlternative.org

Momentum Grows for Julia Salazar

Mass Movement Needed to Fight for Socialist Policies

Patrick Ayers

In the aftermath of the stunning electoral victory of Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, momentum is growing for the campaign to elect Democratic Socialists of America member Julia Salazar to the New York State Senate.

Salazar's campaign is shaking up the Democratic Party primary race in her North Brooklyn neighborhood where incumbent Martin Dilan has overseen a growing affordability crisis while allying himself with developers. Her campaign rejects corporate cash and calls for strong rent laws, ending cash bail, taxing the rich to fund transit, banning ICE from NYC, and passing the New York Health Act which would create a single payer health-care system in New York equivalent to Medicare for All on a national scale.

Need for a Mass Movement

If she makes it through, the 27 year old self-described socialist will enter the state legislature at the same time the Democrats are likely to retake the state senate and regain control over all of Albany. If this happens, there are real hopes that

progressive legislation like the New York Health Act will follow.

But in California last year, large Democratic Party majorities were not enough to pass similar single-payer legislation and pro-business Democrats ultimately blocked it. Any legislation in New York will likely need the signature of the devil himself, Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo, who is closely aligned with Wall Street.

Salazar has correctly argued in other contexts that what's really needed is mass movements. We are calling for her campaign to backup this generally correct position by putting forward a concrete plan of action to build a mass movement that aims to compel Albany to pass progressive legislation in 2019.

We have proposed that left candidates like Salazar, Cynthia Nixon – who is running for governor and has also declared herself a democratic socialist – and Ocasio Cortez, use their momentum to launch a mass campaign toward such a goal, alongside DSA, the Working Families Party and other progressive organizations. This could start with mass meetings to discuss the issues and organize a broader layer of people into neighbourhood action groups to help build it.

To give the campaign an

organizing focus, we propose mobilizing for a mass demonstration at the start of the 2019 legislative session. The protest should not be restricted to simply venting anger, and should be linked to a systematic plan to escalate pressure on the establishment.

The Need for a New Party

Salazar has chosen to run in the Democratic Party primary on September 13. Having hundreds of volunteers knocking on doors is an indication that the campaign is seen by many workers and youth as an important vehicle to fight back. If she wins it will be an enormous upset for the establishment.

Socialist Alternative is calling on registered Democrats in the district to vote for Salazar. But we also disagree with her decision to run as a Democrat. With more than 800 members of DSA in her district and 4,500 citywide, along with the fact that Republicans are a fringe group, a viable independent campaign would have been entirely possible.

Such a campaign could have engaged with voters on all the key issues and spoken clearly against the idea that the Democratic Party represents the interest of working people. Many DSA members want



Julia Salazar and Cythia Nixon speak at a press conference.

to build mass movements outside the electoral arena, but a key factor which holds this back is illusions in the Democrats promoted by the vast majority of leaders of the left.

We would encourage Salazar to more clearly warn her supporters that the Democratic Party, as a whole, is a barrier to socialist change. Salazar may support the so-called "inside outside" strategy of *Jacobin* magazine, but it's clear that the dominant idea in the minds of many of her supporters is that her campaign is part of a broader struggle to transform the party.

Ocasio-Cortez, who inspired hundreds of New Yorkers to join DSA and her campaign, says this explicitly. We have explained that it's essentially impossible to rip the Democratic Party as a whole from

its corporate leadership. To win far-reaching change a new mass workers party will be needed. We have called for launching a socialist ballot line in New York City and running 5 to 10 independent candidates in local elections in 2020 as a step in this direction.

Nevertheless, on balance, Salazar's campaign is playing a positive role. Her campaign is generating support for many important issues that won't be won without struggle. We want to help build a united effort to win those struggles and that's why we are supporting Salazar on September 13 and hopefully again in November. A Salazar victory will be a blow to the establishment and another clear indication of the growing momentum for socialist ideas. ✪

Occupy Inwood Resist Pro-Developer Rezoning Plan

Socialist Alternative NYC

On Thursday, August 2, eleven community members of the working-class neighborhood of Inwood in the northern reaches of Manhattan occupied city council member Ydanis Rodriguez's office. The protest demanded Rodriguez rescind his support for a plan to rezone the neighborhood in favor of developers. The action was organized by Northern Manhattan Is Not For Sale, with whom members of Socialist Alternative are working in coalition alongside residents, the Met Council On Housing, and others.

