

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

ISSUE #49 • DECEMBER 2018-JANUARY 2019  
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# UNITE

## TO BRING DOWN TRUMP

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### BUILD A FIGHTING WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT.

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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

## Quinn Angelou-Lysaker Boston, MA



Growing up in Seattle, I understood my county to be one of the most diverse in the world. My zip code at the time had the most languages spoken of any in the entire country. I was always surrounded by peers who shared my experiences as a person of color. Throughout my education though, I saw classmates disappear as they got priced out of our district. After 2008, my family struggled to sell our home and spent a number of years living with friends for lack of affordable options in the city. Rent prices skyrocketed, grocery stores and community landmarks were torn down for luxury condos, the homeless population grew, and the working-class population shrunk. I wondered: what happened to the city I thought was so progressive?

Housing seemed to be a constant topic of conversation among friends and family. What could possibly be so hard about instituting rent control and building affordable housing? My convictions grew that the Democratic Party politicians who claimed to be "throwing money at the problem" could not provide a lasting solution. They could not with one hand accept donations from developers and with the other, solve our housing affordability crisis. Years and years went by with no end to the gentrification in sight. The rich continued getting richer, while more and more Seattleites faced homelessness or displacement.

After conversations with members of Socialist Alternative, I came to understand

that the inequality I saw in my city is inherent in the system of capitalism. There are three empty houses for each homeless person in the country, but the logic of capitalism holds that profits of developers come before human needs. We urgently need rent control and to tax the rich to fund affordable housing, but moreover we need a society where we don't have to fight for these commonsense reforms. Only through a democratically planned economy can we provide the dignity of adequate shelter. Today, we need working class politics like that of Seattle City Councilmember and Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant who never accepted corporate donations or developer bribery. Beyond that, to build a world where no one has to struggle for any basic necessity, we need a socialist transformation of society. Joining Socialist Alternative gave me tools and strategy rooted in historical lessons and the opportunity to start building a movement for a better world. ✦

## 100 Years Since the German Revolution

A century ago, as millions died in World War I, working people in Germany rebelled and took down the Prussian Kaiser Wilhelm ending the war. What followed were five years of revolutionary ebbs and flows in Germany that were tragically unsuccessful in the end. "Fundamentally, it is the story of missed opportunities to overthrow capitalism," explained Robert Bechert in an article on SocialistAlternative.org.

At the time, Germany was a decisive country in Europe and the world. It had a large and well-organized working class that was part of a massive and technologically advanced economy. Had the revolution been successful, it would have acted as a massive spur to the international wave begun by the Russian Revolution.

The Bolsheviks in Russia, led by Lenin and Trotsky, hailed the opening of this revolutionary period with great enthusiasm and hope. They understood that capitalism, an international system, would encircle the Russian workers unless the revolution spread and thus celebrated the overthrow of the Kaiser and reached out to the German workers in solidarity.

This time period is extraordinarily rich in lessons for socialists today. From the betrayal of the German social democrats in 1914 when they supported the war effort, to the heroic steadfastness of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht who refused to join the capitalist-led government and eventually founded the German Communist Party. From the question of the role of socialists in elected office to the balance between leadership and spontaneity within a movement.

The Committee for a Workers International has commemorated this anniversary with an important article that delves into these ideas and more. Socialist Alternative has republished Bechert's analysis of the German Revolution. It should be considered required reading for all socialists and working-class activists. ✦

Read the full version of this article at [SocialistAlternative.org](http://SocialistAlternative.org)

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# Bernie 2020: Build a Mass Working Class Fightback

Patrick Ayers

Bernie Sanders' insurgent campaign for president in 2016 was a watershed moment. His call for a "political revolution against the billionaire class" translated into 13 million votes, hundreds of thousands in attendance at his rallies, record amounts of individual donations, and a surge of interest in socialist ideas. We supported Bernie's campaign in 2016, and called for Sanders to keep running as an independent after he lost the rigged Democratic primary – a sentiment shared by millions. Socialist Alternative also supports Bernie running in 2020, though we are urging him – and his supporters – to learn from the important mistakes made in 2016.

As we head toward the 2020 presidential election, Bernie is one of the early front-runners. He is one of the most popular politicians in the U.S. and has a unique profile that stands in sharp contrast to the Democratic Party establishment and Trump.

If he runs, 2020 will not be a simple repeat of 2016. There will be a different dynamic with Trump in the White House, and the Democratic Party establishment, the corporate media, and the billionaire class will be prepared for him. If he runs in the Democratic primary he will face a more crowded field.

But a second run would also start out at a higher level than the first. Thousands of people – many of whom believe Bernie can win – will be ready from the outset to build an active mass campaign and fight for his program. The potential exists for the biggest left-wing door knocking campaign in the history of the U.S., especially if a section of the unions throw their full weight into Bernie's campaign.

At the same time, many progressive workers and youth may prefer a fresh face or someone younger, and may initially look to others perceived to be progressive. But who out there has the same combination of massive profile, working-class politics, and ability to rally millions against the billionaire class?

In 2016, Bernie rejected corporate donations and ran on a



Bernie Sanders on the Late Show with Stephen Colbert in December 2018.

radical program of pro-working-class demands such as a \$15 an hour federal minimum wage, jobs programs, Medicare for All, and free public college. He has already begun to lay out a similar platform and attune his message for an expected campaign.

In a December 6 appearance on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, he said many of the things that millions of people want to hear from the timid Democratic establishment, but don't. When asked about the recent midterm elections, Bernie gave a biting response, saying "Trump said this election was about him. It was – he lost."

Democratic Party leaders Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer promised bipartisanship after the midterms, but Bernie called for using the Democratic majority in the House to hold Trump accountable and to force the Republicans to vote against popular issues like student debt, lowering prescription drug prices, and expanding medical coverage for all.

Unfortunately, he praised former president George H.W. Bush and failed to expose his role in promoting economic and military plunder worldwide by U.S. imperialism and the billionaire class. But, what undoubtedly stood out to most people was Bernie's tone of urgency in fighting Trump, inequality, and

especially climate change.

If Bernie comes out of the gate with money, active support, and a strong message that resonates with the broad discontent among working people – weighed down for two years by a Trump presidency and a timid Democratic "resistance" – his campaign once again could become a powerful vehicle for working people to fight back in the presidential election.

With the right approach, his campaign could lead to the growth of a mass working-class political organization to deepen and continue the fight in the years ahead.

## Can Bernie Win?

Many people believe that Bernie can even win the Democratic primary. While there certainly is a path to victory for Bernie in 2020, there are a few factors that need to be considered that could present challenges.

First, the Democratic establishment – who rigged the primary for Clinton in 2016 – is more prepared for Bernie. They have been forced to tolerate him over the past years because of his popularity but, undoubtedly, behind the scenes there is a growing effort to undermine and derail him. Together with the billionaire class, they are absolutely hostile to his program and

the radicalizing workers and youth behind him.

Second, Bernie will face a more crowded field of candidates. The 2016 primaries were seen, from the beginning, as a mere formality in the coronation of Hillary Clinton. While she had the backing of the establishment, she was widely disliked among working people not least because of her support for big business politics and the Iraq war.

Bernie's politics sharply contrasted with her. But also, his campaign was the only credible alternative in the primary. Going into 2020, there are more than a dozen candidates likely to run, and no clear establishment favorite. Many of these candidates are widely perceived to be progressive, and have opportunistically adopted some of Bernie's policies and message.

