

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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# FIGHT TRUMP & THE BILLIONAIRE CLASS



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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. ✦

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## 15 Now Leader Ginger Jentzen Running for Minneapolis City Council

Packing into a nightclub in the heart of NE Minneapolis on January 25, a crowd of 250 cheered as Socialist Alternative member Ginger Jentzen declared her candidacy for City Council in Ward 3. A former low-wage restaurant worker, Ginger emerged as a leading voice for a \$15 minimum wage in Minneapolis, serving as the Executive Director of 15 Now MN since 2014. Jentzen's announcement closed out the rally headlined by Kshama Sawant.



Kshama Sawant and Ginger Jentzen.

"How can we translate the mass opposition we saw last weekend into an ongoing, powerful movement to actually block Trump's billionaire agenda, from City Hall, to the State Capitol, and at the national level?," Jentzen asked the audience.

"By offering a bold vision for social change, for a \$15 minimum wage, for affordable housing for all, for free quality Medicare for all, for a society free from racism, sexism, and environmental destruction. As Bernie Sanders' campaign proved, the best way to inspire the kind of mass movement we need to defeat Trump is by linking our opposition to the right-wing with a wider movement against the billionaire class."

The financial appeal raised over \$7,000 for the campaign. "And we can promise you that, with the backing of Socialist Alternative, Ginger's campaign will build the strongest volunteer base,

knock on more doors, and build the broadest base of donors of any city council campaign in Minneapolis," said the event's emcee, Ty Moore, who ran for city council as a member of Socialist Alternative in 2013 and lost by only 229 votes in Ward 9.

"We need political representatives in City Hall who will fight unambiguously for working people and oppressed communities, who refuse corporate donations, who have proven themselves as uncompromising fighters," said Jentzen in her announcement speech. "That is not possible if you have loyalty to a political party trying to serve two bosses - trying to represent both big business and working class people... I pledge to refuse any donations from big business interests, and as a city council member, I'd only take the average wage of a worker in this Ward, donating half of my \$80,000 salary to social movements." ✦

## WHY I AM A SOCIALIST

**Nora Belrose**  
Organizer  
San Francisco, CA



Childhood was hard for me. I grew up in a conservative Christian household in Indiana. When I started questioning my gender identity at an early age, I didn't have anyone who I felt I could talk to. I tried to suppress my feelings for years, praying that God would cure me of these "sinful" thoughts. But it didn't work. Eventually, I came to terms with my gender identity: I was a girl, even if my family and society told me otherwise. I soon came out to a few of my closest friends, who were very supportive of me. It felt as if a huge weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I had spent so much of my childhood feeling sad, lonely, and afraid. But now I knew that it didn't have to be that way.

It was at this point that I was able to start re-evaluating the worldview that I had inherited from my parents: the worldview that had taught me that it was wrong to be transgender. If my parents were wrong about gender and sexuality, I wondered, what else could they be wrong about? After a long, emotional process of questioning, self-reflection, and research, I abandoned the religious beliefs I had grown up with. And I started looking at society and politics in a new light, as well.

My political views changed gradually, at first. I was skeptical of all the traditional right-wing arguments justifying inequality and poverty. They seemed no more reasonable to me than the excuses that my pastor gave me for why there was suffering and injustice in the world. I knew that we, as humans, could do better. I came to support policies like universal single-payer health care and high taxes on the wealthy. But I was never satisfied with the reforms that I heard liberal Democrats talking about. They just seemed like Band-Aid fixes for a broken system. There must be a better way, I thought.

That better way is socialism. Socialism is a system where working people control the economy democratically, and society's wealth is shared for the benefit of all. Under capitalism, a small fraction of the population owns all of the resources, land, and infrastructure that we need to live. The capitalists make all the important decisions in the economy, while the workers are forced to sell their labor just to survive. This system is hurting people and killing the planet. But it doesn't have to be this way. ✦

During the Next 100 Days

# Build Resistance to Trump's Agenda

Bryan Koulouris

One of the most reactionary, bigoted, and predatory administrations in modern history has officially taken office. The incoming Trump presidency, from the vicious tweets to the bizarre press conferences to the reactionary cabinet picks and executive orders, has millions of people understandably feeling they are in an unfolding nightmare. People fear a man who has glorified sexual assault, incited racist violence, and made billions of dollars off the backs of working people.

He has horrified many by proposing to ramp up mass deportation, attacks on women's reproductive rights, and unions while the Republican Congress is busy dismantling Obamacare. Now he has reversed Obama and given the go-ahead to the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines. He has made clear that environmental regulations generally are going to be shredded in the name of encouraging manufacturers to build factories in the U.S.

As we go to press, Trump has signed orders giving the green light to start building a "wall" on the Mexican border. He is setting the stage for deportations of undocumented workers on a previously unseen scale by adding 5,000 more border patrol officers and tripling the number of ICE officers while radically expanding the definition of "criminal" behavior which can make a person a target for deportation. He is threatening to strip "sanctuary cities" of federal funds. He is also enacting a de facto immigration ban on Muslims by stopping visas from six different majority Muslim countries.

However, fear is not the only reaction to the new "Predator in Chief." Trump's inauguration was met with the biggest day of protest in U.S. history with the women's marches on January 21 mobilizing over three million people into action. This movement must be continued, deepened, and escalated to stop the right-wing agenda. Trump's policies can be defeated, but it will take determined resistance, mass civil disobedience, and disruption of "business as usual" to win.

"Business as usual" is the



Seattle Women's March, January 21.

system that's resulted in only eight people now having more wealth than 3.6 billion people - half the world's population. Business as usual, under Democrats as well as Republicans, is perpetual climate destruction, war, income inequality, racism, and sexism. Business as usual helped open the door to Trump's populist demagoguery. The majority of the American ruling class does not see Trump as a reliable defender of their interests. But, from the point of view of the interests of working people, Trump and his billionaire cabinet are out and out enemies, and we can't depend on the same elites that couldn't stop Trump's election to stop his agenda.

## Deeply Divided Establishment

The ruling billionaire class in the U.S. and internationally is deeply divided on how to deal with Trump's ascendancy to the most powerful position in the world. Obama and Clinton want us to "give Trump a chance," but we can't wait for the defunding of Planned Parenthood or kicking millions off of Medicaid before we take action. Some Democrats, like those who refused to attend Trump's inauguration, say they want to fight Trump's agenda. If they are serious about this, then they could put up roadblocks especially given the Republicans' paper-thin majority in the Senate. For

instance, a filibuster could stop the nomination of a right-wing Supreme Court justice that could tip the balance against Roe v. Wade. Unfortunately, Democrats were unwilling to take such determined measures in the past to halt the assaults of the Bush administration.

Internationally, Trump's nationalistic and protectionist rhetoric is creating profound anxiety among the U.S. billionaire class' "allies." Trump has angered most of the European establishment with his statements that the European Union will fall apart and that the NATO military alliance is "obsolete." As the U.S. elites remain paralyzed by division, Russia, Israel and Turkey's rulers have all gone on the offensive to increase their regional might and influence.

Tensions are rapidly rising between the U.S. and China with the Chinese leadership threatening to "take the gloves off" in dealing with Trump. On Monday, Trump formally scrapped the Trans Pacific Partnership trade deal that the Obama administration constructed to push back against China's growing economic power. We certainly do not mourn the end of this anti-worker, anti-environment pact. But Trump's alternative seems to be to threaten a trade war with China. Contrary to administration claims, tariffs will not bring manufacturing jobs back in large numbers. A trade war is more likely to push

the world economy into recession. Under capitalism we face the terrible choice between destructive corporate globalization and protectionist trade wars.