Earlier that day the subcommittee on rezonings and land use voted in favor of a Rodriguez-approved final version of the rezoning plan for Inwood (that did not incorporate the community's feedback), setting up a final vote by the full council on August 8. Inwood would become the fifth neighborhood to be rezoned by Mayor de Blasio's administration.

Based on previous experiences with rezoning of working-class neighborhoods, residents can expect rising rents, more luxury condos, rising evictions, and displacement.

For this reason, eleven people entered the office with a plan to stay there until either Rodriguez agreed to vote no or until they were arrested. Rodriguez had already experienced a rise in anger from his constituents earlier in the week when the same campaign organized a block party in Inwood on July 28 with hundreds of people in attendance. Rodriguez was invited to speak, but activists repeatedly interrupted him demanding that he vote no and make it absolutely clear he would support at least 50 percent affordable housing for families making around \$34,000 or less.

Rodriguez refused to commit and has claimed that he has the community on his side. Undoubtedly, the council member has plenty of reserves of support having himself led protests in the past. But unfortunately,

his suggestion that it was only gentrifiers that oppose the rezone plan is not only false, it completely disregards the fact that the real gentrifiers are exactly the ones who are behind the rezoning plan – developers, Wall Street, and city officials.

When the eleven people who occupied his office refused to leave on Thursday, Rodriguez first tried to ignore them. When it was clear they weren't going anywhere – he reluctantly agreed to meet.

Without agreeing to anything, he left and for a few moments it got very tense when staff locked the doors, cut the lights, and set off the alarm. Police threatened to arrest people until Rodriguez's staff intervened hoping to avoid embarrassing arrests. In the end, the eleven occupiers were allowed to stay. By mid-day on Friday it was clear that Rodriguez and police were not going to allow things to continue. But they were not yet prepared for who they were dealing with. They managed

to pick off a few people and get them out of the office. But occupier, senior resident, and Dominican immigrant Maria Peña completely defied and outmaneuvered them.

She locked herself in the bathroom, for hours she heroically refused to leave. But eventually she had no choice and was allowed to leave the office. Another brave occupier and Community Board 12 member (CB12 earlier in the process gave an advisory vote against the rezoning), Ayisha Oglivie, was arrested on suspicious grounds for attempting to re-enter the office. Other non-violent direct actions including a march were planned in the few remaining days leading up to the August 8 City Council vote. On Wednesday August 8, the city council voted 43-1 in favor of the pro-developer rezoning plan. Socialist Alternative will continue organizing with the community for affordable housing and dignified city planning for the 99%. ✪

Can the Working Class



Tom Crean

One hundred years after the Russian Revolution and 50 years after the revolutionary general strike in France in 1968, many on the left question whether the working class has a central role in changing society. This is understandable given the enormous retreat of the labor movement in recent decades. Working people in the U.S. no longer look to the unions as the leading force in the struggle for a better life as they did in the 1930s and 1940s and to a degree after World War II. Also the U.S. is virtually alone among Western countries in having no historical experience of a mass working-class political party which challenges for control of the government.

For a Self-Aware Working Class

Karl Marx, the pioneer of scientific socialism, in describing the modern working-class, differentiated between it being a “class in itself” as opposed to a “class for itself.” The working class, defined as those who have to sell their ability to work to the employer class to survive, has enormous potential social power because of its ability to stop the wheels of the economy. As the accompanying piece explains, contrary to those who say that globalization or automation have eliminated the American working class, it remains without doubt the majority of society. While the capitalist media is at pains to obscure this, just-in-time production, logistics hubs, and other large concentrations of workers, like in airports, show that the big corporations are vulnerable to collective action.