A third complication for Bernie is the overwhelming desire of tens of millions to defeat Trump – assuming he's on the ballot. This could raise arguments and doubts about electability. Of course, it's absolutely ridiculous to think that Bernie would do worse against Trump than Joe Biden or Kamala Harris. But the playing field is not exactly fair and we should expect the corporate media to ramp up attacks, or "scrutiny," aimed at Bernie.

## Need for an Audacious Grassroots Campaign

These obstacles can be overcome. But it will require a sharp political message and a massive organizing effort to convince people not to settle for any seemingly progressive Democrat.

Politically, Bernie will need to skillfully take up attempts of the establishment to blur the differences between their candidates and himself. It would be a mistake for him to tone down his message and platform, or to shy away from sharp criticisms to help expose other candidates' loyalties to the establishment. This includes progressive members of the establishment like Elizabeth Warren – who failed to support Bernie ahead of the Massachusetts primary in 2016, which Clinton then won.

Bernie has more allies to help with such a task. This go-round Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others can help create a sharper political contrast by challenging the corporate Democrats in Congress to vote "yes" or "no" on progressive legislation – and calling them out when they don't.

Unfortunately, Bernie and Ocasio-Cortez send mixed messages on the corporate Democrats, at times sharply criticizing them, and at other times praising them. This approach contributes to the wrong idea that the corporate Democrats can be pushed into standing up for working people.

But a political revolution against the billionaire class will not be successful by avoiding a confrontation with the pro-corporate elements of the Democratic Party.

To challenge the Democratic Party establishment, it is crucial to build an organized mass campaign that can inspire support from working people and the oppressed at doorsteps, in workplaces, and inside unions and other important organizations of working people.

To tap the creative energy of supporters, Bernie should avoid the trappings of a top-down, staff-driven organization, and open up his campaign structures to the

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Fund Transit, Education, and Housing – Not Amazon

# The NYC Amazon Deal Can Be Stopped

Anthony D'Amico

On November 13, Amazon announced that it would put one half of its new headquarters in Long Island City, Queens. Erstwhile rivals Governor Andrew Cuomo and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio came together to congratulate themselves on winning Amazon's "HQ2" national beauty pageant.

But not all that glitters is gold. In exchange for a promise of 25,000 jobs, Amazon will receive corporate welfare in the form of tax credits and state government grants estimated at over \$3 billion over 10 years.

The estimated cost per job? \$120,000 apiece. The shocking giveaway – to attract one of the world's richest companies to one of the world's most desirable locations, a stone's throw from Manhattan – sent a shockwave of resistance through working class communities.

Adding insult to injury, 1,500 units of affordable housing originally slated for the area will likely be cut if the planned Amazon campus goes ahead. Instead, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos will get a heliport funded by taxpayers. All this for the richest man in the world, whose company, according to filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission, paid \$0 in federal taxes in 2017!

Cuomo and de Blasio are promising jobs – but the experience

of Amazon in Seattle shows that Amazon doesn't so much bring jobs as bring high-paid transplants attracted to an urban environment.

If Amazon wants to establish itself in New York City, they should at least pay their fair share of taxes. When the subway system is broken and New York's public housing is falling apart, we should not be giving away money to one of the biggest companies on the planet.

## Scrap the Deal!

Given that Amazon has revealed its total project will cost about \$3.7 billion, the government is giving Amazon around a dollar back for every dollar it spends! Using rosy estimates, Governor Cuomo has promised a 9-to-1 return on the government's investment. But this is based on cherry-picked job creation data.

State Senator Michael Gianaris of Queens has correctly said, "This bad deal needs to be torn up and thrown away." Gianaris is the second-leading Democrat in the newly elected State Senate, where the Democrats will have a 17-seat majority and enough tools to scrap the deal come January.

The real question is: Do the Democrats in the legislature have the political will to take on Cuomo and big business, and fight uncompromisingly for working people? The State Senate's incoming Democratic Party leader, Andrea

Stewart-Cousins, "has straddled the issue," according to Crain's New York, and she "is unlikely to scuttle Cuomo's prized deal with Amazon because the governor was instrumental in returning Democrats to power in the Senate" (11/15/2018).

Clearly, powerful sections of the Democratic Party in New York are beholden to Cuomo and big business. We need to build a mass fightback to hold these politicians' feet to the fire and demand they stand up to Cuomo and block this deal.

## Mobilization Needed to Block It

We need to build an energetic mass campaign across the state with creative and audacious protests to hold politicians accountable, and demand they do everything possible to stop this.

Working people in the city should register their anger in City Council hearings organized on the issue. We should organize to disrupt phony "community engagement" public meetings on the Amazon deal in Long Island City, Queensbridge Houses, and surrounding neighborhoods. We should protest in Albany at the state capitol later this month and next month.

We also need to support the growing efforts of tech workers and Amazon warehouse workers internationally to unionize and fight against low wages, poor working



Socialist Alternative members campaign against the Amazon deal in NYC.

conditions, sexism and racism. Building power in the workplace is critical to fighting the billionaire class.

Labor union leaders who have supported Cuomo should instead join together to help build a united mass struggle of all progressive and working class organizations against the anti-worker Amazon deal. Julia Salazar, the Democratic Socialists of America member that was recently elected to the State Senate, should use her position in Albany to expose any attempts by the Democratic Party supermajorities in the State Assembly and Senate to provide cover for Cuomo and Amazon. She can use Kshama Sawant in Seattle as an example of how a socialist elected representative can go up against a tycoon like Amazon. Together, we should fight to tax Wall Street to fund thousands of good union jobs to fix the subway, repair NYCHA, and

radically improve our education system and public services.

## Need for a Political Alternative

As the mask of "progressivism" slips further from the faces of Cuomo and de Blasio, the potential for building a real political alternative – including a new working-class party that completely rejects corporate cash and handouts to billionaires – is placed squarely on the agenda.

The Amazon deal is a product of decades of pro-corporate development that has transformed New York City into a playground for the rich and increased hardship for the rest of us. Defeating this deal in New York can be a first step toward fighting for a new society based on meeting the needs of people and the environment, not profits – a socialist world. ✪

# The Seattle People's Budget Fight for Affordable Housing

Nick Jones

On November 19, after two months of intensive fightback from working people and renters, the same Seattle City Council that overturned the Amazon Tax this spring voted 8-1 to adopt a budget that completely fails to offer a solution to the city's urgent affordable housing crisis (Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant cast the sole vote against). Instead, this budget means a further deepening of austerity policies – the cutting of services for the working people of Seattle – thanks to the political establishment's refusal to pursue any avenues to tax big business and the rich.

Despite the budget's overall failure to address the needs of Seattle's working class families, the People's Budget movement spearheaded by Socialist Alternative and Kshama Sawant alongside hundreds of activists, community members, and working people were able to win important gains.

## When We Fight, We Can Win

A key victory of the People's Budget movement was the first eviction defense attorney in the city's history – to provide badly needed support for tenants facing evictions. Currently evictions are rampant in Seattle, with over three eviction cases being filed a day, over half of which were non-payment of one

month or less in rent, and severely disproportionately affecting working-class women and people of color. Establishing a legal recourse for tenants is an important precedent. Additionally, for the second year in a row the People's Budget movement had to rally hundreds of homeless activists and community members to win the reversal of cuts proposed by Mayor Durkan to desperately needed homeless shelter services.