Our movement shouldn't answer Trump's nationalism with anti-Russia echoes of the Cold War. Struggles will be far more effective if we focus on fighting against the racist, sexist, and anti-working class policies that the right wing proposes rather than trailing behind the CIA's attempts to whip up nationalistic scandals. Nevertheless the attacks of the intelligence agencies against Trump reflect genuine ruling class anxiety about his obvious admiration for Putin.

Hundreds of thousands of people outside the U.S. protested against Trump on January 21, and we need to be in solidarity with working people around the world looking to resist both "business as usual" and right-wing reaction. Nationalist slogans and paranoia about the government being controlled by foreign powers like Putin won't be effective mobilizing working people, youth and the poor to join a determined resistance that can beat back Trump's reactionary agenda.

Instead of relying on the murderous CIA or the corporate-controlled politicians to stop the right-wing onslaught, we need to instead focus on mobilizing from below with 100 days of resistance to Trump's

agenda.

## The Democrats and the Movement

We need to base our movement on the needs of working people and not limit our demands to what the Democratic Party leadership will accept. We can build the biggest possible protests by calling for popular measures like defending and extending reproductive rights, ending deportations of immigrants and establishing improved Medicare for all. We need to keep fighting for a \$15 minimum wage, tuition-free college, and an end to mass incarceration.

We need unity and solidarity of all people actively opposing Trump to stop his attacks. Women facing cuts to Planned Parenthood should be backed up by everyone who is standing against Trump; the same goes for immigrants and anyone else in this predator's crosshairs. Unions, community groups, women's organizations, Black Lives Matter activists, and socialists should all mobilize together with clear demands and decisive action.

At the same time, new mass movement needs to welcome people who are attending their first ever protests and organizing meetings. This means that new coalitions against Trump will include people who often look to Democratic Party politicians for leadership. Coalitions of resistance will also need to include organizations with ties to the Democratic Party like unions and women's groups. Within these coalitions, we need to have debates about the best strategy to fight for demands that can improve the lives of working people.

Socialist Alternative thinks that we need a new party of the 99% to be an uncompromising force in fighting Trump's agenda. The Democratic Party leadership helped pave the way for Trump's victory, and their politicians are overwhelmingly controlled by the corporate elites. Mainstream Democrats didn't stop Bush's agenda, and they haven't delivered on their promises to combat racism and sexism or

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# Millions of Women March Against Trump



Women's March in Washington, D.C., January 21, 2017.

Erin Brightwell

January 21, 2017, will go down in history as one of the largest ever days of protest in the United States as Women's Marches were attended by tens and hundreds of thousands in city after city across the country, in a show of mass defiance to Trump's right-wing agenda. The protests were also taken up internationally, with events organized on every continent. The numbers are staggering. Even according to the lowest crowd estimates, more than three million attended marches; the actual total is likely above four million. Between 1% and 1.5% of the U.S. population was in the streets the day after Trump's poorly attended inauguration. In many cities, march organizers were overwhelmed by the massive crowds, and predetermined routes became irrelevant as marchers spilled onto side streets.

The mood was buoyant. In New York, Oakland, and Los Angeles, the enormous turnout was soon

evident as marchers had trouble even getting out of subway trains to arrive at the gathering points. There was a tremendous feeling of solidarity in the shared rejection of the sexism, racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia peddled by Trump that was obvious from homemade signs, tee-shirts, buttons, and chants. Signs with feminist themes were everywhere: "Fight like a girl," "The future is female," and "Men for women's rights." Others attacked Trump with humor like "Not My Cheeto." Also addressed were a host of other critical issues such as "Black Lives Matter," "Science is Real," and "Health care for all."

**Mass demonstrations and civil disobedience on International Women's Day, March 8, can send a powerful message that our movement is prepared to continue the fight against Trump for as long as it takes.**

There is now no doubt that Predator in Chief Trump lacks a popular mandate for his anti-woman, anti-immigrant, and anti-worker agenda. But there are pressing questions that an effective movement to stop Trump will have to grapple with to ensure that January 21 is remembered as the day a powerful movement came to the

fore and not a one-time pressure release. Hillary Clinton and other Democratic leaders have told us that we need to "give Trump a chance" and that "Trump deserves our support." But we cannot afford to wait until the 2018 or 2020 elections. In just his first few days in office, Trump is dismantling the already inadequate health care system, moving to build a wall on the Mexican border, and ordering permits for work to restart on the Dakota Access and Keystone XL Pipelines.

Any successful movement will have to base itself on maximum unity in action and the social power of the working class. Massive marches like what we saw on January 21 are essential to build confidence and inspire people to join the movement. Socialist Alternative disagrees with the condescending approach of some on the left toward these historic protests. While it is broadly true that the marches were

in no way radical, and in many areas lacked diversity, they are a tremendous starting point that we need to build on toward an ongoing and powerful movement. That will mean welcoming new people who are just becoming politicized, helping them develop into activists and winning those to socialist ideas who see that a serious and sustained approach to organizing is essential and that capitalism is a failed system.

To defeat Trump's vicious attacks, it will be necessary to actually shut down "business as usual." We need independent, democratic organizations to mobilize millions into the fightback. Mass demonstrations and civil disobedience on International Women's Day, March 8, can send a powerful message that our movement is prepared to

continue the fight against Trump for as long as it takes.

The Democratic Party could choose to fight and block much of Trump's agenda, like the Republicans relentlessly stymied Obama even when he had Democratic supermajorities in Congress. They could help build mass protests to oppose Trump's agenda. They could filibuster and prevent appointment of a right wing, misogynist Supreme Court judge. But recent experience strongly suggests reliance on the Democratic Party to fight Trump would be dangerous for working people. Already many Democrats, including Elizabeth Warren, are voting to approve Trump's horrific cabinet picks.

To galvanize millions into

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## Socialist Alternative in Action on J20 and J21

Bryan Watson

The historic protests on January 20-21 launched a new era of resistance to Trump's brutal agenda of bigotry and division. Socialist Alternative helped organize demonstrations across the country. From Portland to Houston to Worcester, Massachusetts - in 16 U.S. cities - Socialist Alternative led or participated in protests. Socialist Alternative is in political solidarity with the Committee for a Workers International, which organized actions in more than 20 countries, including India, Spain, Brazil, South Africa, and Britain!

### January 20, Inauguration Day

In Seattle, Socialist Alternative and Kshama Sawant, with the Resist Trump coalition, organized a mass rally of 5,000 people. Sawant in her speech pointed out that "Trump only understands one thing: power. Our over-riding task is to build the power of the 99% - working people and all those marginalized by the capitalist elite."

In Minneapolis, we joined with janitors protesting Trump's pro-billionaire agenda and poverty wages in a strike action.

Later at a rally of thousands at City Hall, Socialist Alternative Minneapolis City Council candidate and 15 Now director Ginger Jentzen explained: "We must defend our communities against attacks by putting forward bold demands - Medicare for all, a \$15 minimum wage, free higher education, end police brutality, and tax the rich to fund social programs."

In New York City, we organized with a grassroots coalition and "marched with thousands to the Trump building at 40 Wall Street to highlight Trump's ties to the big banks," explained Socialist Alternative organizer Dan Kroop. In Chicago, Socialist Alternative organized with a coalition under the banner of the Movement for the 99%, and thousands marched on Trump Tower. In Boston, Socialist Alternative organized an evening rally of over 4,000 people. "We had 35 members out talking to people about the need for a united mass movement and a new party independent of corporate interests," said organizer Elan Axelbank.