But the key issue is whether the working class moves from being an objective reality, a “class in itself” to being a force that sees its interests as counterposed to those of the capitalists and organizes to challenge their power. Since the Great Recession, working people in the U.S. have become keenly aware that the top 1% and even the top .01% have gained disproportionately while the bottom 99% and especially the bottom 50% are sliding backwards.

Progressives often point to how the tax system has increasingly favored the rich. This

is absolutely true but there is a deeper reality: Massive gains in productivity have been made by American workers, yet their wages have barely risen while profits have skyrocketed. The bosses have been winning a one-sided class war. It has recently been reported that even with virtual “full employment” wages in the U.S. are not keeping pace with inflation. This reflects the lack of an organized challenge to the bosses’ power in the workplace.

A Grim Future

There is massive anger at social inequality and the social crisis which faces large sections of the working class. There is a loss of faith in institutions and especially in the political establishment. There is a growing awareness that the future under capitalism promises endless inequality, automation replacing good jobs, and a developing climate catastrophe. In poor countries, wars, famines, and massive displacement of people are likely to intensify. Capitalism no longer pretends to offer a vision of a more abundant future for ordinary people.

The growing anger of working people and young people was reflected in the 2016 campaign of Bernie Sanders who called for a “political revolution against the billionaire class.” It is also reflected in the massive interest in socialism, especially among young people. This is continuing with the wave of “democratic socialist” candidates including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. But in the absence of a political force that clearly represents the interests of the working class, the door was opened to the right populism of Donald Trump who also attacked “free trade” deals and proclaimed himself a champion of the working class. This has led to a dangerously reactionary regime which threatens to destroy any remaining gains made through past struggles by workers,

women, and African Americans.

But until recently, working class revolt was only expressed in a partial way and largely on the electoral plane. The retreat of organized labor continued – less than 7% of private sector workers are now in a union and strikes at historically low levels. The recent Janus decision by the Supreme Court aims to drastically undermine organization in the public sector where union density remains higher.

This is why the revolt of teachers in West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado, and North Carolina is so important. Now there is the potential for a major fight by the key UPS workforce against a rotten contract. There are important organizing drives among airport workers. In Missouri, voters defeated an anti-labor “right-to-work” law brought in by the Republicans by a two-to-one margin. In Europe, Amazon warehouse workers in three countries went on strike in July which could inspire workers in logistics here. These are the signs of a desire to fight. What is desperately needed is leadership and a new direction away from the failed approach of labor leaders of the past 30 years – refusal to use militant tactics or to assert labor’s independent political interests.

Lessons of History

The American working class has a rich

tradition of struggle over the past 150 years. In the 1930s and ‘40s, powerful multiracial industrial unions were built using bold tactics including local general strikes and workplace occupations (“sitdown” strikes). Black workers were the driving force of the civil rights movement which brought down Jim Crow in the South in the ‘50s and ‘60s. Working-class women were the driving force in changing chauvinist attitudes in the ‘60s and ‘70s as part of massive rank and file labor upsurge.

And yet working people in the U.S. never had a true mass political party that expressed their interests. The absence of this helps explain why our pension and health care system is so much worse than most advanced capitalist countries where there were powerful social democratic and labor parties. Recent commentary in various mainstream publications asks why socialism was not stronger in the U.S. in the past although some have correctly pointed out that socialists have played a major role in the labor movement at all the key points when it has been moving forward.

There are many arguments for why the U.S. is allegedly “exceptional.” Seth Ackerman, an editor at the widely-read left magazine *Jacobin*, has argued that at the end of the 19th century the U.S. moved on a different course than other capitalist “democracies,” placing onerous restrictions on the development of



Can We Change Society?

Socialists Say Yes



The Working Class Today

While the composition of the working class has changed, it still remains the key force in U.S. society as a proportion of the overall population. The left-wing writer Kim Moody in his recently published book *On New Terrain* points out that transportation and warehouse workers are essential to the modern productive process. The total number of workers employed in “production, transportation, and material moving” in the U.S. at the last census was 19 million. Meanwhile, 13 million workers were employed in “extraction, construction, and maintenance.” These represented 19% of the workforce. 18% were in services and 24% in sales. This totaled 63% of the workforce. The remainder are 1% “capitalist class,” and 36% “managerial” or “professional.”