Our movement succeeded in winning important gains for Seattle's LGBTQ community as well. These included funding for an LGBTQ senior center in the heart of Capitol Hill, Seattle's historically LGBTQ neighborhood, and funding for an LGBTQ wellness center at NOVA High School which serves

primarily LGBTQ youth. In addition, cuts made by Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan to services for the trans community were backfilled. The victories won this year are an important first step toward securing the right to safety and dignity for a segment of our city whose urgent needs continue to be ignored by the city's political and business establishment, despite their progressive rhetoric.

On top of the victories described above, our movement was able to secure partial ongoing funding for the annual Indigenous People's Day celebration, which was itself a serious victory won by Indigenous activists and the People's Budget movement just a

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Public Ownership Bill Needed in State Capitol

# For-Profit PG&E Has Not Worked for California

Rob Rooke

The Butte County Camp Fire, which killed more than 80 people, and last year's Tubbs fire, which killed 24 people, were likely sparked by Pacific Gas and Electric's (PG&E) equipment. According to California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection PG&E were responsible for 12 separate wildfires in California in 2017. In this era of climate change, fast moving firestorms through parched wildlands are a serious danger to Californians in many regions of the state.

The California Public Utilities Commission that oversees PG&E has an ongoing investigation into the company's long history of putting profits over safety. An investigator described the company's approach to safety is just "checking the box" and a "thin veneer" that looks good "but fails under stress."

## A History of Damage

PG&E's for-profit culture has a long history of doing harm to the people of the state. During the 1950s and '60s the company dumped 370 million gallons of chromium-6 contaminated wastewater into the ground water of Hinkley, California, dramatized in the movie Erin Brockovich. It paid out \$333 million to the cancer victims of the town. In 1997, PG&E was convicted of 739 counts of criminal negligence for failing to trim trees



Paradise, California lies in ruins following the Camp wildfires.

near power lines that resulted in the devastating Sierra wildfire.

The human losses, the loss of people's homes and belongings is only one side of the costs paid for the profit driven culture of the utility. As the company considers bankruptcy to avoid paying out for the current host of lawsuits pending against it, we are reminded of the cost of its previous filing for bankruptcy in 2001. The state and people of California, with the cooperation of the Democratic Governor, Gray Davis, paid \$40 billion to keep PG&E afloat

But nothing changes at the corporate helm.

## PG&E's Priorities

A look at where PG&E spends its larger funds reflect its true commitments. While state Senate Bill 100 attempted to make California

fossil fuel-free by 2045, PG&E did not sign onto this. Instead, it joined the ranks of the oil companies and big agriculture to oppose the bill. PG&E has agreed that overhead electric cables contribute to fire safety problems, but the funds it earmarked for putting cables underground have too often remained unspent. In the past 17 years, the utility has left \$246 million of its undergrounding funds untouched.

However, from the perspective of making money, PG&E gets top marks. In 2013 its gross income was \$1.89 billion. By 2017 it had grown to \$3.1 billion. Its major shareholders and its top executives have grown enormously wealthy. In a world of escalating inequality, PG&E is just another huge corporate machine that sucks in the resources, money and labor of working people and transforms it all

## For A Green New Deal

Newly elected socialist Congressperson Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the Sunrise movement's demand for a 10-year Green New Deal have pointed a way forward for addressing the looming climate catastrophe. A crucial part of a Green New Deal should be the demand to take utilities into public ownership. Using the example of the rotten for-profit decisions PG&E has made, we can point to how the resources generated by this company could be used to prevent fires, lower rates for working people, and employ more people at living wages.

Socialist Alternative supports a retooling of the economy to transition to a renewable economy that leaves fossil fuels in the ground, including the retraining of all fossil fuel workers. A Green New Deal would be strongest if democratically directed by working people and communities and would be a step to a fully democratic society not based on profit – a socialist world. ✪

into capital to be handed up to California's elite.

It does not have to be this way.

The generation and supply of electricity and gas is a necessary function for society. It needs to be operated safely, efficiently and maintaining the lowest cost to working people. PG&E has proved, over decades, that it is incapable of meeting these basic goals.

While Socialist Alternative is opposed to the monopoly that PG&E represents, we would oppose the breaking up of the company into baby-PG&Es as this would massively increase duplication, administration costs and it would not address the core issue: the private ownership and control of the utility.

## For a Democratically-Controlled Utility

The Democratic Party has a dramatic supermajority in both state houses. We need a California Assembly person to propose a bill to bring PG&E into public ownership, under the democratic management and control of its customers, California's working people, and its employees. Under such legislation the jobs of its 23,000 current employees should be protected. The workforce should be dramatically expanded to provide the unionized green jobs for transforming the current mess of electricity and gas distribution into a safer, more efficient and sustainable model of organization. ✪

## Seattle People's Budget

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few years ago. Other victories include statements of legislative intent to push forward the creation of a public bank, linked to the movement's victory in divesting from Wells Fargo in 2017, and to demand the mayor choose a location for a safe consumption site in the city that has been stalled for months.

## The Balance of Power

Despite what working people were able to achieve through organizing this year, Seattle's searing crisis of housing affordability remains overwhelmingly unaddressed. The Mayor and Democratic councilmembers' willingness to put the working class, the oppressed,

and homeless people on the chopping block without a second thought provides a stark contrast to their willingness to go to battle to defend the profits of corporations like Amazon, Vulcan, and other downtown real estate interests, or the Mariners franchise.

Kshama Sawant and the People's Budget movement put forward 11 separate options for funding affordable housing, including a reinstatement of the Amazon Tax that was criminally repealed in the face of threats and bullying by Amazon earlier this year. Every single option was voted down by the city council, with no alternatives proposed in the process.

This balance of power can however be shifted through struggle – it is not set in stone. When we build fighting movements, we point the way forward for all those looking for a way to change the world. From the taxes on big business to fund affordable housing passed in California this fall to the protests against Amazon's HQ2 currently underway in New York City, it's clear that Seattle's Tax Amazon movement has inspired activists across the country.

Winning bigger victories will require building stronger movements. Winning a genuine People's Budget in Seattle would also require electing more working-class representatives

like Kshama Sawant, who fight unambiguously for workers rather than basing themselves on backroom negotiations, or on what's acceptable to big business. Nationally, a new mass party of working people, independent of corporate money and both big business parties is what's needed. We have the potential to set a national example in Seattle's local elections next year by building a progressive and socialist alliance to fight for the city we need. This alliance can fight for bold working-class demands and make building social movements central to its political approach, a necessity to win meaningful gains in housing affordability. ✪



# MAKE 2019 A YEAR

## THE FIGHTBACK WILL

Keely Mullen

The system of capitalism is in serious crisis. With massive inequality, impending climate catastrophe, and the loss of confidence in political institutions, it is clear that the foundations of the system are beginning to shake. Much of the political energy of the past year was directed toward the midterm elections where millions of people were looking to strike a blow against Trump and the Republicans. Many have understandably breathed a sigh of relief as the Democrats handily took back the House as well as a number of state legislatures across the country. Particularly significant was the election of genuine progressives and self-described socialists like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

2019 has the potential to be a year of explosive struggle. Socialists will play an active role in that process, drawing out the need for a working-class struggle against the billionaires and bigots.