### January 21, National Women's March

Socialist Alternative joined protests against Trump in dozens of cities across the country and, with the Committee for

a Workers International, on nearly every continent. In Madison, Socialist Alternative member Teddy Shibabaw spoke to a crowd of 100,000, saying: "We are serving notice on the Trump administration, that from the first day, we will not accept and we will resist Trumpism."

In Oakland, Socialist Alternative led a march of thousands behind a large truck with a sound system and "Resist Trump" and "Join the Socialists" banners. They led chants of "Our bodies, our choice (women)! Her body, her choice! (men)" in a crowd of 100,000 people.

In Washington D.C., following the Women's March where dozens of Socialist Alternative members participated, we co-hosted an event with the Green Party and Occupy Wall Street to discuss how the movement can defeat Trump. The event featured Kshama Sawant putting forward a socialist strategy to fight Trump and the need for united mass movements and a new party of the 99%. Socialist Alternative organizer Bryan Koulouris called for mass civil disobedience: "We need to continue mobilizing from below with determined action. We need to disrupt. We need to block highways, to shut down schools and shut down corporate profits." ☘

# Socialist Students Lead Nationwide Walkout Against Trump



Hanna Burge

On January 20, thousands of high school and college students at over 40 campuses in cities across the U.S. participated in walkouts organized by Socialist Students. The nationwide coordinated action was mobilized to send a powerful message that young people are determined to fight Trump's racist, sexist, right wing agenda.

In Minneapolis, the University of Minnesota Socialist Student's walkout started with a rally of 400 people before joining forces with Augsburg College students and then converging with the #NoDAPL and immigrant rights rallies to create a 1,000-strong march to city hall. Socialist Students organizer and U of M student, Tyler Vasseur, addressed the joint rally, calling "to combine our movements for the greatest possible resistance to Trump's agenda."

In Seattle, a total of 2,000 students walked out of 15 schools, including college campuses, high schools, and middle schools. Many came together for a Socialist Students' organized mass rally at Seattle Central College. Socialist Students member Ezgi Eygi, addressed the crowd saying "Mass movements of ordinary people have succeeded in blocking right wing bigoted presidents before," and explained how movements of workers and young people had fought for and won most major progressive gains of the past century, including against Republican administrations. Seattle City Councilmember and Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant spoke about the important example of the bold student walkouts which defied Seattle School Board warnings, saying that more disruptive actions like these will be needed in the age of Trump, because



Middle, high school, and college students rally at Seattle Central College on January 20.

"symbolic protest will not be enough, we need to build mass non-violent civil disobedience."

Socialist Students in New York City organized with a grassroots coalition including Socialist Alternative, DSA, Occupy Kensington, and Metropolitan Council on Housing. The joint protest had a crowd over 1,000 coming together in the driving rain at the Trump Building at 40 Wall Street to fight Trump and the billionaire class.

At UC Berkeley in California, a crowd of 2,000 was joined by several hundred Berkeley High students. At UCLA, students held a rally at the campus' main library where speakers from Socialist Students, labor unions, and student groups addressed an electrified crowd. Socialist Students led a march of 300 through campus and down Westwood Boulevard, where they shut down one of the busiest intersections in the State of California.

In Boston, Socialist Students joined with 150 striking dining hall workers from UNITE HERE Local 26 at Northeastern

University to fight against anti-worker, anti-immigrant attacks. Later that evening they converged with Socialist Alternative's mass rally of 4,000 that called for a united defense of reproductive rights and

health care.

Despite intimidation tactics deployed by the Worcester school administration, over 100 students walked out from four area high schools, along with Worcester State University and Clark University.

Ohio State University and University of Cincinnati walkouts attracted hundreds of students, becoming the largest political demonstrations organized at both campuses in decades.

Chicago Socialist Students helped organize a walkout with Evanston Township High School (ETHS) a few days later on January 24. Over 400 students marched out toward Evanston City Center where ETHS students spoke, along with Nick Wozniak of Socialist Alternative. Socialist Students organizer Sarah Gonser describes the mile long march's empowered atmosphere as showing students' "enthusiasm for hitting the streets in a massive walkout and building a movement." Socialist Students has another walkout scheduled for January 27 at Columbia College in downtown Chicago.

The anti-Trump walkouts underscore the enormous importance of youth in movements and of radical youth organizations like Socialist Students. From the anti-Vietnam War movement to the Occupy movement to combating sexual assault on college campuses, young people have historically been at the forefront of struggles.

Socialist Students organizer Cole Weirich summed up the rebellion of youth against Trump and the predatory system of capitalism: "There's this saying that the youth will inherit the earth, but that's not true about our generation. If we want this world, we have to fight for it." ✪

## Building the Socialist Movement in the Age of Trump

Keely Mullen

As Trump was sworn in on January 20, there were protests on all seven continents to oppose his bigoted, right-wing agenda. This shows the raw potential that exists to build a powerful mass resistance. Socialist Alternative has helped lead the fight against Trump from the beginning, calling demonstrations across the country the day after the election, with tens of thousands showing up, and we continued that momentum by organizing mass demonstrations across the country on Inauguration Day.

It is crucial in the coming months and years that these demonstrations continue, but the fight against Trump also requires that we get organized. Without question the first weeks of the new administration will be met with anger, fear, and an insistence that Trump is "Not my President!" Yet this anger alone will not be enough. Socialist Alternative believes that to defeat Trump, our movement will need a socialist strategy to unite powerful mass movements of workers, students and all oppressed people. Without a socialist backbone, the movement can be misdirected and misled away from the bold, fighting tactics needed to stand up to this dangerous administration. We will need to be clear about who we can and cannot rely on, and must not limit ourselves to what is acceptable to Democratic leaders and their corporate backers. Our movement will need to be prepared to challenge not only this administration but the billionaire class itself. Socialist Alternative will be vital in this struggle.

Socialist Alternative is an organization of workers and young people who have led and won crucial battles for working people across the country. We launched 15 Now and led the fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage in Seattle, Minneapolis, Boston and elsewhere and were able to win the first city-wide \$15 minimum wage in the country. We helped elect Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant in Seattle, the first socialist city councilmember in Seattle in 100 years. We have used Kshama's position to help build a movement that has won a series of major victories, from the \$15 minimum wage to helping block the construction of a \$160 million police bunker to \$29 million for affordable housing. Now, more than ever, with the impending right-wing attacks, is the time to build a fighting socialist movement and join Socialist Alternative and our struggle to not only to defeat Trump, but to build a better world! ✪



UCLA Socialist Students walkout on January 20.

# 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Russian Revolution

# The Relevance

Tom Crean

This year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian Revolution, a decisive turning point in world history, where for the first time working people established their own system of democratic rule through the “Soviets,” literally councils of workers, soldiers and peasants. Their goal was to root out feudal and capitalist oppression and thereby help lay the basis for an egalitarian, international socialist order.

The revolution began in February with the overthrow of the Tsar. The moderate “provisional government” which was then established did not, however, proceed to take any serious measures for land reform, to end the war or to address any of the other central issues which had brought on the revolutionary upheaval. The inevitable crisis led to the rapid growth of the revolutionary Bolshevik party, rooted in the urban working-class, which promised “bread, peace and land.” In October, the Soviets led by the Bolsheviks took power, beginning of the second phase of the revolution.

The revolutionary government kept their promise of “bread, peace, and land” by withdrawing from the slaughterhouse of World War I, taking control of the banks and giving the land to the peasantry. It was the most progressive government in modern history. Through the elected soviets, workers participated in the decisions of the day. For example, it proclaimed its goal to be the liberation of women and took many concrete steps in this direction despite the challenges posed by the country’s backwardness. It was also the first in the world to decriminalize homosexuality and strike out all laws against consensual sexual activity.