However, sections of workers in the “professional” category such as engineers, teachers, etc. are in the process of “proletarianizing” due to the increased regimentation and standardization of their work. In fact, many of these workers have been on picket line in recent years. These adds up to 8% of the workforce. When added to the 63% above you get a broader number of 71% of the workforce being classified as working class (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

The continuing strength of the working class is not just numerical. While capitalism has been restructured due to globalization along with new technology and lean methods of production which require fewer workers in manufacturing, Moody points to new choke points particularly in logistics. “Just in time” distribution networks used by big companies such as Amazon and Walmart rely on thousands of workers in warehouses, shipping, delivery, and transportation.

Location, Location

Historically, an essential aspect of the ability of the working class to cohere into a powerful force is proximity to each others’ struggles, either geographically or within larger workplaces. Success in organizing workers of different trades in the same factories into one union was crucial to the building of mass industrial unions in the 1930s. By uniting their struggles, steel, auto, and rubber workers were able to shut down U.S. Steel

and other huge companies and force them to recognize the union and start to pay decent wages. These unions also united workers from different races and ethnic backgrounds into a united force.

The bosses succeeded in breaking up this concentration of mainly unionized workers in major industrial cities like Detroit after the 1970s by opening up plants in more rural areas. But, Moody describes how auto production is now concentrated more than ever in a belt in the Midwest and upper-South. In order to keep up with capitalist competition abroad, auto parts producers and auto manufacturers have linked up for an ever tighter production and delivery process.

Working-Class Hubs

A key development in today’s economy is just-in-time logistics supply systems. Moody writes: “The just-in-time (JIT) standard for the auto industry, and by implication most manufacturing, went from a three-day delivery ‘window’ to a ‘thirty-minute time frame.’” This drive for increased profitability has forced the big companies to streamline their operations to such an extent that they are now even more susceptible to strikes. Massive sprawling distribution centers have been concentrated in “nodes” or “clusters” in and around major cities.

Moody estimates there are over 50 such hubs in the U.S., with Chicago, Los Angeles, the New York/New Jersey port, and Memphis having concentrations of over 100,000 workers each – up to four million workers. The locations are based on their proximity to major urban centers (markets), docks, and airports. These are also areas with a high concentration of low paid-workers looking for employment, who are predominantly black, Latino and Asian.

While the driving force for this concentration has been capitalism’s insatiable lust for profits, the consequence has been to strengthen the cohesion of the working class. They work and live in the same neighborhoods, have similar types of work, and rely on each other’s labor in the productive system. It’s almost as if the factories of 1930s have been recreated in new form.

The potential for these workers to organize and to win real improvements

in wages and conditions is huge. However, they will face ferocious resistance from big business. With the use of social media tapping into the anger at the billionaires, organizing drives can spread like wildfire to other workplaces. These struggles will have a huge galvanizing role in rebuilding the labor movement. One only has to look at how teacher struggles have spread to other states after the initial victory in West Virginia.

Diversity

Moody points out that the biggest demographic change in the U.S. working class has been the massive growth of women and people of color in the workforce. This historic change highlights how the struggle against racism and sexism are not separate from the struggle to build a united working class movement against capitalism, but an integral part of it.

The workplace is more integrated now than ever before. Women are 51% of the total workforce and are employed in a much wider variety of workplaces that previously. Black, Latino, and Asian workers now represent 33% of the workplace. Forced to work in the lowest paid jobs, they will play an important part of the working-class fightback as it develops. Already largely female teachers and nurses are playing a vanguard role in rebuilding the labor movement.

Women make up 46% of union members, while black, Latino, and Asian workers now represent 33% of union members. These are all quite large increases in the last couple decades. This growing diversity of the union movement will greatly increase the ability of the working class and the oppressed to act cohesively and to build solidarity for struggles of the oppressed such as BLM, immigrants rights, LGBTQ, and the emerging women’s movement.