### Growing Social Struggle

The deep inequality that defines U.S. society today and the devastation caused by the 2007-8 recession has resulted in a bubbling rage experienced by millions of Americans. Now we are facing the threat of another economic downturn with all that will mean for ordinary people.

Beginning in 2011 with the Occupy Wall St. movement, the battle lines were clearly drawn: the 99% and the 1%. In the years since Occupy, we have seen the awakening of the American working class develop further. This year's teachers strikes, the bitter contract battle at UPS, and the recent walkout of Google employees against sexual harassment, are just a few examples of the American working class coming alive to their potential social power.

In 2019, there are a number of key issues that have the potential to spark a movement. These struggles should be brought together as much as possible into a decisive fightback against the agenda of the right and corporate power.

A key feature of many social struggles in the U.S. during the past two years has been a

deep disdain for Donald Trump and a desire to see him out of office. Trump and the right wing have launched attack after attack on oppressed groups, from the Muslim ban to the vile immigrant detention centers and threatened attacks on trans people's limited gains. We will likely see mass protests sparked in reaction to attacks or threats from Trump. Alongside this, further legal problems for Trump can bring the question of impeachment on the agenda of the Democratic controlled House. However the Democratic leadership will not go down this path without mass pressure.

Brett Kavanaugh's appointment to the Supreme Court is a direct threat to women's right to choose and *Roe v. Wade*. There are similar attempts at the state level to restrict abortion access. Just this month proposed legislation in Iowa would limit abortion after a fetal heartbeat is detected, effectively reversing *Roe v. Wade* throughout the state.

Alongside the specific attacks on reproductive rights, we've also seen a general radicalization of women on the basis of a number of issues. During the 2016 Primaries almost 40% of young women supported Bernie Sanders than supported Trump and Clinton combined. They saw Bernie's brand of feminism – Medicare for All, \$15 minimum wage, free public college – as far more accessible than Hillary Clinton's corporate feminism. As we have seen with the historic women's marches and Kavanaugh's appointment process, women are front and center in the fight against Trump and the right wing and it is likely that in 2019 we will see continued growth of this women's movement.

### Best Defense Is a Good Offense

#### Health Care

While there are certainly defensive battles that will continue or be sparked this year, there are also critical offensive battles that have explosive potential. Polls demonstrate that 70% of Americans support Medicare for All as an alternative to the current corporate dominated health-care system. In the 2016 Democratic Party primaries, this issue was a key dividing line between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, with Clinton saying Medicare

for All would “never, ever come to pass.”

However the overwhelming public support for the idea forced many Democrats to take up the issue in the 2018 midterms. In fact, among those who had policy sections on their websites, more than half of Democratic candidates in open primaries expressed support Medicare for All. However, this support needs to be put to the test and we believe organized mass public pressure will be needed to force Democrats to seriously attempt to pass Medicare for All. This fight has potential to be a flashpoint in the coming years. **We demand comprehensive Medicare for All!**

#### Housing

On a state and local level, the dire state of the housing market causes millions to struggle to keep up with rising rent. There have been movements for rent control in cities like Seattle and Minneapolis where socialists have played a key role, and those struggles have been taken up in Chicago, California, and elsewhere. It is likely that with a renewed economic recession the housing crisis will only intensify, and there is the possibility that this will spark a real fightback. **We need to tax the rich to fund high quality, permanently affordable public housing!**

#### Climate Disaster

The images of the California wildfires were nothing short of apocalyptic. With the new reports from the UN indicating a strong risk of climate crisis before 2040, the real effects of

climate change will be felt more intensely every year. We have seen young people propelled into action on this issue, as shown by the occupations of Nancy Pelosi's office in November demanding a “Green New Deal,” and it is likely this movement for climate justice will develop further in the coming year. **We need a massive green infrastructure program to create millions of good paying jobs transitioning the U.S. away from fossil fuels and to renewable energy!**

#### Voting Rights

As shown by the madness following the November midterm in Florida and Georgia, voter suppression is rampant on a national scale especially in a number of Republican dominated states, particularly targeting people of color. But Florida is also the state where a large majority voted to restore voting rights to ex-felons. This is alongside the ridiculous levels of gerrymandering across the country. Democratic demands will be an increasing focus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election. **We call for an immediate end to gerrymandering and to defend and extend voting rights!**

Besides these issues, there is always the potential for unpredictable events to spark a fight back like the student uprising after the Parkland massacre. However, besides the scale of the movement and the social power it mobilizes, the critical factors that will determine whether these struggles are victorious or not are decisive leadership and a coherent strategy.



# WAR OF STRUGGLE

## GROW



### A Strategy to Win

As history has shown us time and again, the key factor that determines whether working-class people win improvements in our lives is the scale of social struggle. From the Civil Rights Movement to the women's movement of the '60s and '70s, and the anti-war movement, major gains – whether in the workplace or in broader society – are only won through a determined, mass struggle. In order for a movement to be strong enough to take on some of the challenges we face today, it needs: the broadest possible participation of working-class people; democratic structures to make decisions about the direction of the struggle; and leadership that is committed to pushing the movement forward, not limiting its demands and strategies based on what is acceptable to the political establishment.

It is crucial that any struggle we build has its feet squarely rooted in the broader working-class movement. Working people function as the backbone of our society – teaching children, caring for the sick, operating trains, building roads – and therefore collectively have the power to bring society to a halt. As we're seeing clearly displayed in the French yellow vest movement, when ordinary people collectively fight back in a determined way, we can wrest major concessions from those in power. What is missing in France, and would be a tremendous tool in their struggle, is an organization where the workers and students in struggle can meet, discuss and determine the course and trajectory of the movement.

### What Obstacles Do We Face?

Beyond the obvious enemies like Trump and the right wing, one of the most difficult obstacles our movements will have to overcome is the pressure and influence of the Democratic Party establishment that will make attempts to demobilize and co-opt the struggle at every stage. The approach of the establishment is to give lip-service to social struggles and then direct the movements' energies off the streets and into channels that are acceptable to them.

But again and again they fail to take a decisive stand even on issues they allegedly see as important. For example, when young Dreamers

were facing the threat of deportation in early 2017, the Democrats took a progressive step by saying they would not vote for a new budget without guaranteed protections for DACA recipients. This led to a government shut-down. However, as pressures mounted from the Republican Party, the Democrats – rather than calling on the power of ordinary people to demonstrate, march, and rally – caved and shamefully surrendered with nothing more than a promise from Republicans to at some point address DACA.

Similarly, during the scandalous nomination process of serial abuser Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court – the Democrats made no real attempt to harness the mass outrage into a decisive fight to block the nomination. This would have also required articulating how Kavanaugh represents a full-spectrum threat to women, LGBTQ people, voting rights, labor rights, and the environment. Rather, the Democrats expressed disapproval in words and put no mandate on their Senators to vote against his nomination.

The platform of newly-elected democratic socialist Congresspeople Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib as well as Bernie Sanders is of enormous importance in building the movement we need in 2019. Soon after the election, Ocasio-Cortez announced her intention to fight for a "Green New Deal" in order to address the dire state of the climate. She supported a sit-in in Nancy Pelosi's office. This is a good example of the combative approach needed.

But these leading progressives are facing enormous pressures to bend to the will of the Democratic Party establishment. Unfortunately they also accept the framework of the Democrats and the extremely unrealistic idea that the party can be "reformed" into a tool for the interests of ordinary people.