The leadership of the revolution, particularly

Lenin and Trotsky, did not see the Russian Revolution as the beginning of “socialism in one country” given the country’s low level of economic development but rather the opening salvo of a world revolution. This was no pipe dream as Western capitalism was facing collapse due to the disastrous effects of the war.

The Bolsheviks launched the Communist International (Comintern) in 1919 to bring together the millions of workers and young people rallying to support the Russian Revolution and rejecting the social democratic parties who had betrayed the working class by supporting the war. In the United States, the Socialist Party which had a significant base, split with the majority of approximately 70,000 coming out in support of the Comintern and going on to create the Communist Party.

The Russian Revolution was followed by similar working class upheavals in a series of countries, most importantly Germany, over the next few years. These did not, tragically, lead to another decisive anti-capitalist breakthrough because of the lack of the type of tested and authoritative leadership provided by the Bolsheviks in Russia. If they had succeeded, humanity could have avoided many of the horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Hitler coming to power, the Holocaust, World War II and the current carnage in the Middle East. We might be living in the beginnings of a global socialist society.

## Stalinism

But this is not of course what happened. After several years of civil war and international encirclement and with the ebbing of the post World War I revolutionary wave in Europe, the emerging conservative bureaucracy led



Women marching in Petrograd in February, 1917.

by Stalin, consolidated power in Russia and set out to destroy all elements of workers’ democracy.

Under Stalin, the Soviet Union continued to make economic progress, especially after World War II, but at a horrific human cost under a totalitarian dictatorship. The revolutionary leadership of the Bolshevik Party itself was almost completely liquidated, including Trotsky who fought the rise of Stalin, killed by an assassin in exile in Mexico in 1940. Tens of thousands of Trotsky’s followers wound up in Stalin’s gulag prison system.

Internationally the policy of the Soviet Union under Stalin was to use the massive authority of the Russian state in the workers movement as a bargaining chip with the main imperialist powers, including Britain, France, and the U.S. Stalin’s key goal was to keep the bureaucratic apparatus he represented in power in Russia at all costs. They were prepared to sell out other countries’ revolutionary movements to this end. Trotsky called Stalin the “organizer of defeats.” A successful workers revolution in another key country which, like 1917, would have had to be based on the workers own democratic bodies would have undermined the Stalinists’ internal narrative that they protected the people from capitalist encirclement. It would have therefore posed a potentially mortal threat to Stalin’s rule.

Trotsky and his followers consistently called for a workers’ “political revolution” to oust the Stalinists from power and return to the revolutionary road of 1917. This remained a serious possibility throughout the rule of the Stalinist regimes from the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 to the Tienanmen Square rebellion in 1989.

But to the end when Stalinism finally collapsed due to its own internal contradictions, the U.S. ruling class and ruling classes around the world remained deeply hostile to the Soviet state. This was not because they feared the Stalinist rulers but because these societies embodied an alternative, however deformed, to their system, a demonstration that capitalism can be overthrown.

## Why Talk about 1917 in 2017?

It might be asked what this has to do with 21<sup>st</sup> century America, a vastly different society to Russia 1917 where the vast majority of the population were peasants tied to the land? The simple answer is the continued domination of capitalism.

As the political earthquake of 2016 demonstrated, tens of millions of people have lost all faith in the institutions of capitalism. Millions, especially young people, now express support for socialism and rallied to Bernie Sanders historic campaign. But in the absence of a left alternative in the general election, the door was opened to a grotesque right populist who presented himself as the defender of the “forgotten men and women” and went on to defeat Hillary Clinton, the candidate of the status quo.

Trump is a living embodiment of the predatory and diseased nature of this profit-driven social system which is threatens life as we



Petrograd demonstration June 18, 1917. Banners read: “All Power to the People - Peace to the Whole World - All Land to the People” and “Down with the minister-capitalists” both Boleshevik slogans.



Visit [1917Revolution.org](http://1917Revolution.org) for Alternative

# of 1917 Today

know it on our planet. With less and less credibility, the billionaire class and its politicians pretend to espouse “freedom” while building a creeping surveillance state and depending on the maintenance of institutional racism and sexism to keep the working class “in its place.”

## Commemorating 1917

Socialist Alternative and the Committee for a Workers International, with which we are in political solidarity, will be producing extensive material to mark the anniversary. The CWI has launched a website called [1917Revolution.org](http://1917Revolution.org).

We will carry material in each issue of our paper this year to bring out the truth about the Russian Revolution and the role of the Bolshevik Party which has been the subject ever since of a relentless campaign of distortion and disinformation by its capitalist opponents. In fact it might be said that this was the greatest “fake news” campaign of the past century. We will also bring out the massive positive impact of the Revolution in inspiring movements around the world against capitalism and colonial and racial oppression.

Opponents of the revolution say it was really a coup rather than a revolution of the masses. They state that Lenin’s regime led inevitably to Stalin’s gulag; that the Soviet experience proved that a planned economy can’t work; and that there was a “middle way” of liberal democracy which could have worked if it wasn’t for the Bolsheviks. The bottom line of all these arguments is that socialism and communism were tried and failed.

In the past, the level of anti-communist propaganda from the ruling class did have a real effect on sections of the working class in the U.S. The brutal reality of the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and subsequently in Asia were effectively used to poison

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For more on the Russian Revolution from Socialist Alternative and the Committee for a Workers International.

## The Russian Revolution and Black Freedom Movement Legacy

Eljeer Hawkins

The Bolshevik-led Russian Revolution of 1917 was a lightning bolt across the world as the weakest link in the global capitalist chain was broken. In the United States, the idea of the working class, poor, and most oppressed ending the tyranny, violence and private property of the capitalist class was awe inspiring. The Russian Revolution and the establishment of the first democratic workers’ republic ushered in a new political paradigm that greatly influenced the black, Caribbean and African diaspora. The leading political and cultural lights of the historic Black Freedom Movement leaped towards the revolution to learn valuable lessons and methods of struggle.

### From Harlem to Russia

This included key activists like black Socialist Party member and labor organizer, A. Philip Randolph, who along with Chandler Owens published the Harlem-based *Messenger* magazine. They gave their full support to the revolution and were dubbed the Lenin and Trotsky of Harlem.

The revolution influenced the thinking and political program of organizations like the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB) founded by Cyril Briggs, a West Indian-born radical organizer and thinker. The ABB was an all-black organization that combined revolutionary nationalist and communist ideas. It would develop close ties to the Communist Party (CP) and provide an important theoretical strand in the black freedom movement. In the words of historian Mark Solomon, Briggs’ ABB “sought to draw together the themes of race patriotism, anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism, and organized defense against racist assault” (Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African-Americans*, 1917-1936).

The Russian Revolution provided artists and activists a new ideological framework to counter the politics of Marcus Garvey’s Pan-Africanist Universal Negro Improvement Association, the largest black-led movement at the time, and the reformist middle-class led National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. For example, Jamaican-born activist Claude McKay, Jamaican-born activist and author of the famous poem, “If We Must Die,” participated in the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist International in 1922 as a delegate and spent over a year in Russia in discussions with leading members of the Comintern including Leon Trotsky.

Why did black activists draw inspiration from the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks? As we

point out in our recent pamphlet *Marxism and the Fight for Black Freedom*:

“The Bolsheviks’ position on the national question was essential to the triumph of the October revolution. In particular the forceful advocacy of the right to self-determination of all nationalities oppressed by the Tsarist Empire and opposition to every manifestation of Great Russian chauvinism was critical to forging class unity in the course of the revolution.”

It was also a key part of the revolution’s appeal to radicals among oppressed people the world over.