The potential for a new upsurge of labor is the most favorable in generations. Not only have workers’ living standards been driven down for decades, but teachers provided a reminder of the dynamism and fighting spirit of the U.S. labor movement, and demonstrated the power of the strike as means of struggle when backed up by support from the broader working class. ☘

third parties. The two main (corporate dominated) parties were institutionalized and Ackerman concludes that “the United States [like the Soviet Union] is also a party-state, except instead of being a single-party state, it’s a two-party state. That is just as much of a departure from the norm in the world as a one-party state,” (“A New Party of A New Type,” jacobinmag.com).

There are elements of truth in Ackerman’s analysis but it is missing an underlying historical reality. Despite all the obstacles, it was hardly inevitable that a workers party would not be created in the U.S. This could have been achieved in the ‘30s and ‘40s for example but was blocked by key labor leaders – unfortunately with assistance from sections of the left, particularly the Communist Party.

The broader truth is that the obstacles to creating a workers party in the past were not primarily legal but lay in the strength of U.S. capitalism which was increasingly dominant in the 20th century on a world scale. The capitalists were able to concede a higher standard of living for a period but they also made relentless use of racism and nativism to keep the working class divided. But again the rise of the CIO industrial unions in the ‘30s proved that common struggle could begin to overcome profound divisions.

Compared to the postwar boom or even the neoliberal era which began in the late 1970s, the situation today is very different. It is very clear that U.S. capitalism is in decline on a global scale. Restoring the previous position through trade wars or other means is an illusion. The workforce is more diverse and integrated than ever before and, despite all the differences in lived experience, there is a burning need for collective struggle to push back the relentless regime of workplace exploitation and the immiseration of wider and wider sections. When 40% of adults don’t know how they would pay for a \$400 emergency while the billionaires’ banks accounts grow ever fatter – it’s time to fight back.

Can a new party representing these common class interests be built? Bernie Sanders raised over \$200 million with no corporate money – which all pundits said was impossible – and was only defeated because of a rigged primary. Most progressive workers and young people today continue to pursue the idea of reforming the Democratic Party. As working-class struggle reemerges in a more developed way, the need to for political independence will become clearer and the need for a program that challenges capitalism itself and points towards democratic socialism. This will truly be the emergence of a working class “for itself” in America. ☘

1968 – A Tumultuous Year Packed Full of Lessons

By Tony Wilsdon

1968 was a tumultuous year of radical struggle in the U.S. and internationally. For working people today, it provides a window into the power of mass movements.

Radicalizing Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements

1968 began with the astonishing spectacle of the North Vietnamese forces temporarily occupying the American embassy in Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, on January 31. Democratic President Lyndon Johnson's message that the end of the war was in sight and that 200,000 new troops would ensure victory was shattered.

Opposition to the brutal war in Vietnam exploded to become the dominant issue in U.S. politics. The ongoing civil rights movement, after defeating Jim Crow laws in the South was running up against structural racism in the North and was moving into a new more political phase. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr was taking an increasingly radical stand. He broke with the Democratic Party on the question of the Vietnam War and began speaking out about the broader economic inequality of capitalism. At the end of his life he was starting to draw socialist conclusions and pointing to need to organize the wider working class, especially its poorest and most oppressed layers. King launched the Poor People's March on Washington. He was in Memphis playing a central role in building support for a mainly black sanitation workers' strike when he was assassinated on April 4, 1968.

King's assassination triggered an explosion of anger in the inner city black communities and fueled further radicalization. This was expressed in the growth in support for the Black Panther Party, founded in 1966, while the antiwar movement became more clearly anti-imperialist. Pushed on by the revolutionary general strike in France in May and major struggles around the world, including the student revolt Mexico, a debate sharpened on the left about how to achieve revolutionary change in



Protestors and Chicago Police faceoff at Grant Park during the 1968 Democratic Party Convention.

America.