For example, Ocasio-Cortez, Tlaib and others pragmatically voted to support Nancy Pelosi's nomination from the Democratic Party to be Speaker of the House despite her clear loyalty to big business. In order to fend off these pressures, elected socialist representatives, as we have raised, need to be held accountable by mass organizations of struggle with democratic structures and ultimately by a

new party of working people.

### What Type of Movement?

In order to protect from the pressures that come to bear on a social movement, it is crucial we have clarity on what type of movement we need. Whether the terrain is a woman's right to choose, Medicare for All, climate justice, housing, or anything else – the movement needs to make attempts to link up with the broadest sections of working-class people to bring them into struggle. This means being explicit about the links between various forms of inequality and oppression and creating demands in the spirit of solidarity to win improvements for the widest amount of people.

For example, at the height of the Black Lives Matter struggle, the movement in some areas began to incorporate the demand for a \$15 an hour minimum wage. Not only does this speak directly to the needs of black workers who make up a disproportionate section of low-wage earners, it connects the struggle against racism to the wider struggle against inequality.

Similarly, the fight for a woman's right to chose should not be narrowly focused on defending against attacks on *Roe v. Wade* but should take up positive fighting demands that would give women real choice. Demands like free abortion on demand, universal child-care, and paid maternity leave – defending a woman's right both to have an abortion as well as the right to raise a child free from undue financial burdens. These demands can speak to and activate a wide section of working-class people giving the movement its best chance at winning.

Beyond the question of broad, fighting demands comes the question of strategy. One-off marches and protests can certainly be powerful and are a great collective expression of outrage, however they are not frequent enough to force the hand of establishment politicians and their corporate backers. In order to win, a movement needs to have a far reaching strategy that includes a variety of tactics from protests to occupations and sit-ins to strike action. The movement will need to identify where and how it can put the most pressure on those in power and it will need the determination not

to release that pressure until its demands are met.

Tied to the question of strategy is the question of leadership. The fightback of public sector workers in Wisconsin in 2011 demonstrated the vulnerabilities a movement faces when it lacks decisive leadership. Facing a massive attack on union rights from newly-elected right-wing Governor Scott Walker, the call for a general strike was widely popular. However, the leaderships of national unions were able to stifle this mood and redirect it into a campaign to recall Scott Walker which ultimately failed. On the other hand, the teachers' revolt early this year won a series of important victories because they did not capitulate to conservative union leaders and began to develop an alternative leadership.

To defend against the pressure of the ruling class requires mass democratic participation in struggle including in the formulation of strategy and tactics. Structures must also exist within the movement for it to replace its leadership should they begin acting outside the interests of those in struggle.

This points to the need for a new party based on working people with democratic structures that takes no corporate money and does not limit itself to running in elections, but is committed to building the power of ordinary people in the streets.

The crisis in the system is becoming clearer every day as capitalism's instability shows its face. With the looming threat of a renewed recession, climate disasters beginning to descend on the coasts, and record levels of inequality – the status quo is no longer viable. The driving force of change are the masses of working people who make up the very backbone of our society. If organized on the basis of a positive vision for the world, armed with the political will to take on the establishment, and with the strategy and vision of a mass movement on the scale of the '60s and '70s, immense change could be won. The year 2019 has the potential to see explosive struggle and socialists will play a key role in helping to point the way forward. ✪



# The Rise of the Yellow Vests Movement in France

Eljeer Hawkins

The rise of *Gilets Jaune* ("Yellow Vests") on November 17 took place during the 50th anniversary of the ten-million-strong French general strike of May-June 1968 that forced authoritarian President General Charles de Gaulle to flee the country. This indefinite general strike by the French working class and youth posed the possibility of a revolutionary change in society. This is only one high point of the French working class' rich history of social struggle and movements.

The Yellow Vests movement began with President Emmanuel Macron proposing a fuel tax on diesel and gasoline. Macron used the argument that the tax would begin turning France into a green economy and cut gas emissions. The fuel tax was correctly viewed by the workers and large sections of the middle class from rural areas who rely heavily on cars to get to and from work as an attack on their living standards, saddling them with more burdens instead of taxing the real polluters: French big business.

The Macron government has introduced massive cuts to social and public spending, assaults on education, pension reform, and tax breaks for the wealthy. Macron's "environmental tax" was the straw that broke the camel's back, starting on social media as a petition that has turned into four weeks of intense protest and social struggle on the streets of France. The Yellow Vests movement is indeed a movement of everyone, from school students and factory workers to secretaries rejecting the opulence of the rich and powerful who thrive as the working class and the poor struggle to live a dignified life under low wages and horrific social conditions.

## "Of course it's not enough!"

The movement has caused a significant crisis for Macron and the political establishment of France. Macron's image as an "outsider" to the traditional parties of French big business has shattered under the weight of this movement. So, too, has the idea relentlessly promoted by the corporate media that he is the upholder of "liberal" ideas and a new standard bearer of continental European capitalism.

The early response by the establishment was to dig in their heels, using state repression

and mass arrests to put an end to the movement. But the sheer popularity of the movement, with a 72% approval rating and rapidly spreading across France, into nearby Belgium, and even globally, forced a change of approach. By the fourth week the movement produced a list of demands including a 40% increase in the minimum wage, a massive public jobs program, ending privatizations, and Macron's resignation. Macron, increasingly worried about the stability of his government, agreed to cancel the fuel tax.

But the protests continued. On the evening of December 10, Macron addressed the nation in an attempted "I feel your pain" moment, putting forward concessions that he hoped would bring the protests to an end. Macron said he will introduce: a \$113 (7%) monthly increase for minimum wage workers, an exemption from taxes on overtime pay, an exemption on certain social security taxes for retirees who earn

less than \$2,265 a month, a revision of taxes on pensions, and a Christmas bonus to workers if their employers can afford it. There was no mention of ending the tax breaks to the rich. A Yellow Vests representative, Laetitia DeWalle, exclaimed on the main state TV channel France2 after Macron's address, "Of course it's not

enough! ... He's been absent from view for ten days, it was obviously to take acting lessons."

What was striking about the pre-recorded televised address was Macron's choice of scenery, the opulent Élysée Palace, a target of the mass rage of the movement. Macron's message and proposals fell flat. The Yellow Vests movement is calling for more protests this upcoming weekend.

## The Pillars of the European Union in Crisis

The crisis in France coincides with the end of Angela Merkel's reign as Germany's Prime Minister. British Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit proposal is falling apart, which could lead to early elections in Britain. Out of movements like the Yellow Vest struggle, a challenge to the rule of the billionaire class could quickly emerge across Europe. The urgent tasks are building a sustained movement and new parties of the working class. The rise of right-wing and nationalist forces in several



countries shows the potential dangers of the left not taking the steps needed.

## Which Way Forward

Some in the liberal establishment and on the left have criticized the Yellow Vests movement for their demand to end the fuel tax with no concern for the environment and for the perception this is a primarily a "middle-class movement." This dismissal of the movement's social composition and demands is a political mistake. Occupy Wall Street in 2011 had its weaknesses but was the first significant left-wing revolt against the economic collapse of 2007-08 and the bailout of Wall Street that sparked a global resistance.

The Yellow Vests movement is in its embryonic stage of development. This new expression of righteous anger shows deeper sections of the population moving into social struggle, some for the first time, against the super-rich, oligarchs, and their representatives like Macron.

The active role of the working class and organized labor is paramount in this situation.