The Bolsheviks also forced American socialists to rethink their approach to race. As James Cannon, a leading U.S. Marxist, pointed out, “Lenin and the Bolsheviks were distinguished from all others in the international socialist and labor movement by their concern with the problems of oppressed nations and national minorities, and affirmative support of their struggles for freedom, independence and the right of self-determination ...The Russians in the Comintern started on the American communists with the harsh, insistent demand that they shake off their unspoken prejudices, pay attention to the special problems and grievances of the American Negroes, go to work among them, and champion their cause in the white community,” (*On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, Trotsky).

### The Communist Party and Black Freedom

The role of the early Communist Party in the struggle for black freedom is very instructive for workers, youth and people of color trying to build a movement now.

It was not until the 1930s that the Communist Party developed a really significant base in the black working class. The Communist Party’s work in the Scottsboro Boys case, defending nine young black men falsely accused of raping two white women in Alabama, was key to developing their base among African Americans.

But tragically, by that stage, the Soviet Union and the Comintern were dominated by Stalinism which led to all its national sections becoming extensions of Kremlin policy which subordinated the class struggle to maintaining the Stalinists’ grip on power. In the U.S., the CP’s overall role in this period was to act as an obstacle preventing the working class and poor from forging their own mass party independent of the Democrats



Claude McKay (right) in Moscow, 1922.

and the Republicans. The effects of that defeat are still felt today.

But despite the CP’s profound political mistakes, their efforts to take up the day-to-day issues facing black workers and build for a working class centered struggle to achieve racial equality within American society remain a powerful example.

The Communist Party work in the north focused on organizing the unemployed, stopping evictions, ending police brutality, and mass union organizing. In the south, the CP was involved in organizing drives in the textile, steel and packing industry and led important strikes like the textile workers’ strike in Gastonia, North Carolina in 1929 and the miners’ strike in Harlan County, Kentucky in 1931. The CP also tried to organize a sharecroppers union.

They organized anti-racist work in the trade unions against white supremacy and bigotry which resulted in a backlash from some white workers in the South. While this was inevitable in the short term, had the CP pursued a correct approach in building a mass workers party they could have won over a large section of Southern white workers. As it was, the CP grew to 100,000 members at its height with a substantial base among black workers, especially in key Northern cities.

The legacy of the Bolshevik Russian Revolution and the work of the Communist Party among black workers and youth in the 1930s and particularly around the Scottsboro boys case, helped plant the seeds that led to the birth of black freedom movement in the South in the ‘50s, ‘60s, and ‘70s. It also showed despite all the CP’s flaws what a socialist organization with an anti-racist program and roots in the working class could achieve. ☘

# Defeat the Right-Wing Assault on Health Care

## Defend Planned Parenthood

Sarah White, Registered Nurse

President Trump and the GOP are hell-bent on repealing the Affordable Care Act (ACA or Obamacare) as one of Trump's first acts in office. And though in the last weeks we've seen a few Republicans get weak in the knees over how swiftly the deal can be done, by and large they are united in the spirit of this assault on working people.

According to the Tax Policy Center, repealing Obamacare will result in a massive tax cut for the 1% while kicking 20 million people off their health insurance. We need a massive movement of people out in the streets to defeat this attack on health care and build the broader fight-back against the right-wing assault on women, unions, LGBTQ people, immigrants, and people of color.

The Republicans link the repeal of Obamacare to defunding Planned Parenthood, which provides vital health care to five million people a year, including cancer screening, pregnancy and STI testing, abortion, and birth control. Loss of those services through attacks on Planned Parenthood would have a disproportionately negative impact on women, people of color, and the LGBTQ community.

### The Reality of the Affordable Care Act

Obamacare expanded Medicaid and eliminated pre-existing conditions as barriers to coverage allowing millions of people to gain desperately needed health insurance. Allowing people to stay on their parents' insurance until age 26, improving access to birth control, and eliminating the gender cost disparity are all extremely popular aspects of the legislation. They should be fiercely defended.

At the same time, Obamacare left the for-profit health system in place. Last year, the drug companies raked in profits to the tune of \$50 billion while one in five Americans couldn't afford their prescriptions. Also, Obamacare failed to prevent tens of millions of working-class people from facing escalating medical costs and deductibles. It is clear that getting health insurance isn't the same as getting health care.

To truly fix the U.S. health care system – to deliver high-quality, efficient care to everyone at a fraction of the cost – a single-payer, universal health system is desperately needed. This can be summarized as Medicare for All. The U.S. is the only developed capitalist country that leaves millions of people without access to health care.

### A Long-Term Republican Goal

Since Obamacare passed in 2010, the



Republicans have attacked it relentlessly. Trump, who in the past voiced support for universal health care, cynically used the understandable frustration with climbing out-of-pocket costs to fuel his campaign. The GOP-dominated Congress and the president agree that Obamacare must be repealed. However, cracks are appearing on the timing of the repeal and what the replacement would look like. The most prominent divide is between those who want to throw the entire legislation in the trash and those who want to preserve the more popular aspects of the legislation.

Repeal of Obamacare would target the federal funds that were allocated to expand Medicaid, which provides health care for people with limited resources through funding to the states. Astonishingly, many Republican governors turned down this additional funding.

Kellyanne Conway, Trump's White House Counselor, has suggested block grants to states to pay for Medicaid. Since its creation in 1965, Medicaid has been an open-ended entitlement program. This means that, if you qualify, you get full benefits automatically. Introducing block grants would allow states to decide how to allocate Medicaid funds. People's health care coverage would then be at the whim of state legislatures, most of them dominated by Republicans. Block grants would also open the door to future cuts to state block grants in the name of "balancing the budget." It would end Medicaid as an entitlement program and it could embolden Republicans to go after Medicare and Social Security.

### What Will Happen Next?

Trump and the Republicans are likely to pass a budget reconciliation bill, which will defund the Medicaid expansion and health insurance subsidies. But with many Republicans already getting cold feet on the process, Trump complicated the delicate situation with his insistence that everyone will have insurance, that deductibles will go down, and that Medicare and Medicaid will start negotiating drug prices.

Obamacare uses taxpayer money to fund private health care, subsidizing profits for the insurance companies. We can expect the Republicans to keep that basic premise in place. The GOP has given lip service to maintaining the most popular Obamacare provisions, including covering pre-existing conditions. GOP lawmakers are now talking about separating those with major health problems into "high-risk" pools. Experience with them has been disastrous, with those in "high-risk" pools facing astronomical health care bills and denial of service by insurance companies. The ongoing process of cost-shifting onto patients will likely be escalated via rising co-payments and deductibles, discouraging people from accessing the care they need – exactly contrary to what Trump is promising.

### Universal Health Care Is Hugely Popular

Bernie Sanders' call for Medicare for All during his presidential campaign was massively popular. Universal health care – everybody in, nobody out – is more efficient and

provides better outcomes than our broken for-profit system. Obama could've and should've put this in place in 2008, when he enjoyed even greater majorities in Congress than Trump currently has. Such a system would have been extremely popular, and we wouldn't find ourselves defending minor gains, as we are today. But Democratic Party leaders, including Hillary Clinton and Obama, opposed this.

In early January, thirteen Democrats voted against Sanders' proposal to allow Americans to buy medications from Canada and other countries that are often significantly cheaper. The Democratic Party leadership is financially linked to big business, including Big Pharma and the insurance companies. We shouldn't be surprised that politicians receiving their money aren't willing to threaten the profits of their donors for the sake of our health.

To realize efficient, high-quality health care for all, we must demand single-payer, Medicare for All. 280 million people have insurance that is too expensive for them to properly use. As Sanders said recently, I have access to buy a million-dollar home, but that doesn't mean I can afford it.

