


# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE



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# EDUCATION REVOLT



## TEACHERS, STUDENTS, AND PARENTS FIGHT FOR FULL FUNDING

### ALSO INSIDE

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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

True equality and equal opportunity for all is something that I have always wanted, but I didn't know how to fight for it. I was under the impression that supporting the Democratic Party was helpful, since the only other option was the reprehensible Republican Party. But then in 2016, Bernie Sanders ran as a "democratic socialist" with a demand for well paying jobs for all to repair our crumbling infrastructure. Yet the Democratic Party slandered and sabotaged his grassroots campaign. This left me with little hope for any change to ever come out of the Democratic Party, but I became interested in a new word: "socialism."

A couple of months passed by and nothing had really changed in my life. Until one day I took a step off of a job site in Boston's most expensive luxury tower and looked at a group of homeless people freezing. I knew that that apartment would be left vacant as an investment for a millionaire, and at that moment I could not accept this system anymore that would allow for apartments to be left empty while people froze on the streets. I did not know what to do about the system though, since our politicians are morally bankrupt. Then I remembered "socialism." When I started to look deeper into socialism I realized that Bernie was only the tip of the iceberg and with a grassroots working-class movement we could push for more than



**Alex Glassmacher**

Interior Designer  
Boston, MA

just reforms, we could revolutionize society. That's when I decided to join Socialist Alternative so that I could be in an organization that would fight for immediate reforms, but would not stop until the rotten system of capitalism was overthrown and a socialist society was created, where all could prosper. ✦

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# Oakland Teachers Lead Historic Strike

**Rob Rooke**, Skyline High School parent and organizer

“I’ve been waiting for this moment for years!” was the sentiment of many teachers at Skyline High where over a hundred blocked the school entrance.

Teachers have faced the daily toll of dramatic underfunding. Special education teachers can barely maintain their anger at how their students have suffered through decades of cuts. The hope is that this strike will be a turning point in the direction of public education in Oakland.

The people of Oakland have turned out in the thousands on picket lines and are keeping their kids home from school. The magnificent level of parent and student support is reflected in the many schools with less than one percent of students in attendance on February 21, day one of the strike. Some schools on the second day had zero student attendance. Today, there is a significant shift to the left in consciousness: the strike has galvanized a wider anger at the economic setbacks all Oaklanders feel.

Strike day two’s rally converged on the headquarters of the school district’s main driving force for privatization, the misnamed Great Oakland (GO) Public Schools. “GO” arrived in Oakland over a decade ago, funded by local and national billionaires, to promote charter schools as a stepping stone to privatization. A critical element of their campaign was to make public education a bad experience for teachers, parents, and students. The district would underfund schools, parents would pull their kids out and then enroll them in billionaire-subsidized charter schools. Falling enrollment would lead to closing schools and an open market for new charters. The one problem they faced was the resistance of the Oakland Education Association.

## Mass Mobilizations

OEA leaders have helped educate their own members and the parent community as a whole on the privatization plans of the district. Charters are increasingly recognized for what they really are.

“Billionaires can’t teach our kids!” was the chant echoing through the streets of West Oakland as public education community members rallied at GO headquarters.

The teachers’ demands for a 12% pay hike, smaller class sizes, and more support staff are welcomed by parents, but the OEA decision to fold-in the demand for no school closures has parents cheering. The district superintendent was practically run out of a Kaiser Elementary meeting of parents over the proposed closures. Parents are done with

the district’s destabilization efforts. It’s increasingly accepted that the district intends to destroy public education and make itself disappear – as recently happened in the New Orleans school district.

Teachers have been preparing for this strike for many months. As other teachers in Los Angeles, Denver, and again in West Virginia took to the streets and won their battles, teachers in Oakland were eagerly checking their phones and discussing in their lunch rooms. For most Oakland teachers, this is the first strike of their lives.

At the 86 schools, yellow special education buses were allowed through, but all deliveries were stopped. The district is losing \$9 million a day for the 33,000-34,000 students not attending school. The OEA’s approach of mass mobilization, explaining the wider issues at play, and uniting teachers and parents has had an incredible effect.

## Oakland’s Democratic Establishment

Oakland’s establishment are paying lip service, supporting the teachers because it is politically expedient, but preparing to undermine the movement. The city agreed to open its rec centers for OEA Solidarity Schools where parents could drop their kids and respect the strike. On day one, its inspectors confiscated free sandwiches for not being refrigerated – parents yelled at them, “our kids take sandwiches like these to school every day!”

The mass media have also been pushing the district’s arguments: that Oakland is broke, that several kids crossed picket lines, and have been silent on the poverty pay of new teachers and the district’s plan to privatize.

While California’s governor and Oakland’s mayor are both friends of the charter model, they have continued to make vague statements to support the teachers. Rumors of Kamala Harris visiting picket lines to promote her race for president were nixed when the OEA refused to let that happen. In stark contrast, Bernie Sanders tweeted the specific demands of the teachers and the need to win on the picket lines. Teachers in Oakland recognize that this strike is also a fight against the billionaire class, the enemy Bernie often points to.

## A Fight to the Finish

Huge public support has created a political



*One of many marches and rallies organized by the Oakland teachers, students, and parents.*

vulnerability for politicians who don’t want to be seen as anti-teacher. In Oakland, the district board appears to be indifferent to the solid picket lines that are costing it millions daily. However, as the strike continues to point politically at the district’s behind-the-scenes privatization, the board will likely find more money for the contract. If the strike continues as solidly as it began, they may even agree to temporarily keep some schools open, hoping to restart that fight after the strike.

The OEA members have mandated negotiators to not come back with an offer unless it includes higher pay, smaller class size, more support staff, or school closures. But the last demand would put a halt to the entire decades-long agenda of the district.

In 1996, the OEA strike lasted for five weeks. A long strike cannot be ruled out this time as well given the high stakes for both sides. While a strong picket line does hurt the district financially, this movement needs to shake up the entire picture in Oakland, linking with the generalized anger at inequality in the city.

Currently, teachers in San Francisco are discussing a district-wide sickout this Thursday. Solidarity workplace actions and teacher sickouts across the Bay Area in support of the OEA and their demands would be an important next step. Longer term, the union should consider running independent candidates for school board who are committed to dismantling the districts’ plans and willing to undo the top-down priorities of the board.

The leadership of organized labor, the OEA, is in the spotlight, pointing toward a different direction for Oakland. In previous fights

against school closures, the district pitted parent against parent, black against brown, white against black. Now, the student leaders of the movement are chanting “The schools united, will never be defeated!” Parent leaders are aware that the union including school closures into contract negotiations gives the movement incredible leverage. Under OEA leadership, the anti-privatization movement has suddenly become mainstream and widely discussed.

One parent high fived another at the end of a school-wide meeting, “We gotta turn this shit around!” That is what is beginning in Oakland.

We Call For:

- ✪ End teacher poverty – 12% raise for all OEA members and a \$15,000 wage hike for the lowest paid teachers and school workers.
- ✪ No school closures! Tax the billionaires to keep our schools open and fully funded.
- ✪ Unionize Oakland’s charter schools as a first step toward bringing all charters back under direct district control. For the biggest, strongest OEA opposition to the charter bosses and billionaires.
- ✪ Solidarity workplace actions and teacher walkouts across the entire Bay Area in support of the OEA and their demands.
- ✪ Replace the entire school board with OEA supporters.
- ✪ The California Democratic Party has presided over all attacks to public education statewide. We need our own party with grassroots democratic structures that will unite the fight for workers’ interests at every step, not cave to billionaires. ✪

# Bernie 2020: Build a Working-Class Fightback Against the Billionaire Class



**Kshama Sawant**  
Seattle City Councilmember

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@cmksawant

Bernie Sanders launched his 2020 run for the U.S. presidency vowing to mount “an unprecedented and historic grassroots campaign that will begin with at least one million people from across the country.”

In the first 24 hours, he had already raised \$5.9 million in donations and has more individual donors than all other current presidential candidates combined.