The largest French trade union federation CGT called for buildup strikes and actions four weeks after the protest began. Socialist Alternative's sister organization, Gauche Révolutionnaire, are active participants in the movement and have a special issue of their newspaper, *Egalité*, that calls for a one-day general strike as the next step toward bringing down the Macron government.

Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Front, who lost to Macron in the general election last May, has attempted to take advantage

of the mass anger and protests, demagogically blaming immigration and launching a nationalist attack on globalization for causing the crisis. The overall mood, sentiment, and demands of the movement have pushed back on Le Pen's rhetoric.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of La France Insoumise (France Unbowed) and the left candidate who got over 7 million votes in the first round of the last presidential election, called for protesters to converge in Paris and other cities for "Act 5" of the Saturday demonstrations (December 15). He speaks of a continuation of the "Citizens' Revolution" and the creation of a Constituent Assembly but makes no concrete proposals for organizing a movement to carry it through. Clare Doyle of the CWI challenges Mélenchon's proposal for a Constituent Assembly, stating; "Why not make it an assembly of revolt, with democratically elected representatives, at all levels, including from assemblies in the workplaces, offices, schools, local neighborhoods, and factories?" ("France in Revolt," 12/11/18).

Gauche Révolutionnaire's program speaks to what is needed now to take the movement forward: "The French movement needs to link the immediate struggle for a minimum wage, the reinstatement of the taxes on the super-rich, an injection of billions into education, health, and the environment with the struggle for socialism. This entails striving for a society that is planned democratically and ecologically to satisfy the needs of all and not the profits of the handful of super-rich ... a truly democratic, fraternal and tolerant society, free of wars, poverty, racism, and sexism." ☘



# Brexit Negotiations In Crisis

## For a Socialist Alternative to the EU Mobilize to Kick Out the Tories!

*Adapted from an article from The Socialist (paper of the Socialist Party, CWI in England & Wales, sister organization of Socialist Alternative).*

On December 11, British Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit deal was supposed to be put to a parliamentary vote. Facing fierce opposition, the vote has been postponed and May faced a vote of no confidence within her own party which she survived. Among the multitude of sharp divisions, what all sides can agree on is that it seems unlikely the vote will go her way. This presents a huge opportunity for our side – workers, trade unionists, young people, and all who oppose austerity – to strike a final blow against May's conservative Tory government.

The Tory party ministers who advocated for a "Brexit" vote oppose May's deal because it's not "hard" enough. In other words, it doesn't go far enough in giving the British government and corporations free reign to exploit the country's workers and resources. But it's not only the right wing who will feel this deal is a "no-Brexit Brexit". Many workers will recognize that the deal comes as close as the government dares to ignoring the anti-establishment, anti-neoliberal sentiments that motivated millions to vote to leave the EU in 2016. The deal commits Britain to a "dynamic alignment" with the EU on things



**The EU will not make any more concessions to British Prime Minister Theresa May to help her sell Brexit.**

like state subsidies for industries – which place obstacles in the way of bringing them into public ownership.

One key issue dividing parliament is the question of how to avoid creating a "hard" border between Northern Ireland, which is part of the UK, and the independent Irish Republic, which will remain in the EU. The imposition of a hard border could be highly destabilizing to relations between the two communities in Northern Ireland and the island's two states.

Now that the vote has been postponed,

what are Theresa May's options? She will almost certainly try to come up with a new Brexit deal. But the reality is that any deal is likely to fail because the capitalist class – and their representatives in parliament – are simply so divided that they are at stalemate.

### Political Representation

This crisis of political representation for the capitalist class is an international phenomenon. The world economic crisis has undermined the authority and base of support



Read more on international news at [SocialistWorld.net](http://SocialistWorld.net), website of the Committee for a Workers International.

for all capitalist parties. If Jeremy Corbyn, the left-wing Labour party leader, fought for a Brexit on the basis of strengthened workers' rights, it would have enormous appeal to workers across Europe. The opportunity in front of Corbyn and his supporters cannot be underestimated.

But as yet this opportunity has not been seized. Theresa May has announced plans to send ministers around the country to sell her deal to the public. Where are the plans for mass Labour rallies opposing it and explaining a pro-worker Brexit alternative? Instead the space has been left for the far-right leader Tommy Robinson to call a protest against the "Brexit betrayal." If Corbyn doesn't step up, forces like these can misdirect anger at the Tories toward racism and division.

Corbyn has rightly accepted May's challenge of a TV debate over the deal, but the important question is what he will argue. He could point to recent workers' actions like the strikes by shipyard workers against planned layoffs and argue for nationalizing the shipyards to save the jobs. This is an opportunity for Corbyn to add meat to the bones of his proposal for a Brexit in the interest of the working class. Millions of workers could be mobilized around this type of program and would have the strength to kick out the crisis-ridden Tory government. ✪

## Mexico: AMLO Sworn In

Hannah Swoboda

On December 1, Mexico's new president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, popularly known as AMLO, was sworn into office, marking the beginning of a new period in Mexican history. After eight decades of betrayals at the hands of the two establishment political parties, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and National Action Party (PAN), a left alternative has emerged. AMLO and his new party Morena ran his campaign on promises of a dramatic transformation of Mexico, including eliminating corruption, reducing violence, fixing infrastructure, and providing resources for the poor.

This development in Mexico shines a light of hope in the midst of the current ascendancy of right-wing governments in countries like Brazil and Argentina. It shows that the Latin American working class has the power to fight back against reactionary regimes and

longstanding corruption.

AMLO's rise to power was opened up by the defeat of the establishment parties at the hands of mass movements. Nearly a century of PRI and PAN governments brought with it military and police violence, the privatization of key sectors of the Mexican economy, attacks on labor and education, and, above all, corruption. AMLO's predecessor, the former PRI president Enrique Peña Nieto, began the process of privatizing Mexico's oil industry, resulting in a 20% increase in fuel prices and huge protests. Peña Nieto was also implicated in all of Mexico's big scandals of recent years, which reached their height after the disappearance of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College in 2014, causing mass outrage that continues to this day.

Another key struggle has been against the construction of the proposed new international airport, a corruption-filled mega-project funded by taxpayer money to line the pockets

of the ultra-rich. The movement against the airport's construction forced the issue into the center of the past election cycle such that every candidate had to engage with it, with AMLO taking a prominent stance against it.

Since being elected, AMLO's positions have shifted toward the right in the face of pressures from big business. For example, he has said that he's not planning to renationalize sectors like oil and has gone back on his promise to pull the military off the streets. And significantly, AMLO decided not to take advantage of his electoral win to halt construction of the airport, instead calling a referendum on the issue.

This referendum on the airport however, has opened up a fundamental debate: who makes the decisions in society? The fight back of the anti-airport activists provided a counterforce to the rightward slide of AMLO's government, causing him to hesitate in succumbing to pressure from Mexico's wealthy elite. When given the opportunity to decide

on the airport's construction for themselves, the people rejected it with a resounding "no."

The struggle against the new airport demonstrates that when working people organize and fight, we win. An important lesson to draw from this struggle is that the movement can push forward its own demands with its own forces to win political victories, without resigning itself to working within AMLO's government and taking whatever concessions the government allows.