Our first step must be to defend the gains made under Obamacare. This will require the strongest possible movement. The January 15 protests across the country were a good start, but we have to build upon that momentum through further collective action, holding rallies and direct actions to send a clear message to Congress: Stop the attacks on health care; we want Medicare for All. Unions must urgently follow the lead of National Nurses United, which has long advocated for Medicare for all, and bring their considerable resources to bear in this critical fight.

We'll also need to broaden out the movement to build strength, linking up with those fighting against the right-wing assault on immigrants, on union rights, on education and the environment. To get to Medicare for All, we'll need a united movement that fights on all fronts, for gains big and small. If the Republicans win at the federal level, we'll take our fight to the states. In recent years, there have been a number of efforts to win Medicare for All at the state level. Repeal of Obamacare could give these efforts more momentum, especially in some crucial big states. Wins on this front can embolden the broader fight against Trump.

But in the coming days and weeks, the key issue is to bring the maximum pressure to bear, especially in the streets, to force the Republicans in Congress to step back from their assault on health care. Trump and the Republicans can be beaten; this is the first crucial opportunity to do exactly that. ☘

## Danger of Trade War

# Trump and China: Heading for Conflict

Vincent Kolo,  
ChinaWorker.info

The coming to power of President Trump marks a major turning point in international relations. Trump in power means the U.S. ruling class has lost control, at least partially, over their political system and government. There is enormous uncertainty, and not least among governments in the Asia-Pacific region, over whether the Washington establishment can control the 45<sup>th</sup> president: Will his late-night Twitter rants become policy, or not?

## Anti-China Profile

Since the November election, the CCP dictatorship (China's so-called Communist Party) has become increasingly nervous about the "three Ts": Trump, trade, and Taiwan. Trump's cabinet, if approved, and many of his senior advisors, have a distinct anti-China profile.

Taken together with Trump's recent statements on Taiwan and the "One China" policy – a diplomatic formula which rules out recognition of a separate Taiwanese state and commits the U.S. and other parties to officially recognise only the Beijing regime – and his suggestion that the U.S. may pull back from this agreement or seek to renegotiate it, all this has placed China's rulers on a state of red alert. While publicly playing down Trump's utterances, the Chinese regime has been busy reviewing its options diplomatically, economically, and even militarily in terms of its deployments in the South China Sea and vis-à-vis Taiwan, to take account of various Trump scenarios.

Beijing's anxieties were ratcheted up further when Rex Tillerson, Trump's choice to become Secretary of State, likened China's man-made and unpopulated islands in the South China Sea to "Russia's taking of Crimea," and warned that China's "access to those islands is also not going to be allowed" (*The Guardian.com*, 1/12/2017). Tillerson did not elaborate on how such a policy could be implemented – even for the U.S. navy, this would require gigantic resources, effectively a

naval cordon of the entire South China Sea – but his comments immediately drew a riposte from the *Global Times*, a CCP mouthpiece, that this would trigger a "a large-scale war" (*GlobalTimes.cn*, 1/13/2017).

The *Global Times* is a notoriously rabid nationalist tabloid, which is given a certain license by the Chinese regime to let off steam. But other commentators are also warning of a U.S.-China military conflict based on Trump's confrontational tone.

## Deglobalisation

Internationally, capitalist governments and commentators share this sense of alarm both over the implications of a serious chill in U.S.-China relations, which were already increasingly strained under the Obama administration, and the danger of a trade war that could have a devastating impact on an already weak global economy. For this reason, Xi Jinping took the biggest-ever Chinese delegation to the yearly billionaires' conclave, the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and was given top billing with his speech defending "economic globalization," showing that we live in the most ironic of times. European governments are also openly expressing fear and disdain toward Trump's threatened China policies and trade agenda, while many of them have gripes of their own with Beijing.

In general, capitalist commentators are agreed that the U.S.-China relationship is the "most important bilateral relationship in the world" and is "too big to fail." Combined, these two giants account for more than one-third of global economic output. Since the turn of the century, they have been the two main engines of global growth. China is the world's biggest exporter and the U.S. is second, so a serious trade conflict between them would clearly have dire implications for the global economy. At the same time, as China's rise increasingly challenges U.S. global dominance, their relationship has become increasingly antagonistic and contradictory.

This did not begin with



Chinese newspapers worry about a looming trade war.

Trump; it is a process rooted in the nature of capitalism and imperialism. Imperialism, as Leon Trotsky said, "by its very nature abhors any division of power" ("Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution," 1940). But under Trump, if the rhetoric becomes policy, then the relationship with China will become fundamentally and openly adversarial. An actual shooting war between the U.S. and China is not at all a likely outcome for many reasons, but that does not mean the situation is devoid of dangers, nor that a proxy conflict – such as Russia and the U.S. backing different sides in the Syrian Civil War – is excluded.

## Asia-Pacific Tensions

A process of militarization is already underway in the Asia-Pacific region, with the world's sharpest increase in arms spending and an escalation of territorial and maritime disputes. Beijing and Washington – supported by its Asian allies, most importantly the right-wing Abe government in Japan – are inflaming nationalism and using "security" fears to increase their economic hold on the region – while of course, painting the other side as the "aggressor." All these governments promote their own version of Trump's mantra to make "our nation great again." In every

case, this nationalist message is also used to justify more repressive antidemocratic measures against the working class and the poor.

Depending on what policies emanate from Trump's administration, China is likely to step up its military expansion, which would include weaponizing its artificial islands in the disputed areas of the South China Sea – this has already begun – and speeding up its naval build-up and missiles program as well as its ability to play the "police" role in Asia and the Western Pacific.

## "Thucydides Trap"

Trump represents that section of the U.S. ruling class that, seeing China as the main challenger to their global power, believes a more confrontational economic and geopolitical strategy is needed. The contest is fully understood in Beijing, where Xi and the CCP ruling group openly discuss the so-called "Thucydides Trap," named after the ancient Greek philosopher, which says that a rising power will face a military clash with an established ruling power.

Beijing's counterstrategy attempts to balance between projecting confidence and strength, not opening itself to the charge of "weakness" from rival nationalist factions within the CCP-state while



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For more in-depth coverage, see  
SocialistWorld.net, website of the  
Committee for a Workers International.

ducking and weaving like a boxer to defer an open conflict with the U.S. This is also tied to their firm belief that China will "inevitably" at some point overtake U.S. capitalism economically, shifting the balance of power to its advantage.

Some economists argue that this economic "surpassing" has already occurred, but this seems unlikely. Certainly, in terms of financial power and the role of the almighty dollar in the global capitalist economy, the Chinese economy is still some way from economic parity with America.

This suggests that China, while it would certainly be expected to retaliate if the U.S. slapped new tariffs on its exports or took other punitive measures, will try to calibrate its response to avoid escalating into a full-blown trade war. At the same time, using the WTO, G20, and other global forums, the Chinese regime will project itself as a "responsible global leader" in contrast to a U.S. administration bent on breaking agreements and tearing down the post-World War II global trading system.

## Deeper Crisis Under Capitalism

The prospect of an increasingly turbulent U.S.-China relationship, with serious trade and economic conflicts, is one that rightly fills most capitalist commentators with dread. For socialists, this confirms our analysis that capitalism is dragging humankind deeper into crisis and calamity. Our optimism in the face of these dark clouds is because we see the other side of these processes in the growing resistance to capitalism and its political representatives by workers and young people around the world. This is shown most clearly in the mass opposition to Trump that has already announced itself – before he even entered the White House. The necessary answer to Trump, to capitalism, and the right-wing nationalism in all countries, is the building of a mass working-class political alternative with a clear socialist program. ✪

A full version of this article  
appears at SocialistWorld.net.