Public anger at the Vietnam War and racism also began to be reflected in the Democratic Party primaries. Two anti-war candidates, Eugene McCarthy and Bobby Kennedy, were the dominant candidates. Due to his previous stand on civil rights and sympathy for his slain brother, Bobby Kennedy was drawing large crowds. He was going toe to toe with Eugene McCarthy, whose campaign was driven by tens of thousands of anti-war young people.

At the same time Lyndon Johnson was totally discredited. Seriously weakened by escalating a hated war in Vietnam, he declined to run. The Democratic Party establishment vacillated between trying to convince Johnson to run and backing vice-president Hubert Humphrey who declined to participate in the primaries. Also, right-wing American Independence Party candidate George Wallace ran an un-reconstructed racist campaign tapping into Southern opposition to civil rights legislation.

The Democratic Party primary season ended with Kennedy surging. But on the night of the California primary, June 5, Bobby Kennedy was also assassinated. His death, so closely following that of Martin Luther King, had a profound effect. Two men, broadly perceived as among the most powerful spokespersons for civil rights and against the war, had been gunned down in a period of months. Among other issues sharply debated among radicals was: can the Democratic

Party be a vehicle for fundamental change?

1968 Democratic Party Convention in Chicago

This was to be answered in spectacular fashion in the national convention of the Democratic Party, held in Chicago in August 1968. Much has been written about the "Battle of Chicago." There are certain similarities with 2016 Democratic Party convention, the outcome of the rigged primary when Hillary Clinton defeated Bernie Sanders who stood on a pro-working class program. In 1968, the establishment leadership ensured that their preferred candidate, the war-mongering Hubert Humphrey, was elected against the overwhelming opposition of activists in the party.

Democratic Mayor Richard Daley unleashed the police in a series of vicious attacks against those protesting the war outside the convention. This has been corrected described as a police riot.

These astonishing scenes of police violence set the stage for Republican candidate Richard Nixon's campaign in 1968. Nixon exploited divisions in the Democratic Party on the Vietnam war and civil rights by demagogically calling for "peace with honor" while also defining himself as the candidate of the law-abiding "silent majority." This coded message against the "violence" of social movements in an increasingly divided America message was a precursor to the "Southern strategy" and dog-whistle

politics that the Republicans honed in years to come to appeal to conservative whites alienated by social change.

While there were some moves to run left independents candidates during 1968, major sections of the liberal left and the labor movement still had illusions in the Democratic Party. Nevertheless the turmoil in society continued to be reflected inside the party.

Lessons of 1968

Having seen the Democratic establishment decisively turn their back on the left and the mass anti-war sentiment at the 1968 convention, the question for tens of thousands of young activists was how to struggle against a power structure that clearly did not want to be reformed. A sizeable section of the antiwar, black freedom, and radical women's movement was starting to draw revolutionary conclusions; yet they were isolated from the majority of society. How could a radical minority change U.S. society?

In 1968, conditions for a revolutionary challenge to capitalism in America had not ripened. Capitalism, at the end of the postwar boom, was still perceived as delivering improved living standards for the majority of people, and crucially the majority of the working class. Unions were much stronger than today and there was a massive organizing drive in the public sector. Yet at the same time, the bosses were increasingly trying to push back against union strength, and young workers were becoming

radicalized along with the rest of their generation. They were also profoundly affected by the losing war in Vietnam, which young working-class men could not escape unlike most of their middle-class college-student counterparts. Radicalized young veterans were to play a huge role in rank-and-file labor struggles in the early 1970s.

The Black Panther Party was to be at the center of explosive events in the coming year, and

by 1971, one million blacks considered themselves revolutionaries. In 1968, neither the anti-war movement nor the radical women's movement had reached their peak. Then, from 1973 to 1974 the political system was in crisis due to the collapse of the military in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal which forced Nixon to resign. In the mid-'70s, the economy went into the sharpest downturn since World War II, signaling the end of the postwar boom. Society was faced an enormous social, political and economic crisis. By this point many of the precursors for a social revolution were in place in the U.S.