Without a clear break from the capitalist system, AMLO's government will continue to succumb to the pressures of big business. We must build a movement that can hold AMLO to his word. Any reforms in the interests of working people will be fought tooth and nail by the capitalists, with no gains ever being truly safe under capitalism. In order to truly secure better lives for Mexican people, and the working class worldwide, a socialist transformation of society is necessary. ✪



# The Teacher Revolt Is Not Over

**Matt Maley, member of Seattle Education Association (personal capacity)**

*Despite the uptick in strike actions, the teachers revolt, and the recent blue wave, the right wing continues their assault on unions, spending millions of dollars on billboards, canvassers, and anti-union propaganda. While many union leaderships have limited themselves to campaigning for Democrats and fighting this right wing assault with their own mailers, the real fight is being led from below.*

Ten months after West Virginia teachers sparked the largest strike wave by educators in decades, the pace of strikes may have slowed some but the spirit of West Virginia lives on. This is despite the Supreme Court's recent ruling on *Janus v. AFSCME*, which sought to undermine public sector unions, particularly teachers with around one-third of education workers being unionized.

The teacher uprising will only make right-wing forces – funded by such familiar names as the Koch and DeVos families – more determined to attack teacher unions. But under Obama, the Democrats were also determined to drastically weaken teacher unions.

In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, tax breaks for ExxonMobil over the past two decades have cost \$700 million in revenue, while school busses desperately need repair and teachers haven't gotten a raise since 2008. On October 23, responding to ExxonMobile demanding \$6 million more in tax exemptions, educators and school workers in the East Baton Rouge Parish Educators Association fought



**Baton Rouge teachers' strike threat pushed back ExxonMobil's demand for tax cuts.**

back; they voted by 99% for a one-day walk-out. Hours after the vote, which included a call to pack the hearing on ExxonMobil's bid, the threat of a strike had beaten back the oil giant, which withdrew its demand (LaborNotes.org, 11/15/2018).

On the other side of the continent, Los Angeles teachers voted by 98% to authorize a strike before the school year began. The United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) is fighting to reduce the time and money spent on standardized tests, for smaller class sizes, for raises so teachers can afford to live in LA, and to rein in unaccountable charter school spending. Educators have been calling on the district to be transparent with the budget and

prioritize students over the corporate profits of testmaker Pearson. A strike of public schools in the second biggest city in the U.S. could reinvigorate the teachers' revolt and catch the attention of the nation.

In Washington State, with the most regressive tax structure in the country, over a dozen districts began the school year on strike and many more held strike authorization votes. More than 2,000 educators and hundreds more community members in Tacoma, WA walked the picket line for seven days and won a 14.4% raise, a relatively modest victory compared to some in the state!

Recently, educators in the Chicago Teachers Union, employed by the Acero charter

school network in Chicago, went out on strike for higher pay and smaller class sizes. This is the first strike of its kind – charter school employees are rarely unionized, though that is changing. This is a further indication of how the strike wave of 2018 is not an end-point but, in reality, the beginning of a new, militant chapter in labor's struggle against school privatization and for fully funded, high-quality public education.

Public schools urgently need a tax on big business and the rich to ensure full funding, regardless of the state or ZIP code. This means moving away from property-tax based funding for schools and toward statewide and federal funding for education financed through taxing the rich and biggest corporations. In order to do this, we must build a mass movement for smaller classes and to bring wasteful spending on standardized tests and unaccountable charter schools under control. Educators and school worker unions should hold rallies and mass actions for taxes on big business.

As we enter 2019, it is clear the uprising of educators will not be easily returned to Pandora's Box. But to continue winning victories means a new, fighting leadership must be built in our unions. Educators in West Virginia formalized the massive Facebook group that made up the core organizing tool of their historic strike by recently forming the rank-and-file caucus, WV United, made up of members from both NEA and AFT locals. A key task now is to build democratic, rank-and-file organizations, like WV United, within our unions and in our unorganized workplaces around the country to sustain this wave of struggle. ✪

## GM Prepares to Cut 14,000 Jobs

**Robert Shields**

On the Monday after Thanksgiving, General Motors (GM) announced in a written statement the closing of five plants and the cutting of 14,000 jobs in Ohio, Michigan, Maryland, and Ontario. GM reports it will be cutting salaried positions by a total of 15% and has plans to end production of a plant in Gundan, Korea.

### GM Protects Their Profits

GM made this decision despite receiving enormous tax cuts passed by the Republicans and approved by the Trump administration. GM reports this shift will help them as they move away from making smaller cars and focus on autonomous vehicle, or driverless car, production.

On the other hand, Trump's tariffs on steel have added \$1 billion to GM's costs. Despite the tariffs, GM and Ford have been able to turn a profit. China's market has been a factor in this as GM is now selling more vehicles there than in the U.S.

GM has thrown in the towel, giving up on being a competitive small vehicle maker in the U.S. and is searching for a path to squeeze profits out of its current infrastructure. This plan is more about protecting corporate profits than becoming a sustainable automaker.

One of the factories on the chopping block is in Lordstown, Ohio where the Chevy Cruze is built. GM already eliminated the 2nd and 3rd shifts and moved production of the Chevy Blazer to Mexico just in the past year. Cutting shifts over a long period of time has put the United Auto Workers (UAW), which represents GM workers in Lordstown, in a

weak position with less workers to take this fight further.

The UAW needs to stand up to this corporate bullying in a major way. They could build for community demonstrations against moving crucial jobs away, participate in work-to-rule days, and start preparing members and the community for the possibility of a strike around contract negotiations in 2019.

### Fight for a Democratic Workplace

In spite of soaring profits, both Ford and GM are laying off thousands of workers. Ford has yet to announce how many will be laid off but estimates reach up to 25,000 workers globally. This will have a profound effect on the local and regional economies of the areas where these factories are based.

For the workers facing these layoffs the first question they will ask is, "What can be done?" We need a fightback that calls into question the system that created this crisis. If GM cannot run these factories profitably, the workers should take them under democratic control and revamp them to build public transportation and keep good union jobs in the communities.

While wages have remained virtually stagnant, the 1% has massively increased their wealth. U.S. workers in all sectors are facing pressure to increase production while still being paid low wages. This is a tinderbox for explosive workplace struggles in the upcoming period. It will be the willingness of working people to fight back together using increasingly escalating tactics against big business that can save our jobs and communities when faced with further cuts. ✪



# Bernie 2020

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grassroots. Bernie supporters should not wait for the official campaign to set up shop in their areas, and should launch a broad, independent campaign with grassroots democratic structures to rally working people to take ownership of the campaign.

This includes linking up with all the social struggles taking place in local areas. A Bernie campaign will be far more attractive to the most oppressed if it has the character of a broad working-class movement fighting against every injustice. The unions who supported Bernie last time, along with DSA and other progressive groups should throw their weight into such an effort.

## The Case for An Independent Campaign

But even with a mass grassroots campaign, the Democratic Party primary is far from a fair process for working people, as we learned in 2016. It's a rigged system. While there certainly is the potential for Bernie to win, which we would welcome, it's in no way automatic.

In fact, given the complexities of the 2020 landscape, it is not excluded that his campaign is defeated even earlier than it was in 2016. This could leave us with another general election between a faux-progressive corporate Democrat against Trump and millions of supporters of Bernie could again find themselves demobilized and without a vehicle to continue the fight for working-class policies.

After the defeat of Bernie in 2016, the issues he had forced into the debate were shunted aside. Instead the debate became depoliticized and centered around the personalities of Trump and Clinton. Tragically, far more people paid attention to the general election than the primary.