## Right Wing Targets Public Sector Unions

## Labor Must Fight Back

Alan Jones

The election of Donald Trump sent a shiver down the spine of every progressive working person across the country. Behind the facade of “making America great” and creating jobs lies an administration of, by, and for the billionaire oligarchy determined to eliminate any restrictions to corporate profits. Every gain working people made in the past that still stands – occupational safety, health and environmental protections, the minimum wage, Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare – is under direct threat by Trump’s gangsters. Emboldened politicians like Paul Ryan and Mitch McConnell could eviscerate the Fair Labor Standards Act and equal employment protection. And, above all, there is the threat of a national “right-to-work” legislation along the lines of what Scott Walker did in Wisconsin – although the Supreme Court, with a new Trump appointee, might beat them to the punch.

The unions have continued to be weakened by decades of false policies from a leadership that touted collaboration with the employers and reliance on corporate Democrat politicians – not a policy of class struggle to build union power – as the only “realistic” way forward. The results of these policies are now in front of us: Overall union membership fell by another 500,000 under Obama, while inequality continued growing to the point where over 40% of working people are now at or near poverty levels (*AlterNet.org*, 12/14/2016).

Obama – after bailing out Wall Street from the 2008 economic crisis – rewarded working people with 10 million families losing their homes to the foreclosure crisis (National Center for Policy Analysis, 3/15/2015) while promoting the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) – another free trade agreement to further eviscerate workers’ rights and environmental regulations. The vast majority of the new jobs created during the Obama years were low-paid jobs. In the private sector, only 1 in 15 workers is in a union. Plant shut-downs, outsourcing, two- and three-tier contracts, precarious employment, and health-care costs are escalating alongside a serious crisis for those workers who had union pensions. At present, overall union membership



The Verizon strike in 2016 was the largest in years.

is at a 70-year low.

It was these trends that contributed to Hillary Clinton receiving the lowest union turnout for a Democratic presidential candidate in more than 30 years. Clinton was correctly perceived to be in the pocket of big business, and she failed to motivate or inspire against the demagogic, racist, and xenophobic campaign of Trump. Union households went 51-43% for Clinton – an 8% margin for the Democrats, far lower than the typical 15-20% margin in previous presidential elections.

These attacks on unions, health care, pensions, and wages were already happening under the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations, but now, after Trump’s inauguration, unions and working people are facing a grim reality. We are confronted directly by a gang of criminal sociopaths brandishing baseball bats and switchblades. The question is how to effectively counter this threat and what policies can effectively defend working-class people. This will be the instinctive conclusion of millions of working people, women, minorities, and immigrants: as Joe Hill famously said, “Don’t mourn, organize!”

The good news is that millions of people have rejected the calls by many Democrats, and even some union officials, to “work with Trump” by getting out in the streets and showing they are ready to fight back. To preach

peace when the other side is preparing for war is complete foolishness, if not open betrayal.

How can an “unstable charlatan who made his fortune by scamming working families,” as Richard Trumka of the AFL-CIO called Trump, be trusted to defend workers? Trump’s criticism of awful trade agreements like the TPP and NAFTA – promoted by Democrats as well as Republicans – has nothing to do with defending workers’ jobs, but it is centered on a vicious attack on wages and regulations in the U.S. so that companies will invest here.

## Resistance Grows

The attacks on unions by Trump and the employers will likely start immediately, with executive orders directed at public sector workers’ unions. Trump has imposed a hiring freeze in federal agencies, which could be the first step to attacking the pay, benefits, and union rights of federal employees. This can then lay the basis for going after the union rights of public sector workers more generally, using Wisconsin as a model. It is critical to use the momentum from the mass rallies and protests against Trump to build a broad movement to defend workers’ rights on the streets alongside defending immigrants, Muslims, and women’s rights.

While Trump won the election, it should be remembered that 2016 saw an increase in workers’ struggles on a number of fronts, from further gains in the fight for \$15 to the Verizon workers’ strike, which was the biggest strike in nearly 20 years. We saw the explosive rise of the Bernie Sanders movement and the call for a political revolution – a mass awakening by millions of discontented workers and young people. While this movement was defeated by the intrigues of the pro-capitalist Democratic

Party and Bernie’s failure to launch a new left party, the campaign radicalized millions. For the first time in decades, socialism became a popular idea alongside a rejection of Wall Street and the billionaire class.

The debates in society about how to fight Trump will play out inside unions, as well. Labor for Bernie exploded against the leaders of major unions, who rushed to endorse Clinton despite her coziness with Walmart and Wall Street. Tens of thousands of union members registered their anger and frustration with union officials on social media.

It is urgent that unions and workers across the country link with immigrants, communities, students, and socialists to prepare to build solidarity and defend ourselves against the attacks from Trump. These attacks will include appointing a conservative to the Supreme Court, opening the door for attacks on women’s rights as well as those of public sector workers. The renewal of the DAPL and Keystone XL are just the beginning, as big business drives to further undermine and even smash union rights across the board.

Union members should move resolutions in their locals to demand meetings to mobilize for mass protests against the Trump regime. Unions have the resources and can, alongside other forces, provide the backbone for taking immediate action, including mass rallies, boycotts and mass media campaigns, as well as strikes and civil disobedience against attacks on immigrants, public education, etc. This type of movement could spread like wildfire across the country and disrupt the plans of Trump and the Republicans. We need to end the disgrace of labor giving millions of dollars to politicians who do not fight for working people. We need a union leadership that is prepared to fight back. Let’s make sure that labor is at the forefront of the resistance at the next big rallies, on International Women’s Day, and especially on May Day 2017.

The Sanders campaign showed that millions of working people are prepared to start taking action and to support a challenge against the dictatorship of capitalism and the Trump oligarchs.

After decades of misleadership, setbacks, and defeats, the unions have to be transformed into fighting and democratic organizations and discover what it means to become a social movement for justice, in the way that the abolitionist movement or the Civil Rights Movement were in their day, bringing together working people around the vision of a new society based on solidarity, equality, and justice, as opposed to the nightmare of capitalism. ☘

# Russian Revolution Anniversary

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the minds of many against any alternative to capitalism, the “best of all possible systems”. In the U.S., anti-communism was linked to the “American dream” that the working class would experience an ever-improving standard of living. All of this led some on the left to conclude that it was best to avoid the Russian Revolution as much as possible. This was perhaps understandable but it was ultimately impossible to avoid these questions.

Unlike 25 years ago, in the wake of the collapse of Stalinism, when it confidently proclaimed that “history was over” and that “liberal democracy” had triumphed, things stand very differently today. The American dream is officially dead. The ruling class is on the defensive, its system and institutions discredited. Millions are looking for an alternative to corporate politics and do not accept the ruling class narrative.

Perhaps the key discussion that the American left needs to engage in is what kind of political force do we need to build today to challenge capitalism. Socialist Alternative argues that establishing a broad left, anti-corporate, pro-working-class party would represent a huge step forward towards the political independence of the working class. We have called this a “party of the 99%.” Such a party could not, by definition, at this stage, have a clear socialist program at its inception. It would

probably be a party with a left-populist or social-democratic character which would accept the existence of capitalism while arguing to reform it. If it had a program along the lines of Bernie Sanders’, despite all the limitations, it would be an enormous step forward.

But as long as such a party did not adopt a clear anti-capitalist, socialist position, it would remain unable to answer the burning questions of our time. We believe that those committed to ending capitalism and creating a democratic socialist society must also have their own organization to make the case for such a transformation, basing itself on the lessons of the past 150 years of the workers movement. A new socialist force along these lines would seek to be part of a broader party of the 99% when it is established and to argue for a rounded out socialist program.