Starting from a much higher point than in 2015, Sanders is well poised to politically define the coming Democratic primary.

Sanders’ video announcement began: “Real change never takes place from the top on down, but always from the bottom on up.” I fully agree. And that is why Socialist Alternative and I will be working with others to launch grassroots campaigns in communities, unions, schools, and workplaces across the U.S. to build a mass working-class fightback around Sanders’ campaign.

There is a great deal at stake in this election. Trump urgently needs to be driven out, and socialists and the left must take full advantage of the potential to organize alongside the millions already moving into struggle and who now will be mobilized around Bernie.

But we should also heed the lessons from 2016, when the Democratic primary was rigged against Bernie: with the Democratic National Committee (DNC) actively organizing against him, maneuvers in a series of state caucuses and primaries, and with the corporate media and “progressive” Democratic figures leading waves of blistering attacks.

In the past year, the strikes of teachers and hotel workers and the action of airport workers to end the government shutdown has pointed toward the collective power of the working class. We need our own party, independent of corporate money and power, and that fights alongside our movements rather than against them.

I think Bernie should run as an independent socialist, as I have, and used his campaign to launch a new mass party for working people, instead of running inside a corporate party whose leadership is determined to stop him at all costs.

Bernie unfortunately has made his decision and is running in the Democratic primary, but it is not acceptable that our political

movement becomes imprisoned in this process. While it is certainly true that Bernie will gain an enormous platform in the Democratic primary, declaring now that he was running as an independent and using his campaign to lay the basis for a new party would create a massive earthquake in American politics.

If the Democratic establishment succeeds in once again blocking Bernie, he should continue his run as an independent candidate all the way to November 2020. History doesn’t offer an unlimited number of opportunities to build the kind of political force working people need and we must learn from the past. If the Democratic leadership again succeeds in ramming through another status quo candidate, there is a risk Trump could win reelection in spite of his unpopularity and poor standing in the polls at present. Certainly an establishment candidate may also be capable of defeating Trump, as many such candidates won in last fall’s midterm elections, which were essentially a referendum on the administration’s right-wing agenda. But we do not accept that the corporate politics of Joe Biden or Kamala Harris are an asset in defeating the right or represent the views or needs of working people – it is quite the opposite.

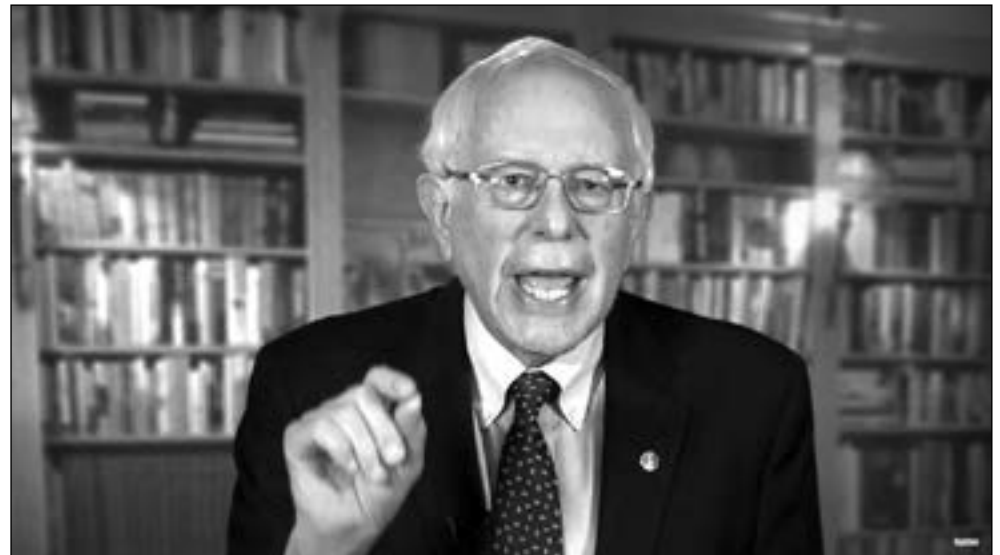
## It's the Program

Sanders today is the most popular politician in the country, and the working class demands at the center of his 2016 campaign – Medicare for All, free public college, and a federal \$15 minimum wage – have been thrust to the center of American political discourse. While long popular, these demands now have overwhelming support in the polls as a result of Sanders and grassroots forces backing them. Many establishment Democratic Party politicians have had to at least pay lip service to them.

In 2016 and since, Sanders’ self identification as a “democratic socialist” has played a big role in creating a mass discussion about socialist ideas, a process primarily driven by the failure of capitalism and its inability to provide decent living standards for the working class or a future for young people.

Now polls show a majority of millennials view socialism positively.

When asked by CBS how his new campaign would be different, Sanders responded “We’re going to win.” But as my organization, Socialist Alternative, and I have emphasized, neither Bernie Sanders nor his working-class program are at all acceptable to the ruling class. Sanders will face an uphill fight every step of the way, and all sorts of maneuvers



*Within a week of announcing, Bernie raised over \$6 million and one million signed up to get involved in his campaign.*

and vicious tactics will be deployed if seen as necessary to stop Sanders from winning the Democratic primary.

The crowded field of candidates in the Democratic primary is also a different situation than the clear contrast created in 2016. Many working people and youth will take some time to assess the different candidates running on “progressive” platforms. This is understandable, but in spite of Sanders’ political weaknesses, which are real, his program and approach are qualitatively different from any of the other candidates. Even Elizabeth Warren, who stands for many progressive, pro-working-class demands, differs from Bernie in not arguing for the need to build a mass movement to win real change. Her approach is purely electoral and limited to the Democratic Party and this is completely insufficient.

## Standing Up In Seattle

What will really be needed to win our demands and defeat the coming onslaught of the ruling class against Sanders is a broad independent grassroots campaign of millions of working people, with grassroots democratic structures, independent of the Democratic Party, and aimed at mobilizing the strongest possible force.

As a city councilmember in Seattle, I have fought alongside social movements and labor to help win the \$15 minimum wage, millions of dollars for affordable housing, and a series of landmark renters’ rights victories. All of these gains were won in spite of the fierce opposition of the Democratic establishment, which has long run Seattle City

Hall. My organization, Socialist Alternative, has been the backbone of our progressive victories. Even the most well meaning of the Democratic Party councilmembers will bow to huge pressures from big business and the leadership of their own party, as we saw with their betrayal of working people in Seattle by capitulating to corporate pressure and reversing the progressive Amazon Tax we had helped win last spring.

This year, my seat is up for reelection in Seattle. Here, the corporate politicians are backed by Amazon’s billions and are still furious over our campaign to Tax Amazon in 2018. Helping with this campaign will build momentum for socialists and independent campaigns.

Sanders’ website opens with “Not Me. Us.” We need to make this real – not just in the fight for Bernie’s campaign and against the corporate political establishment – but in the struggle for a fundamentally different kind of politics.

Rather than wait and see what’s in store in the Democratic primary, let’s start now.

Let’s begin building independent grassroots campaigns in our communities and workplaces, introduce resolutions in our unions to support Bernie’s campaign, and launch student groups on our campuses. Let’s use this historic moment to launch an all-out working class fightback.

But to really defeat the right wing and win the struggle for a society based on the needs of working people and a sustainable environment, we need to fight for a socialist alternative. I hope you will consider joining my organization. ☘



## Sawant and Seattle Community Fight Back

# Victory for Halcyon Mobile Home Park Residents

Nick Jones

In mid-2018, homeowners at the Halcyon Mobile Homes Park in North Seattle were shocked to learn their community was up for sale. Nearly all in the senior park bought their homes under the explicit promise that the land would never be sold, that the community would be a place where they could “age in peace.” The residents own their mobile homes outright, but pay rent for the land they sit on – one of the most affordable and seemingly stable options for seniors living on limited incomes in one of the most expensive cities in the country.