What was lacking was a revolutionary organization with real roots in the labor movement that could size up the situation and chart a bold course to link up the revolutionary-minded youth with the wider working class. This would have required bold demands that spoke to the interests of working people and the oppressed and pointed towards the need for a socialist transformation of society. This was the way to transform the sizeable layer of militant activists into a broader mass revolutionary party as millions moved into struggle in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Today, unlike in 1968, there is already widespread anger at the economy and the political system. With correct strategy and tactics this new generation of emerging activists won't be as isolated from the general population as they were in 1968. ☺

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DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST WAVE

Dana White

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's congressional primary victory in July has brightened the spotlight on democratic socialism. Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), defeated Joe Crowley, one of the leaders of the establishment Democrats in the House, with an astonishing 57.5% of the primary vote. Her immense popularity nationally and her affiliation with DSA has also boosted interest in democratic socialism.

Ocasio-Cortez' appeal to a broad section of ordinary people in both New York City and across the country is driven by her campaign's commitment to bold demands – similar to those raised by Bernie Sanders in 2016 – including Medicare for All, abolishing ICE, free college education, and affordable housing.

Winning these demands would be a huge step forward for working people but this will require electing fearless representatives who take no corporate money and are the voice of a mass movement in the streets. One of the first breakthroughs in the current shift to the left in major urban areas was in Seattle where the election of Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant to the city council paved the way for the victory of the grassroots 15 Now campaign, and the first citywide \$15

minimum wage in the country.

Both Ocasio-Cortez's victory and the tremendous growth of a broader mood of protest in society demonstrate the rising potential for the development of mass movements. According to a Washington Post poll, 1-in-5 Americans have attended a protest or political rally since 2016. Millions have flooded into the streets for the women's marches, recent demonstrations against Trump's anti-immigrant policies, the youth movement against gun violence, and in support of the teachers strikes in a series of states earlier this year.

Our Vision of Democratic Socialism

Ocasio-Cortez correctly points toward the incredible wealth in our society which should provide for people's basic needs, including health care, food, and housing. A democratic socialist society would provide free college education, universal health care, and affordable housing to serve the needs of the vast majority of people.

But a socialist society would go further and take decisive measures to eliminate poverty, war, racial segregation, and structural sexism; and it would rebuild our infrastructure on the basis of renewable energy. In order to achieve all this, working people

would need complete control of the levers of power in society, enabling us to democratically build a better world for all. Instead of big business reigning over all of politics and the economy, we need to bring the banks and big corporations into public ownership.

In several interviews, Ocasio-Cortez pointed to social democratic countries like Norway and Sweden as a model. However, many of the social reforms won in these countries, such as universal healthcare, have been continually chipped away. Worldwide, corporate interests seek to turn profit on health care by privatizing public health systems. The reality is that capitalism continued to dominate these societies even under the welfare state. Under capitalism all gains are temporary and can be reversed.

What it Will Take to Win

To mobilize forces strong enough to shake the foundations of this rotten system, we need to build a political force representing the interests of working people independent of corporate interests combined with a sustained mass movement in the workplaces, campuses and on the streets. In the 1960s and 1970s, explosive social movements won significant victories during the reactionary Nixon regime, including the right to abortion, civil rights protections, and an end to the Vietnam War.

The failure of the left to bring to bring these struggles together and to give them a clear political expression in a new mass party factored into the eventual dying down of these movements and their inability to bring a more decisive challenge to the establishment and capitalism itself. Many of the victories won in this era, including the right to abortion, have been steadily eroded since then.

What's Needed Today

With the fightback developing today, the same potential exists for our struggles to be linked and channeled into the formation of new mass organizations. We recognize that Ocasio Cortez' victory has strengthened the desire to use the Democratic Party as a vehicle to develop a socialist challenge. But the further this challenge develops, the more it will come up against the barriers of corporate control in the party. The key thing right now is to mobilize the widest possible forces to fight for Ocasio Cortez' platform. The struggle will only intensify when she and other self-described democratic socialists take office this fall.

The power to win a better world for all lies in the hands of the millions of working people and young people who have already begun moving into action and have the power to put an end to this oppressive, exploitative system once and for all. ✊