## Looking Back and Forward

1917 was the most extensive attempt to date to permanently end the conditions which keep breeding Donald Trumps. For that reason alone, it demands careful attention from all progressive working people and youth.

*The Economist* magazine, a longstanding voice for global corporate interests, recently headlined “Bolshiness is Back”

pointing to the collapse of the post World War II political order in Western countries and the massive upsurge against establishment politics. As they put it:

“The similarities between the collapse of the liberal order in 1917 and today are stark. They start with the *fin de siècle* atmosphere. The 40 years before the Russian revolution were years of liberal triumphalism. Free trade (led by the British) brought the world together. Liberal democracy triumphed in Britain and America and looked like the coming thing elsewhere. The years from 1980 were a similar period of triumphalism. Globalization (led by America) advanced relentlessly.”

As regards the current political and social crisis, *The Economist* points to the errors and arrogance of the liberal political elite in helping create Brexit and Trump but more fundamentally they argue,

“The liberal order itself is also to blame. The global economy has delivered too many of its benefits to the richest: in America, the proportion of after-tax income going to the top 1% doubled.”

They are right. The question is as Lenin said long ago: “What is to be done?” Despite the many differences between 1917 and now, we say humanity needs to change course and return along the path that the workers of Petrograd began laying out 100 years ago. ✪

# Build Resistance to Trump’s Agenda

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improve the lives of working people. This is why some working people were seduced by Trump’s pro-worker demagoguery, something which will be undermined by experience. Socialist Alternative will work alongside progressive Democrats around clear demands to mobilize people into action, but we will not limit our program, strategy or tactics to what is acceptable to the corporate Democrats. Instead we will base ourselves on the needs of working people to resist a system and a Presidency that’s bent on destruction.

## Next Steps Against Trump

We need 100 days of escalating resistance. Reproductive rights are under attack. In Poland, women went on strike to stop sexist laws, and they won. Women’s organizations and unions should follow this positive example and build the strongest possible determined actions for March 8, International Women’s Day.

Our 100 days of resistance should culminate in mass marches, civil disobedience and strike action on May 1, International Workers Day. On May Day in 2006, immigrant workers went on strike and protested throughout the country to beat back racist anti-immigrant legislation. This time, we can’t leave the immigrants to fight alone. The unions should mobilize all members, immigrant and native-born alike, to oppose Trump’s deportations with decisive action, including work stoppages. We shouldn’t forget that the labor movement itself is a target of Trump’s predatory appetites.

January 20 and 21 inaugurated a resistance of monumental proportions. Socialist Alternative feels that we need to turn this into a movement that can challenge the “business as usual” system that gives eight white men more wealth than 3.6 billion inhabitants of this planet. Trump is the embodiment of predatory capitalism, and while successfully fighting his agenda, working people can lay the basis for a world without exploitation, poverty and discrimination. Join us in the fight for socialism! We have a world to win! ✪

# Millions at Women’s Marches

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struggle, we need to fight for concrete demands beyond just playing defense. Encouragingly, the Women’s March organizers developed a broad program, demanding “open access to safe, legal, affordable abortion and birth control for all people” as well as support for racial justice, LGBTQ rights, immigrant rights, and a living wage. A movement against Trump that fights for Medicare for all, a \$15 minimum wage, and to address the economic problems of working class people

can win over many of those conned into voting for this billionaire swindler, but on a firm anti-racist, anti-sexist basis. Bernie Sanders’ presidential run showed the enormous popularity of a pro-worker, anti-corporate program in spite of fierce establishment opposition. It is up to us, the millions of outraged, ordinary working people and students, to build a movement that can defeat the horrors of the Trump administration. ✪

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# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

## TRUMP THREATENS MASS DEPORTATIONS DEFEND IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES



**Cora Bergantinos**

January 26 - Donald Trump is moving rapidly to fulfill many of the reactionary promises made during his presidential campaign. On the fifth day of his presidency, he signed orders giving the green light to start building a “wall” on the Mexican border, stripping “sanctuary cities” of federal funds, adding 5,000 more border patrol officers, and tripling the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers while empowering them to “remove those who poses a threat to public safety.” He is also enacting a de facto immigration ban on Muslims by stopping visas from six different majority Muslim countries. It has been reported that he will drastically curtail the existing refugee program – particularly heartbreaking with the current situation in Syria.

Trump is sending a clear message against our immigrant brothers and sisters, and it is time to activate the resistance. He has repeatedly promised to deport two to three million undocumented immigrants, threatening to do in months what took the Obama administration eight years!

Trump claimed his administration would focus on deporting criminals, gang members, and drug dealers but to reach that number he will need to cast a much wider net, redefining the concept of criminal and undermining the basic right of due process with a massive, relentless escalation. But even including

everyone who ever had a parking ticket there aren't enough people for ICE to go after!

This is why Trump's order says that a priority target will be people who have “engaged in fraud or willful misrepresentation in connection with any official matter or application before a government agency.” As *The New York Times* said today, this would “essentially include any undocumented worker who has signed an employment agreement in the United States.” If Trump keeps his promise, he will need to go back to the tactics used during the Bush years with workplace and neighborhood raids that rounded up thousands of workers at car washes, meatpacking plants, and grocery stores.

Considering the current climate, this approach could spark massive resistance, especially in the key “sanctuary cities” like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. It would not be the first time that overreaching by the Republican Party against immigrants led to a tremendous upheaval in society. In 2005, the Republican-dominated House passed H.R. 4437, the Sensenbrenner Bill, targeting all undocumented workers for deportation and criminalizing anyone giving them assistance.

This led to one of the biggest waves of mass demonstrations in U.S. history, culminating in the historic “Day Without Immigrants” on May 1, 2006. This included strike action that paralyzed important sections of

the economy, including the port of Los Angeles. This courageous movement stopped H.R. 4437 and pushed back anti-immigrant attitudes, but the unions tragically failed to bring the native-born working class out alongside immigrant workers, leaving them isolated. Through workplace raids, especially in industries where organizing drives were underway, many were deported, the movement was broken down, and the demand for “equal rights for all workers” was temporarily defeated.

The Democratic Party, at the time, tried to divert the movement away from the streets and – while promising a “comprehensive immigration reform,” including a “path to citizenship,” during Obama's 2008 campaign – they failed to deliver, even when the Democrats controlled the presidency and both Houses of Congress. Under Obama, the Democrats then ramped up deportations to historically record levels and helped create the infrastructure that Trump will now use to go even further.

### Fighting for the Future

But while Trump wants to implement his agenda in a hurry, this is not the same country it was even a decade ago. A new generation has been radicalized and galvanized into struggle by the immigrant Dreamer campaign, Occupy, the

Fight for \$15, Black Lives Matter, and the recent victory of the Dakota pipeline struggle. Millions responded last year to Bernie Sanders call for a political revolution against the billionaire class.

Trump's agenda can be defeated, but it will take more than protests and demonstrations if we are going to win. This time, native-born workers and young people must come out in active solidarity with immigrant workers. The unions have a crucial role to play; not only organizing key workplaces but also calling mass meetings where workers can discuss, plan, and organize nonviolent civil disobedience actions to slow down the ICE machine, including strike action. Networks are already being built in a number of cities to prepare mass nonviolent civil disobedience to resist the deportations.

Defending immigrants' rights is not only a question of fairness or justice. Millions feel threatened by Trump's attacks on women's rights, workers' rights, and environmental protections. Trump knows he will face massive opposition and wants to win quick victories. A defeat of one struggle will send a wave of demoralization to all our movements. We can't allow even one step back! The right-wing agenda can be defeated but only if all of us unite in solidarity and build our social power, the strongest force of humanity. ✪