Anxiety caused by news of the sale was compounded in December when residents heard that a developer had already submitted a preliminary plan to redevelop Halcyon into 196 market-rate townhomes. This would have meant a mass eviction for the community.

Halcyon residents refused to sit idly by and watch their community be swallowed up by developer bulldozers. Instead they reached out to the Seattle City Council, and with the help of Councilmember Sawant’s office were able to organize a powerful resistance that won a year-long moratorium on the sale of the park. This victory is a first step to guaranteeing their long-term stability, but the fact that the park’s eventual sale has gone from an established fact to a politically-charged debate proves that ordinary people can fight back against the status quo and win.

### Big Developers Caused the Crisis

Seattle is reeling from a deep crisis of housing unaffordability. The homeowners at Halcyon, almost all of whom are low-income seniors, saw Halcyon as an “island of affordable housing in a sea of gentrification.”

Alongside Sawant’s office, Socialist Alternative, the Association of Manufactured Homeowners and others, Halcyon residents began a breakneck campaign to organize the entire mobile home community and bring the issue to the attention of the broader public. A committee meeting was called by Sawant’s office to get homeowners to city hall to tell their stories, and to formally introduce legislation to temporarily stop all redevelopment at Halcyon and buy time for a permanent solution.

This put the rest of the city council in a difficult position – it’s not good publicity to side with developers and landlords against low-income seniors during an election year. Other councilmembers and Mayor Jenny Durkan sidestepped by arguing that any exemptions to the city’s “upzoning” plans to increase density in several neighborhoods, including the one where Halcyon resides, would lower the overall amount of housing in the city and contribute to keeping rents high overall.

Waiting for private developers to solve the housing crisis is a totally failed strategy that has caused the gross inequality and massive suffering we see today. We need rent control and to Tax Amazon and big business for a massive expansion of social housing - we *don't* need to evict low-income seniors from their homes.



*“My family and I have lived in Halcyon mobile homes park for more than 25 years. We took our retirement income to buy a home so we could retire peacefully and safely in the neighborhood that we knew, among people that we knew and trusted. So that’s why the thought of losing our homes and not having a place to go is so frightening. We worked for years, who ever thought I would have to fight to keep my home!? Sawant and her staff have been so incredibly helpful, I cannot tell you how much they have done for us, I truly appreciate them and all they are doing.” -Lynette Chaise, Halcyon Park resident*

Within two weeks of getting organized, Halcyon residents were on the front page of *The Seattle Times*. Together with Councilmember Sawant’s office they organized to pack multiple city council meetings and force the squirming establishment to vote unanimously in favor of a temporary moratorium on the sale of the park.

While the fight over Halcyon is far from over and a permanent solution still has to be won, this is undoubtedly a victory with lessons for affordable housing movements everywhere.

Just as essential as the militant action of the homeowners at Halcyon was having a representative in city hall who unabashedly fights as a voice for movements of working people rather than a mouthpiece for developer interests. In the five years since Kshama Sawant was first elected, her office has been able to help one community struggle after another win major victories against big business interests and an intransigent political establishment.

Because of this, there is an awareness in Seattle that ordinary people don’t have to roll over and accept the brutal consequences of the private housing market. Working people across Seattle see victories like that of the Halcyon community and see that it is possible to fight back against the rich and powerful and win! The victories that Sawant’s office has helped win give many more people the confidence to resist any injustice they themselves are facing. ✪

## Sawant Reelection Campaign

### A Referendum on Who Runs Seattle:

### The People or Amazon?

Sunny Aiyar

Socialist Alternative and Kshama Sawant made history in 2013 and 2015 by winning and retaining a seat on Seattle City Council as an independent socialist. This showed that openings exist for socialists to run serious and effective campaigns outside the Democratic Party to challenge the corporate agenda dominating local and national politics.

As Amazon and other major corporations continue to try to dictate the priorities of the Seattle City Council, the Kshama Sawant reelection campaign poses the question: Who runs Seattle? Jeff Bezos or ordinary working people?

In just five years serving on the city council, Sawant and Socialist Alternative have shown what an independent fighter for working people can do. We’ve worked alongside countless activists and grassroots organizations to win major victories for working and oppressed people in Seattle that were previously dismissed as “unrealistic.” The most well known of these is the \$15 an hour minimum wage, which subsequently spread to cities and states across the country and became a central plank in Bernie Sanders’ campaign platform. Additional victories include:

- ✪ An “anti-slumlord law” preventing landlords from increasing rents when their properties have outstanding code violations;
- ✪ A cap on move-in fees;
- ✪ Halting proposed 400% rent hikes for low-income families in public housing;
- ✪ Winning city funding for an annual Indigenous People’s Day celebration to replace Columbus Day;
- ✪ Saving a women’s shelter and other homeless services from being cut from the city’s budget, and many more.

The political establishment puts the interests of wealthy corporate donors above the needs of ordinary people. From Trump and Congress through state and local legislatures, the corporations and their lobbyists maintain a direct line of communication and control over establishment politicians of both parties. Seattle Democratic Mayor Jenny Durkan accepted a whopping \$350,000 from Amazon during her 2017 campaign. Then, when housing activists fought and won a tax on Amazon, the corporate giant blatantly blackmailed the city, threatening to shut down construction on a major downtown property. The mayor, with the help of an informal “kitchen cabinet” of corporate lobbyists, organized a shockingly speedy process to repeal the tax on Amazon and other big businesses. Nearly a year later, they have yet to find any replacement funding for affordable housing.

Kshama has been the only elected official consistently standing up against these “business-as-usual” practices and making sure ordinary people have the opportunity to fight to defend themselves against the predatory interests of Amazon, the big developers, and other corporate kingpins in Seattle. Even having one voice for ordinary people in city hall has helped push Seattle politics to the left. It is vital for working people nationwide to reelect this fighter against the billionaire class.

Right now, ordinary people across the country are continuing to get organized, fight back, and win, showing the immense power of mass working class revolt. A fightback in New York City helped defeat a rotten deal with Amazon. In West Virginia, Los Angeles, Oakland, and Denver, teachers are reviving the strike as a weapon to deal critical blows to Republican and Democratic lawmakers funded by the same billionaires profiting from the systematic defunding, privatization, and charterization of public schools. While the primary strength of our movements is in the streets and workplaces, we have to fight in the electoral and government arenas as well.

Reelecting Kshama Sawant in 2019 would be a powerful boost for everyone fighting back against corporate control over all aspects of our lives. When people see the impact a genuine fighter for working class interests can have in elected office, it raises confidence in what is possible and provides a blueprint that movements in other parts of the country can follow.

Donate today at [kshamasawant.org/donate](http://kshamasawant.org/donate) and sign up to follow the campaign! ✪



# 30 Year Campaign to Undermine Public Education Working People Stand Up Corporate Privatizers

**Matt Maley and Tom Crean**

Thirty-six years after the *Nation at Risk* report commissioned by the Reagan administration - which first rang the alarm about the "crisis" of public education - launched the corporate "education reform" drive, events have come full circle. Hundreds of thousands of teachers from West Virginia to Los Angeles have gone on strike in the past year, with massive support from parents and students. They have challenged the underfunding of education and the drive to privatize, particularly through the creation of ever more charter schools. The education revolt has won important victories and put the corporate "reformers" on the back foot. But while they are down, we should in no way conclude that these forces are decisively defeated.

In the 1980s, when *Nation at Risk* was published, the ruling class in the U.S. and internationally were in the process of trying to restore the profitability of their system after the recessionary 1970s marked the end of the post-war boom. This led to a series of "neoliberal" policies, among which were the drive to privatize large sections of the public sector especially in countries where railroads, utilities, and health care provision had been brought into public ownership after World War II. All sorts of manufactured "crises" were created to justify privatization which became a bonanza for the worst sort of parasitic capitalists.