This raises the question about whether Bernie should even run in the corporate-dominated primary system, or if he should just now commit to run all the way as an independent and use his campaign to begin building a new mass party for working people. After all, he's already a household name and



doesn't need the primaries to reach a mass audience.

However, the suggestion that Bernie should abandon the Democratic Party primary and run independently is a non-starter for many. Many on the left, including some leading thinkers in the Democratic Socialists of America, argue the primary is the best "strategic" chance for Bernie to win. This is backed up by Bernie's strength in the 2016 primary.

In our view, there would be important advantages for the workers' movement if Bernie ran independently if you look more broadly at the processes unfolding. In the 2020 election there is a lot at stake for both the billionaire class and the working class. Capitalism is facing mounting crises on a number of fronts, and the ground is being prepared for huge events that will shake society and lead to political upheaval on a massive scale. The single biggest advantage of an independent campaign would be to lay the basis for a mass party rooted in workplaces and communities that can galvanize struggle

against the ruling class.

The mass revolt in France of the "yellow vests" provoked *The Wall Street Journal* to ask, "The real question is what happens to Western politics when the economy next heads south. Times won't always be this good, and the next recession will test the resilience of advanced political systems" (12/12/2018).

Already, in a number of countries since 2008, we have seen the collapse of many traditional political parties – the equivalents of the Democrats or Republicans – and the emergence of new parties on both the left and far right. In the U.S., the growing polarization within the political system points toward this possibility here. People are growing tired of establishment politics in the face of widespread grinding hardship. The sooner we build a real alternative for working people, the better chance we have to forestall the growth of right populism.

The biggest obstacle to a new party is not that working people wouldn't support it – as many on the left claim. In fact, polls show

growing support for a new party. The real obstacle is the conservative leadership of the left and the unions that has promoted the idea of the Democrats being the only possible alternative and a "lesser evil" for decades.

In 1950s, the unions – built through big struggles against the bosses in the 1930s and 1940s that led to significant gains – represented one-third of the workforce and commanded enormous authority in working-class communities.

Instead of launching an independent working-class party with an anti-capitalist program, the leadership of the unions delivered votes for the elites in the Democratic Party, a strategy that has continued for decades. The result? Today, less than 8% of workers are organized in the private sector, a decisive reason for the growth of inequality.

We are living in period where U.S. capitalism and its parties cannot deliver the goods for working people. A Bernie 2020 campaign could give voice to all the bubbling discontent. But it also presents a historic opportunity to rally millions of working-class people into an independent political force to fight for far reaching change against the billionaire class.

An audacious campaign in 2020 could turn the "spoiler" question on its head – after all, the Democratic Party establishment claimed Clinton was the best chance against Trump and failed. They should either stand aside or risk being replaced – just like the radical Republican Party of Abraham Lincoln smashed the "lesser evil" pro-slavery Whig Party in 1856-60.

We understand that most workers will not agree to an independent Bernie campaign and will want to try the route of the Democratic Party primary. We do not rule out the possibility that Bernie wins the primary, but it's a gamble nonetheless. We want Bernie to be elected president but we want his campaign and presidency to be the voice of the struggles of working people. But the biggest danger of all is that we miss a historic opportunity to build a new mass working-class party. ✪

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# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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# WOMEN'S MOVEMENT SHAKES AMERICA

Erin Brightwell

The vicious right-wing agenda of Trump has been pushed back in the midterm elections, in which 41 Republican members of Congress were thrown out by voters. Millions of women are disgusted by the unbridled sexism of Trump and the Republicans who pushed Brett Kavanaugh through the Senate confirmation process to the Supreme Court despite the multiple credible sexual assault allegations against him.

Increasingly, women are enraged by there being one set of rules for the elites and another for everyone else. The Republicans showed with Kavanaugh that they won't stop their attacks on women, LGBTQ people, immigrants, workers, and other oppressed groups, for lack of a popular mandate. It will take a determined movement in the streets, communities, workplaces and schools to stop Trump's right wing offensive.

## #MeToo Goes Into the Workplace

A new women's movement has developed through the giant women's marches, the online explosion of #MeToo, and now through workers taking job action to fight sexual harassment. The first phase of #MeToo was powerful in its own right. Individuals shared their stories and became part of a collective sense of outrage, and

corporate moguls, politicians and others revealed to be serial abusers fell from grace. The new phase of #MeToo is about organizing in our workplaces, either in unions or in new organizations, to fight for justice on the job.

From some of the most well paid workers at Google to the most oppressed at McDonald's, women workers, often together with their male coworkers, are organizing and walking off the job to pressure bosses to end sexual harassment in the workplace. Google workers have already won a partial victory after their November walkout of 20,000 workers internationally: management there has agreed to end forced arbitration in sexual harassment cases.

After lengthy strikes in several cities, union workers at Marriott hotels have recently won stronger language protecting workers against sexual assault by guests, as well as strong wage increases. Unions should be, and sometimes are, including demands around sexual harassment in their bargaining. They should also be opening critical discussions within their memberships on how to fight sexism on the job, and on how critical it is to have a unified workplace across gender, race and other divisions to win on all issues including wages and benefits. This new phase of #MeToo — of organizing and going out on strike if necessary — holds enormous potential power to improve the day to day lives of millions of women. Through building workplace

organization it will also improve the lives of male workers.

## Defend Abortion Rights!

With arch-conservatives in a majority on the Supreme Court, defense and extension of abortion rights must be a key priority for the women's movement in 2019. Roe v. Wade was won during the momentous 1960s and 1970s women's movement, when a conservative Supreme Court was dragged along with the pace of events and rapidly changing public opinion. Recent surveys show support of Roe v. Wade at 71% overall, including even 52% of Republicans! Even if the Supreme Court steers clear of Roe v. Wade, a mass movement is desperately needed to win back the ground that has been ceded in reproductive rights over the past several decades of far right attacks in state legislatures.

The strategy of the mainstream women's organizations of closely aligning with the Democratic Party establishment has been an abject failure for defending women's reproductive rights. Young women rejected the stale arguments of corporate feminism to vote for Bernie Sanders in big numbers in the 2016 primaries. A new women's movement will need to go further and join with radicalized union workers, LGBTQ, BLM and immigrant activists, fighters for environmental justice and others to form a new party that is independent of big business and which has a pro-worker, left-wing program that fights for

the rights of all oppressed people.

In much of mass media, feminism over the past decade has been dominated by individualism. This type of feminism celebrates the achievements of wealthy ruling class women like Hillary Clinton, and emphasizes that women can take individual action to reach greater heights in their lives and work, as preached by Sheryl Sandberg's Lean In. The "feminist" CEOs and capitalist politicians want to see more women at the top, as they actively work against working class women's interests. The for-profit health care system, the severe crisis of housing affordability, low wage jobs: these factors and more, alongside the rollback of reproductive rights, all contribute to women's oppression. We need to continue to reject a feminism of the elites that is placated by the symbolism of a few token women breaking a glass ceiling.

We need a women's movement with an organized socialist feminist wing that will fight to center the needs of working class women, women of color and LGBTQ women. Crucially, a socialist feminist platform must highlight the need for the economic stability needed to raise a child just as it highlights reproductive justice. It needs to fight for gender and racial justice simultaneously, and it must stand for the rights and equality of LGBTQ people. But most of all it needs to point away from a system organized solely on the basis of profit and toward a new egalitarian society where people's needs will be the top priority. ✪