It is important to look back and see how the "reformers" took the all-too-real problems facing public schools, especially in poor and segregated communities, and used them to build a case to dismantle public education brick by brick. Education

reform was sold using the slogan of "choice." It was claimed that choice - whether in the form of voucher programs that divert public funds to private schools or investing in charter schools - is in the best interest of students and parents. In reality these are tools of the ruling class for starving-out public education. A related goal was destroying local community schools where ordinary people could band together to fight for improvements and hold school leaders accountable. At every stage, the reformers sought to convince parents and students that they were consumers of an education "product" with "choices" as opposed to citizens with rights.

It is no coincidence that some of the biggest champions of the so-called "reform" movement are some of the richest families in America, including the Waltons (owners of Walmart), Eli Broad, and Bill and Melinda Gates. Nor is it a coincidence that these families are also sworn enemies of educators' unions. Targeting the teachers' unions was part of trying to push back the labor movement decisively. After the long retreat of the industrial unions in the '80s and '90s, the public sector remained as labor's stronghold with the teacher unions being key. By pushing proposals to end tenure and for "merit pay" tied to testing, the reformers aimed to make it easier to fire teachers. There was a relentless campaign in the media to portray most teachers as greedy and incompetent.

A key moment in the education reform campaign was the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002 with strong bipartisan support. NCLB is a prime example of education

reforms as a wolf in sheep's clothing, adorned in lofty rhetoric about closing "racial achievement gaps" while tying a school's federal funding to high stakes testing, one of the primary mechanisms that has further defunded the poorest schools and districts! If schools did not meet the "proficiency" standards, they were to be closed. This led to a wave of school closings around the country. Teaching became increasingly focused on "teaching to the test" as schools in working-class communities fought to avoid closure. In this way the quality of education was degraded. Arts and other programs not the focus of testing were slashed to the bone.

Never mentioned was addressing the massive funding disparity between schools in poor communities and those in wealthy suburbs. Public education in the U.S. is overwhelmingly funded by property taxes and this puts poor communities at a serious disadvantage. Despite all the evidence that segregation is a major contributor to the educational obstacles facing black and brown children, no proposals were brought forward to address this running sore. After a period of partial desegregation in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the civil rights movement, schools have become even more segregated over the past twenty years. But again, funding disparities and segregation were never raised by the reformers. In reality, education reform was never about helping children. It was about reinforcing the domination of the corporate elite.

## 2008 Crash and the Obama Years

The 2007-'08 economic crash was followed by a massive wave of attacks on working people as the ruling class sought to make them pay for the crisis of their system. Millions lost their jobs and their homes and there were massive cuts to public programs, especially education, at state and local levels. While education spending has been growing in recent years, the U.S. is still a long way from returning to the levels of funding for public education that existed before the Great Recession. As we pointed out in the introduction to the 2018 edition of our pamphlet, *Save our Schools*: "Combined with mass layoffs of educators that were never reversed, rising student populations are stretching classrooms to their limit. As of now, it would require 400,000 new educator positions to return to 2008 staffing levels."

This period also marked a major acceleration of the ruling class' assault on public



education. The school year 2007-'08 was one of two years in the past couple decades, along with 2003-'04, during which more than two thousand public schools were shut down! In 2009, Obama doubled down on the regime of privatization established by NCLB with the "Race to the Top," holding federal funds hostage unless unions agreed to a teacher evaluation system tied to test scores with the widely acknowledged bunk science of "value-added modeling."

Despite the role Obama played in education reform, his election as the first black president did raise expectations among many working-class people, especially people of color, and there were numerous examples across the country of community fight-back, uniting teachers, parents, and students against over testing, privatization, and especially school closures. Often these struggles went down to defeat but they reflected the increasing disillusionment with

**The education has won important victories and put corporate "reformers" on the back foot.**





# Education Up to

and making demands around wider issues as well as pay, the CTU made significant gains, eliminating merit pay from the contract, reducing the impact of test scores on teacher evaluations and securing an 18% raise. Unfortunately, “Mayor 1%” Rahm Emanuel was able to force through another wave of demoralizing school closures a year later.

The year 2010 also saw Scott Walker elected as the governor of Wisconsin. Shortly after entering the governor’s mansion, Walker engaged in a fierce attack on public sector union rights. While ultimately the labor movement was unable to stop Walker’s attacks, it was high school students who walked out and educators who followed them, calling in sick en masse, that galvanized the mass movement in the streets that occupied the capitol building in Madison.

## Trump, JANUS, and the Reforging of the Strike Weapon

The 2018 revolt of educators emerged in spectacular fashion in the polarized era of Trump, but the tinder and fuel for this blaze were built up for years under Obama. Trump and big business have sought, yet again, to deal public sector unions a death blow, this time with the *Janus v. AFSCME* Supreme Court decision which makes the entire public sector “right to work.”

But starting in West Virginia last February, teachers occupying the state capitol showed that Janus does not have to be a death sentence. Defying union leaders’ calls to return to work, they stayed out until they won a 5% wage increase not just for themselves but for all public employees in the state. Their success was infectious and led to strikes in Oklahoma, Arizona, Kentucky, Colorado, North Carolina, and

Washington State which also won real gains. Last fall, a large number of educators stood for public office, reflecting the desire to push the fight for education funding to a conclusion.

Teacher and parent activists across the country are finally reaping the reward for their long, hard struggle against corporate “education reform.” When teachers struck for six days in Los Angeles in January with daily rallies of 50,000 plus, made up of two-thirds parents, we saw graphically that this is not simply a series of teachers’ strikes but a wider revolt against decades of neoliberal attacks on working people and their communities.

The task now is to build on these victories and decisively defeat the forces of corporate education reform by restoring all cuts to education and ending the drive to privatization. This requires a political struggle as well to tax the rich and centralize and equalize education funding, pointing towards a socialist society where people’s needs, including education, housing, and health care are given priority over profit. ✪

education reform.

Initially, charters were quite popular as parents hoped they would give their children a better chance at a decent education. But then the realization set in that the quality of education in the charters was not necessarily better and that the vast majority of students were still in public schools that were literally being left to rot.

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These community struggles were an important proving ground for many teacher activists and union militants leading the struggles breaking out today. The Caucus Of Rank-and-file Educators (CORE), a rank-and-file caucus of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) cut its teeth in the fight against school closures. In 2010, CORE won the leadership of the CTU and in 2012 led the historic Chicago teachers strike which popularized the slogan “our working conditions are our students’ learning conditions.”

By taking up a conscious approach to building grassroots support within local communities

# The Way Forward

2018 witnessed a remarkable upsurge in labor struggle with teachers at the heart of it. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that throughout 2018 over 485,000 workers took part in a work stoppage - more than have been involved in a single year than since 1986! Fully four-fifths of these were teachers.

Already in 2019, teachers in Los Angeles waged a magnificent six day strike which led to an important victory; teachers in Denver settled a three day strike for raises up to 11%; two separate strikes have been waged at charter school networks in Chicago over the past four months for reduced class sizes and full funding; and the heroic West Virginia teachers came out again for two days and successfully stopped a bill in the state legislature that included charter school programs and a school voucher system. As we report on page 3, teachers in Oakland California are now out on strike fighting for decent pay and an end to school closures and charterization.

Some of the key lessons of the struggles of the past year include the willingness of teachers to challenge or go around conservative “leaders” unwilling to take bold action. In West Virginia and Arizona, for example, teachers formed mass Facebook groups that helped lay the groundwork for strike action. But of course Facebook groups are not a substitute for real on the ground organizing. In West Virginia, it was critical that teachers held meetings in every building including all workers, not just teachers, to build the widest possible support for action. A new rank-and-file caucus, West Virginia United, has been established which is a key step toward giving the union the fighting leadership it deserves.

By contrast, in Los Angeles, the victory of the Union Power caucus in the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) elections in 2014 helped lay the basis for the victory the teachers and working class communities won in January. The new leadership has spent two years building support inside the union and within the community for a more decisive fight against privatization. A February article in *Labor Notes* explains the crucial role played by Contract Action Teams that were organized in every building made up of “union volunteers recruited at each school who took charge of involving educators and the local community in developing contract demands, communicating regularly with co-workers about their top issues, and mobilizing co-workers to participate in

actions, such as regional rallies last spring.”

Without doubt, central to the victories won in the past twelve months has been focusing not just on wage demands but on the overall underfunding of public schools and the disastrous effect this has had on the education students receive. This has further strengthened the massive support for the teachers’ strikes from parents and students. In Oakland, the strike has turned into a general revolt against decades of gentrification; working people are fighting for the future of the city itself.

The teachers in Arizona and other places have raised bold demands for how education should be funded by increasing the taxes on big business. LA teachers were able to get the district to agree to jointly propose a statewide moratorium on further charters. Again and again, the demands of these strikes have taken on a more political character of necessity because they are posing a wider challenge to the corporate neo-liberal agenda that has been pushed relentlessly by both parties, even if the Democrats are now falling over themselves to “support” the teachers.

But we need to be clear that the forces behind corporate education reform will push back. To continue this struggle and win further victories will require being prepared to escalate actions, for example, with appeals for wider solidarity action by public sector workers and with further statewide teachers actions. As Socialist Alternative has raised, we also need the national teachers’ unions, as well as key figures on the left like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, to call a national day of action demanding full funding of public education, reversal of all the cuts, and taxing the rich and big business to pay for it.

But the political challenge posed by the teachers’ revolt must also be carried forward. Teachers’ unions should stand independent candidates in local elections around a bold program that speaks to the needs of working people including ending privatization of education, single-payer health care, and rent control to stop out-of-control housing costs. This points toward a new party representing the interests of working people and all the oppressed. The momentum that has been achieved must not be lost. Bigger victories are possible if the spirit and determination shown by hundreds of thousands of education workers and parents are harnessed to a bold project for serious change. ✪

## Save Our Schools

New 2018 Edition

Purchase a copy for \$5

from a Socialist Alternative branch near you.

This pamphlet by Socialist Alternative looks at the relentless attacks that have been leveled against public education in the U.S. for decades. It details the privatization attempts that have been made under the guise of “school choice,” as well as the type of struggle that would need to be waged to defeat these attacks.

Check out the pamphlet at [www.socialistalternative.org](http://www.socialistalternative.org)





# A Rotten Deal - Trump, the Democrats, and Border Security

**Teddy Shibabaw**

The Democratic Party leadership has claimed political victory in negotiations with Trump on border security in avoiding another government shutdown. Yet the figures tell a different story. Trump got a \$1.4 billion, 55-mile down payment on his wall.

Democrats, in trying to look like the “adults in the room” by ensuring the functioning of the federal government, actually legitimized Trump’s contention that there’s a security crisis at the border for which the public purse must be pilfered. In a year when the cruelty of immigration enforcement and family separation had been laid bare, and voters rejected Trump’s racist and reactionary anti-immigrant policies at the voting booth, Democratic Party leaders ignored the mass sentiment and conceded.

The only crises that exist on the border are the thousands whose right of asylum is being ignored, the indigenous communities of the Rio Grande Valley which are being artificially split up, and the environmental damage caused by construction in the area. Refugees are fleeing politico-economic violence perpetrated, facilitated, or ignored by U.S. imperialism in its client states. The money being spent on “border security” is theft from the working class, poor, and oppressed on either side of the border.

## Shutdown and Emergency

This is not new. Last year, Democratic Party leaders were even prepared to give Trump all \$25 billion that he needs to construct the full 1,000 mile-long “wall” in exchange for his support of the DREAM Act. The only thing that seems to have prevented that deal from going through was Trump’s arrogance of demanding a ton for every

pound the Democrats gave.

At that time, the Democratic leadership was ready to strike a rotten compromise, but at least there was a tangible benefit of protecting the Dreamers. What did the Democratic Party secure this time around for immigrant rights that they claim to support? Practically nothing! Not the DREAM Act, not a renewal of Temporary Protected Status for refugees, nothing! All they managed to get was a tortured rhetorical victory because there’s no funding for a concrete 30-foot wall according to Trump’s precise specifications.

And now Trump has declared a National State of Emergency in order to redirect the rest of the funds he needs from the Department of Defense. Of course, that will be stuck in the courts and may never actually see the light of day. If taken up by the Supreme Court, there is a chance that the conservative majority could deliver a victory to Trump. Either way, Trump gets to justify himself to his hard-right base. Meanwhile, the virtually unchanged status quo of enforcement-only bipartisan policy on immigration continues, despite the Democrats’ professed desires for “comprehensive immigration reform” and Trump’s escalating harassment of immigrant communities.

## Fight Trump’s Immigration Policy

Javier Valdes, co-executive director of Make the Road NY said “there’s been a national conversation about the role of ICE and detention, and folks expected we’d see something that actually decreased the level of detention and came with actual oversight. It’s not just about the wall. It’s the other enforcement mechanisms and the impact they’re having on our communities on a day-to-day basis” (*The Intercept*, 2/13/19).



*Pelosi said “no wall” but accepted Trump’s narrative.*

Of course, a number of Democratic members of Congress have declared their support for the call to “abolish ICE” and in general the party states their opposition to Trump’s inhuman policies of separating families and detaining asylum seekers. But while it is clear that the party’s base and even a section of the elected officials are well to the left of the leadership, this makes the weakness of their position in the negotiations all the more striking. Even a number of mainstream news outlets are sharply criticizing the Democrats for the disastrous outcome in the negotiations. *The Week*, for instance, had an article titled “The Democrats’ total capitulation on the border” and a CNN.com headline read: “In border deal, Democrats gave too much away.”

The bottom line is that Trump doesn’t have a serious opposition on immigration in Congress. We cannot rely on the Democratic

Party to fight Trump’s racist anti-immigrant policies or any part of his bigoted and anti-working-class agenda. Mass protests, direct actions, and strikes need to be organized among workers, immigrant and native born. Immigrant rights organizations, Bernie Sanders, AOC, union leaders, socialists, and other major social movement organizations should call for these mass actions around the following demands:

- ✦ No money for Trump’s wall or any other so called SMART fences.
- ✦ No to a militarized border.
- ✦ No to U.S. imperialist intervention in Latin America or anywhere else.
- ✦ Make DACA and TPS permanent!
- ✦ An end to raids, detentions, and deportations!
- ✦ Immediate, full, and unconditional legalization for all undocumented immigrants. ✦

## Lessons of the Government Shutdown

**Keely Mullen**

We’re now a month on from the end of the longest government shutdown in U.S. history and we need to remember how this shutdown actually came to an end. The corporate media worked overtime to make the case that Trump caved to Nancy Pelosi and the Democratic Party. Article after article detailed how Nancy Pelosi’s Congressional maneuvering made it impossible for Trump to keep the government closed. However, this is a shameful half-truth. The real forces that pushed Trump to reopen the government with not one of his demands met were the federal workers, particularly at the airports, who refused to go to work until their pay resumed.

The last day of the shutdown did not begin with Nancy Pelosi calling for mass

rallies or Chuck Schumer organizing a sit-in at the Oval Office. It began with air traffic controllers and TSA agents at some of the country’s busiest airports refusing to go to work. It began with Sara Nelson, the president of the Association of Flight Attendants, calling on flight attendants across the country to skip work and organize mass sit-ins of Congressional offices until the shutdown ended. It began with Paul Rinaldi, president of the Air Traffic Controllers Association declaring, “They’re [Air Traffic Controllers] worried; they’re tired; they’re distracted. And they’re not going to come to work if they’re not fit for duty... This government shutdown has got to end.”

In Trump’s speech where he announced the end of the shutdown he left open the possibility that after three weeks, if there was no funding for the border wall, the

shutdown would resume. At the time we wrote:

“While Trump threatened to shut down the government again at the end of three weeks if he doesn’t get agreement on money for a wall, it is very hard to see how triggering another shutdown would be a sustainable political position. Nevertheless, unions should continue mobilizing and making it clear that another shutdown will be met with more decisive action. This position would have massive popular support.”

As the possibility of a renewed shutdown approached, Sara Nelson held a press conference to make clear that things would resume where they left off the last day of the shutdown and escalate from there. Calling for a “general strike” she said flight attendants would not work in an unsafe situation and appealed for mass demonstrations at

the airports starting on February 16. This is exactly the bold approach that the labor movement needs to take up if we are going to succeed in defeating Trump.

It is crucial that the lessons of this shutdown be crystallized for a whole new generation of workers that are entering into confrontation with their bosses and the billionaires. It is our work that lines the pockets of the super rich every day, and this gives us immense power. Airport and airline workers, who play a critical role in the overall economy, were able to bring the longest government shutdown in U.S. history to a close by beginning to strike and threatening wider action. We should learn from and replicate this lesson by organizing ourselves into an unwavering struggle against Trump, the bosses who take advantage of us, and the billionaire class as a whole. ✦



# Venezuela: No to Trump's Threats and Sanctions

**Calvin Priest**

Trump is ramping up his campaign to overthrow the Maduro government in Venezuela. He has imposed crippling sanctions and is even threatening military intervention, continuing a bloody two-century history of U.S. imperialism asserting its "interests" in Latin America – in reality the interests of big business. Ever since Hugo Chavez was democratically elected president of Venezuela in 1999 and talked about transforming Venezuela along "socialist" lines while implementing extensive social reforms, the U.S. has been out to undermine or overthrow him and his successor, Nicolás Maduro.

The Trump administration has pulled together an unholy international alliance stretching from the Spanish "socialist" government to the far right leader of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, to back Juan Guaidó's claim to be the real president of Venezuela. All of this is done in the name of "restoring democracy."

But one cannot separate the U.S.-led attempt to depose the Venezuelan government from the fact that Venezuela has the largest proven oil reserves in the world and that U.S. imperialism is increasingly in competition with Chinese, and to a lesser degree, Russian imperialism in Latin America. Both China and Russia back Maduro.

While the Democrats claim to be resisting Trump, it is remarkable that they are prepared to put their faith in him and Bolsonaro to "save the people of Venezuela." Their real position is that deposing Maduro is necessary for the interests of big business which they and the Republicans both defend.

Trump himself is undoubtedly looking for a quick and easy foreign policy victory. But an actual military intervention, which the majority of Venezuelans oppose, could lead to civil war and massive opposition across Latin America. The sanctions, while allegedly aimed at helping the Venezuelan people, will actually make the economic situation they face substantially worse. Socialist Alternative opposes the sanctions, which are a modern form of siege warfare, and all threats of military intervention.

It is of course true that the ordinary people of Venezuela are suffering a devastating economic and humanitarian crisis, and a majority no longer have confidence in the Maduro administration. Something must change quickly.

Despite identifying as a socialist, Maduro has been unwilling to stand up to foreign and domestic capitalist forces by bringing the banks and large corporations into democratic public ownership. Maduro tried to maintain stability by placating corporations with lucrative government contracts and turning to China for massive loans. Increasingly, oil revenue was used to pay back loans from foreign banks rather than for the needs of the people. This directly led to worsening conditions.

Instead of uniting and empowering the working class and the poor to fight against the elite, Maduro has been using undemocratic and repressive measures to quell growing discontent in the working class. In reality, Venezuela is now run by an unaccountable and corrupt bureaucratic caste which has betrayed the promise of the "Bolivarian Revolution" led by Hugo Chavez. But Chavez himself failed to



*Vice President Pence meets Juan Guaidó in Columbia.*

break with the capitalist class and this laid the basis for the present disaster.

This crisis, further exacerbated by Maduro's policies, is used by the capitalist establishment – including Trump and leading Democrats – to point to the alleged dangers of socialism. Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer vigorously clapped when Trump said in his State of the Union speech, "we will never be a socialist country." Comparisons with Venezuela are being used to smear "democratic socialists" like Bernie Sanders and AOC and their pro-working-class demands.

But the history of Latin America, as well as the crisis faced by working people inside the U.S. – increasing poverty and inequality while the billionaire class enriches itself, broken health care and infrastructure, the trillion-dollar student debt, and the environmental crisis – shows that capitalism is not the solution to the crisis in Venezuela.

To prevent Maduro's bureaucratic regime being replaced by a vicious, right-wing, neoliberal regime that would give U.S. capitalism full access to the resources of Venezuela requires building a new political force that truly represents the interests of the working class and the poor in Venezuela. Such a political force could win over the majority of Venezuelans on the basis of a genuine socialist and internationalist program of working people taking the banks and large corporations immediately into democratic public ownership, creating a massive public jobs program, defending democratic rights, and raising living standards. But such a victory could only be secured by calling on the working class all over Latin America and in North America for solidarity against global imperialism, capitalism and all the violence and suffering that comes with it. ☸

## Brutal History of U.S. Intervention in Latin America

**Kailyn Nicholson**

The United States has a 200-year-long history of intervening in Latin American politics to protect its geopolitical and economic interests. All of these invasions and interventions have been aimed at preventing radical or revolutionary movements from gaining or wielding political power that would set a "bad example" or restrict U.S. access to oil and other natural resources in these countries. Today, the U.S. is also competing with other imperialist powers, especially China, for influence in the region.

Both "soft" and "hard" interventions can have widespread devastating effects on the quality of life for people in targeted countries. U.S. military intervention has caused tens of thousands of civilian deaths and decades-long military dictatorships that have inflicted trauma on a mass scale. From 1898 to 1989, the U.S. directly invaded: Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Grenada, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama – some of them multiple times.

The U.S. government has also provided

support for brutal military dictatorships in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama that have collectively been responsible for hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths and social trauma lasting generations.

### Chile

In 1970, Salvador Allende was elected president of Chile at the head of a mass movement of radicalized workers. Allende promised to nationalize the country's oil resources and reverse the policies of the existing U.S.-backed government that had resulted in low wages for most workers and an inability for domestic industry to compete with a flood of cheap U.S. goods into the country.

Despite decades of U.S. financial support for his opponents, Allende was elected with overwhelming support. President Nixon immediately gave the order to orchestrate his overthrow. Over the next three years, the CIA funded and armed officials within the Chilean

military who were receptive to carrying out a coup against Allende.

In 1973, the coup finally happened, installing brutal right-wing dictator Augusto Pinochet. While publicly condemning Pinochet's "gross human rights abuses," which included killing and torturing almost 30,000 people, the U.S. government continued to provide material support for his regime. In return, Pinochet allowed U.S.-educated neoliberal economists to essentially write his government's economic policy. This included getting rid of tariffs against U.S. goods, selling off industries nationalized under Allende, privatizing social security, and making trade unions illegal. Under these policies GDP increased substantially, but so did economic inequality.

### Venezuela

Even more brutal interventions occurred in Central America in the 1980s in response to a growing wave of mass revolutionary movements opposing the impacts of U.S. economic and military interventions in the region. After a



decade of brutal U.S. intervention and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, participation in socialist movements and parties across the region declined over the '90s and early 2000s. The election of self-described socialist Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in 1999 was a blow against U.S. economic and political dominance in the region. The U.S. government wasted no time in responding by helping organize and fund a coup attempt in 2002 by military forces loyal to the previous administration. However, the coup was unsuccessful. Chavez held office until his death in 2013 when Nicolas Maduro was elected as his successor.

The massive collapse in oil prices between 2014 and 2016 pushed Venezuela from economic hardship into economic crisis. Rather than offering aid to help the country recover, President Trump is imposing sanctions in an effort to starve the government of resources and hasten its collapse. This does nothing to help ordinary Venezuelans and instead reduces the ability of their government to provide relief to those suffering the most from the economic crisis. ☸

# A Picture of the Heroic Rosa Luxemburg

**Anthony D'Amico**

Rosa Luxemburg, a heroic and principled figure of the left, died 100 years ago this year. Rosa was a disabled Polish-German secular Jew, a woman jailed for her views, a poet and a migrant, but above all she was a Marxist political economist, theorist and leader whose works have sparked the imagination of socialists for over a century. Rosa made major contributions to the development of socialist parties, theorized the nature of mass resistance by the working class, and fought steadfastly against reformism and for a revolutionary rupture from capitalism. Her murder at the hands of the paramilitary "Freikorps," ex-army soldiers aligned with the right-wing of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), has made her a martyr for the socialist workers' movement.

Rosa Luxemburg was born in Russian-ruled Poland in 1874, and immigrated to Switzerland as a teenager to avoid the czar's persecution of political radicals. She received a doctorate in 1898 in law and political economy. While studying, she helped found the Polish Social Democratic Party.

In 1898, Rosa moved to Berlin to work with the largest and most powerful socialist party of the time, the German SPD. She quickly jumped into the "revisionist" controversy that divided the party. SPD leader Eduard Bernstein argued that socialism in industrialized countries like Germany could be achieved gradually, through strengthening trade unions and winning parliamentary elections.

Rosa wholly rejected Bernstein's viewpoint. In her pamphlet "Reform or Revolution," published only months after arriving in Berlin, she said Bernstein raised "the question of the petty bourgeois or proletarian character of the labor movement." Would the SPD join the capitalist system, or work to overthrow it? She reinforced Marx's case for revolutionary socialism by arguing that parliament is an institution of, by, and for the capitalist class. The interests of workers and bosses are fundamentally counterposed. The working class can only end its subjugation if it takes power and transforms the social, economic and political system – most notably by bringing the key sections of the economy into public ownership under workers' control.

Furthermore, Rosa dismissed Bernstein's exclusive focus on piecemeal reforms. Rosa said the fight for reforms had to be linked to the conscious effort to take political power. "Between social reforms and revolution there exists for the [socialist] an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim," she wrote. Revolutions became possible as the working class



*Rosa Luxemburg speaks at a rally in 1907.*

evolved in experience and consciousness, driven forward by changing social conditions and collective victories. Failing to fight for a revolution meant failure to emancipate the entire working class.

Indeed, the Russian Revolution of 1905 was a pivotal event shaping her outlook. Rosa returned to Russia-controlled Poland, participated in the struggle against the czar, and was imprisoned. Her experiences led her to write "The Mass Strike" in 1906, which propounded a theory of revolutionary mass action. Rosa viewed the mass strike – which could erupt spontaneously – as the single most important tool of the working class for winning a socialist victory. She correctly emphasized that it was the independent movement of the working class that powered revolutions, not "officials" warming seats in parliament or trade union bureaucracies.

Some have criticized Rosa for her belief that organization would naturally emerge from workers' struggle, thereby de-emphasizing the need for a cohesive organization of revolutionaries. Her views certainly contrasted with Lenin's construction of the Bolshevik Party which was based on a clear revolutionary program and combined a wide internal democracy with a high degree of centralized discipline. However, it is important to note that prior to the Bolsheviks, there had been no tight-knit revolutionary party that had successfully won a socialist revolution! Rosa's ideas on organization were an obvious reaction to the increasingly nationalist and conservative ideas of the sclerotic SPD bureaucracy, which were epitomized in their tragic vote for World War I in 1914.

## Revolution and Counter-Revolution

When Rosa was released from prison in 1907, she returned to Berlin to teach, write, and agitate. In response to the SPD's vote for war in 1914, Rosa and her comrade Karl Liebknecht formed the anti-war, pro-worker Spartacus League. In this, she, Liebknecht, and others aligned in their fight for workers' uprisings to end the war and bring about united socialist workers' democracies. For these positions she was again jailed, this time by the German Kaiser.

The devastation of World War I, which included over 16 million people dead and another 20 million injured, rocked European nations. A year before the end of the war, the Russian czar fell at the hands of the revolutionary Bolsheviks, who were able to unite workers, farmers and soldiers into soviets, or self-governing workers councils. As German losses piled up in 1918, the Kaiser was forced to abdicate and an armistice ended the war. The SPD leader, Friedrich Ebert, became chancellor (prime minister) but revolutionary upheaval was already underway throughout Germany. A naval mutiny in Wilhelmshaven had spread to Kiel (both in the north of Germany) and then rolled onward. Soviets were springing up throughout German towns, cities, and ports.

The SPD government tried to control the situation by appeasing the revolutionary workers and soldiers. This took clear form when SPD leaders rejected the declaration of a socialist republic and instead called for new elections in January 1919. Their goal was to

write a new constitution of a capitalist republic. But Rosa and Liebknecht, who had been released from jail in November 1918, were already underway agitating against the SPD leadership. They rallied the working class, especially in Berlin, who were frustrated that the old capitalist regime had not already been toppled.

Rosa was vilified in the bourgeois press as "Bloody Rosa," who, like Lenin, demanded immediate political power for the workers' and soldiers' soviets. Realizing that the conservative social democratic establishment was irreparably compromised, in late December 1918, Rosa and Liebknecht founded the German Communist Party (KPD). They were spurred on by SPD leaders' bloody suppression of the left and the desire among revolutionary workers to aid Soviet Russia by overthrowing German capitalism. Yet the broad masses of workers, over seven million of whom were in trade unions, still held illusions in the SPD. This tumultuous situation of revolution and counter-revolution unfolded at different speeds throughout Germany.

From January 9-12, on the orders of Ebert, the social democratic prime minister, regular forces and the paramilitary Freikorps successfully and bloodily suppressed the "Spartacist" uprising.

Isolated and under seige, the Spartacist leadership fell into the crosshairs of the SPD's brutal crackdown. The Freikorps abducted Luxemburg and Liebknecht, murdered them, and threw their bodies into the Landwehr Canal.

There is no doubt that the heroic life of Rosa Luxemburg remains full of lessons for the working class today. Her contributions would have been impressive enough if she had only bravely defended Marxism against reformism or theorized the power of the mass strike. But she went further, inspired by the Bolshevik's program of "All Power to the Soviets," to launch the KPD as a tool for fighting the German revolution. For all of this to have been achieved by a woman – in an age of women's formal political exclusion – is truly remarkable.

In the words of Lenin, "In spite of her mistakes she was – and remains for us – an eagle." Radical workers and young people should say the same today in our struggle for socialism. With mass inequality, political turmoil and climate crisis gripping our planet, Rosa's words from 1916 ring just as true today: "Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads: either transition to socialism or regression into barbarism." ✪



# Massive Climate Demonstrations in Europe: Build the Global Fightback!

## Grace Fors

Over 70,000 people braced the cold air and pouring rain on Sunday, January 27 for the largest climate march in Belgian history. There have been mounting demonstrations throughout Europe. In Germany, Switzerland, and France, working people are pouring into the streets to bring attention to the impending climate catastrophe and the need for a rapid transition from fossil fuels to a sustainable economy based on renewable energy. Socialist

Alternative's sister party in Belgium, the Left Socialist Party and its student wing Active Left Students, have been energetic in the struggle on the streets and in schools.

These protests are a part of the explosive School Strike 4 Climate, a campaign that has spread to 270 cities in 17 countries. Students have initiated a call for an International School Strike on March 15, which could be a key moment for bringing the struggle to the U.S. and for building an international movement for the climate.

## Youth Revolt

In Belgium, where air quality is among the worst in Europe, tens of thousands of students have skipped school weekly and held demonstrations. The January 27 protest in Brussels was packed with families and working Belgians of all ages, but young people were the clear driving force. Teenagers climbed atop monuments and construction barriers and led chants in Flemish, French, and English, injecting a mood of disobedience and international solidarity against capitalism into the protest.



Environmental protest in Belgium, January 31, 2019.

Climate change is the most stark representation of capitalism's inability to promise a future for working-class youth. Decent, well paying jobs, clean air and water, and protection from devastating natural disasters are not guaranteed under this system.

In the U.S., the youth-dominated Sunrise Movement, prominently working with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, has pushed the demand of a Green New Deal against resistance from both corporate parties, including Nancy Pelosi. The campaign for a Green New Deal could draw tens of thousands to rallies across the country and should be coordinated with the international day of action.

Policies like permit trading, carbon taxes, and subsidies for renewable energy have failed to prevent emissions from climbing. These policies also pass the costs onto consumers, which has outraged working people. In France, the reaction to a raised fuel tax has sparked the Gilets Jaunes (Yellow Vests) movement.

The fossil fuel CEOs, with their iron grip on politicians, will fiercely oppose a transition to renewable energy every step of the way. We call for taking the energy companies into public ownership, the only way to

end the devastation caused by their relentless drive for profit, and put power in the hands of workers and the community.

## What Is Needed

The impending climate disaster is one of the most urgent factors pointing to the need for a socialist society, and its impact is global. The International Day of Action on March 15 could escalate even more, especially if environmental groups in the U.S. support the call and link it to the demand for a Green New Deal.

We need a new working-class party with no ties to corporate cash to challenge fossil-fuel backed politicians and to help organize a sustained environmental movement while fighting for quality affordable housing, retraining for workers in the fossil fuel industry, and genuine help and protection for communities struck by natural disasters.

The movement for the climate must be linked to the broader struggles of the working class and all the oppressed. The active involvement of unions will be indispensable. The example of the teachers' revolt should be built on by unions taking up environmental demands. After all, the threat of work stoppage is what ended the recent government shutdown here in the U.S. The youth have found that strike action works, and while the student strike has forced the issue into the spotlight in Europe and potentially in the U.S., workers have the leverage to win decisive victories by using their collective social power. Truly solving this crisis will require a shift toward a socialist economy, with production democratically planned to meet the basic needs of humanity. ☘

In terms of policy, this deal was the logical outcome of years of establishment politics that have allowed big business to turn our cities into playgrounds for the rich, while propping up a dysfunctional capitalist system.

We need to use this victory as a launching pad to build an even bigger working-class movement to strengthen workplace rights; strengthen the state rent laws; pass Medicare for All and the NY Health Act; and fight for a society that puts people before profit.

Amazon is building a distribution network that could be used to provide for the needs of all, rather than the whims and profits of the few. To do this we need democratic decision-making at Amazon – only possible by taking the company into public ownership under elected committees of workers and the public.

Let's celebrate the victory against Amazon, and use it to inspire us to build the fight for a socialist world! ☘

## Amazon Pulls Out of NYC Victory for Working Class Resistance

Amazon's plan to build part of its HQ2 in Queens, New York has fallen apart. There was an uproar of community activists, echoed by some state lawmakers, who opposed the atrocious handouts the city was giving to Amazon and feared that the new headquarters would displace Queens residents.

While Amazon complains they didn't "feel welcome," the real problem was they couldn't bully working people in New York to accept their dictated terms. Amazon's decision makes it clear they will only invest in communities and jobs on the basis of massive handouts and opposition to unions and workers' rights.

Clearly we need an alternative to the job creation approach of Amazon, Governor Andrew Cuomo, Mayor Bill de Blasio, and the

corporate establishment!

Cuomo and the establishment will use this to ramp up their attacks on all those who dared stand in Amazon's way.

It cannot be ruled out that this deal could be reintroduced at a later stage. That's why we need to use this moment to go on the offensive and demand the legislature abolish the pro-corporate tax breaks that Amazon would have benefited from.

Instead, we should fight to create thousands of good union jobs through a fully-funded public sector and public jobs programs. We need to tax Wall Street and the 71 billionaires in NYC to fully fund NYCHA repairs, fix the subway, fund education, and transition the economy to renewable energy sources.

## SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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*Roe v. Wade Under Attack*

# DEFEND ABORTION RIGHTS

## Ginger Jentzen

*Roe v. Wade*, the landmark 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in the U.S., has been in the target of the religious right in this country for decades. Since Trump was elected they feel they are getting closer to their goal of rolling back this key gain of the women's movement.

For years, anti-abortion activists have organized with Republicans to pass laws that severely restrict access to abortion. In 2016, Republicans controlled both houses in 35 state governments, and anti-abortion conservatives have celebrated Trump's two Supreme Court appointments in Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh.

On February 7, the Supreme Court put a stay on a Louisiana law that requires abortion clinics to have admitting privileges at a hospital no more than 30 miles away. While preventing the law from going into effect is a victory, it is only a temporary one while the court decides whether or not to hear the case. There is no guarantee that the law will be struck down. The only way to defeat this attack decisively, and others that are making their way to the Supreme Court, is the full mobilization of the emerging women's movement on a national scale. *Roe v. Wade* was won in the context of massive civil rights, women's rights, and anti-war movements. Defending *Roe v. Wade* and a woman's right to choose more broadly will require a fight back on the same scale.

## Republicans Dismantling *Roe v. Wade*

According to the Guttmacher Institute, 93 percent of American women live in a state where abortion access is limited through various laws. On February 22, the Trump administration cut Title 10 federal funding to clinics that provide or refer for abortion services, which targets Planned Parenthood, the largest provider of non-abortive family-planning care for working-class women nationally. In Texas, millions of dollars are being directed to faith-based, anti-abortion service providers. One high-profile example, the Heidi Group, has been under investigation for neglecting to provide even the most basic health care services to women. Groups like Women on Web provide online consultation with doctors and abortion pills, but even with *Roe v. Wade* on the books they're banned in Oklahoma and 18 other U.S. states. In some cases using such services is punishable with jail time. A movement for abortion rights must be connected to overturning these potentially deadly state laws.

## We Need a Fighting Women's Movement

A 2018 poll showed two-thirds of Americans support *Roe v. Wade*. The explosion of #MeToo both as an online phenomena and a banner for workplace actions against sexual harassment, particularly by the Google and McDonalds workers, clearly shows that there

is a mood for an organized fightback against sexism.

Unfortunately, while the mood to fight back is strong, mainstream liberal women's organizations like NOW and NARAL, as well as the Democratic Party, who put themselves forward as the party of women, are not leading a fight in the streets. After the Democratic victories in the midterms last November, they could have built for the women's marches in January around the call to defend and extend reproductive rights. They could have connected the fight for women's rights with a rejection of the racist, anti-women, anti-working people Trump agenda. They could have rejected the racist border wall, or gone even further and built support for workers furloughed by the government shutdown. They could have boldly called to mobilize for Medicare for All and a Green New Deal. The Democrats unwillingness to build the movements necessary to win such demands shows that while they definitely want to defeat Trump and the Republicans electorally, they're afraid of taking any stance that would offend their corporate donors. They cannot be relied on in the fight to defend women's rights.

## Women Workers Show the Way Forward

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 2018 experienced the highest number of workers on strike since 1986. Workers in industries dominated by women – teachers, nurses, and hotel workers – have largely been

the spark for the revival of labor struggle. These actions set a precedent for how we can force those in power to change course, and shows the important role the labor movement must play to unify working people in a fight against the bosses and billionaires.

The labor movement in the U.S. is beginning to rebuild and is more diverse than at any time in the past. To win against the bosses it must take up struggles against all forms of oppression. The labor movement should call to bring #MeToo into the workplaces and organize a broad struggle against harassment. The labor movement must demand the right to reproductive health care, including abortion, as well as the right to have a child without the burden of enormous childcare costs – this means demanding free, universal childcare.

Our movements can't wait for the Democratic Party or the mainstream women's organizations to become the leadership we need. Defeating backward anti-choice legislation will require a determined struggle from below. Beyond defensive battles, we must organize for an end to for-profit healthcare, and for a Medicare-for-All system including free, legal, and accessible abortion. We can fight to win a federal \$15 minimum wage and high-quality social housing, which is the bare minimum necessary for working-class families. To win lasting change, we'll need to transform these struggles for reforms into a fight for a radical shift in society – for a socialist society based on human need, not oppression and profit. ✪