

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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# BUILD THE MOVEMENT & DRIVE OUT TRUMP



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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.

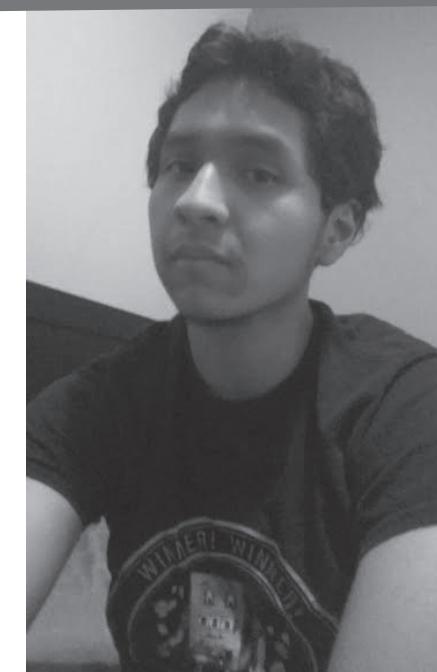
Solidarity with the struggles of workers and oppressed peoples internationally: An injury to one is an injury to all.

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

## Zahid Alvarez Immigrant Student Chicago, IL



I'm a twenty-one-year-old college student raised in the Chicago area studying pre-medicine. My parents brought me here as a three-year-old from Mexico. They were lawyers in their own country, and from my mother's side, particularly, there was a strong inclination for the humanities and left-wing politics. I've lived almost my whole life in a predominantly Mexican-immigrant community. Both of my parents work in the restaurant service-sector now with one working \$8.25 an hour and the other doing overtime with no pay. I work as a package handler in a harsh working environment, where the risk of injury, heat stroke, and exhaustion are quite high for a few, but grueling, hours and little pay.

On the night of Donald Trump's election, I had to comfort my family against the atmosphere of uncertainty, fear, and anger that had taken hold of us in that moment. Things, although bleak in that instant, did not have to stay so. It's something no doubt many immigrant families went through that night, as well

Undocumented immigrants in the U.S. make up a special underclass of exploited workers who are simultaneously used by the upper business class as a source for cheap labor and also to divide native and immigrant workers against each other. Raw capitalist exploitation and precarity is a reality we are reminded of on a daily basis, and only through socialist and militant working-class action can there be any hope of changing this all-too-familiar scenario. A prime example of this were the waves of resistance in 2006 that defeated anti-immigrant legislation

devised in Congress and culminated in the "Day Without an Immigrant" strike that shut down the port of L.A. and paralyzed other sectors of the economy, leaving the bosses with huge profit losses. When working-class people fearlessly join together in this ferocious and determined manner, anything is possible.

Beyond simply putting an end to deportations, the single strongest demand immigrant workers can make is unconditional amnesty and legalization for everyone, yet such a demand will never be taken up by the Democratic Party, whose members rely on money from the sectors of the ruling class that profit off undocumented workers. Only a mass party of the working class, including the most oppressed and marginalized, can take this fight forward to reach what has eluded undocumented immigrants for decades and change at the root the system that engineered our exploitation in the first place. I will gladly spend my whole life building such a party.

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Comey Scandal Continues

# Trump Regime Faces Deepening Crisis

**Tom Crean**

Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey last week has led to a spiraling political crisis in Washington. The sharp divisions in the political establishment and within the state apparatus have become even sharper due to Trump's authoritarian actions. Tens of millions who completely oppose Trump's racist, misogynist, anti-working class agenda, which has no democratic mandate, have had enough and simply want him gone.

## Trump Digs His Own Hole

There is a lot of talk in the liberal media about the echoes of Watergate. And indeed, the accounts of Trump's dinner with Comey where he allegedly demanded his "loyalty" and his Twitter threat after firing him that Comey better hope there are no "tapes" of the discussion certainly sound like echoes from the Nixon era.

Technically Trump has the authority to fire the head of the FBI, but what is becoming clearer is that this was part of a hamfisted attempt to quash the FBI investigation into his campaign's ties with the Russian government. This is otherwise known as obstruction of justice. If Trump did make tapes, and they corroborate Comey's notes, he will be severely damaged.

The appointment of the former FBI director Robert Mueller as special counsel ensures that the political crisis will last for months; but it also means the establishment have placed a check on Trump. One can only agree with the comment of Julian Epstein who was a counsel for the Democrats when Clinton faced impeachment: "With the appointment of Mueller, [the administration] have now totally lost control of this train and have very limited ability to manage the widening crisis around it. This will go down as one of the most inept and counterproductive efforts of damage control that we've ever seen in public life" (*New York Times*, 5/18/2017).

## Authoritarian Tendencies

From the start of this administration we pointed out that in addition to a thoroughly reactionary agenda, Trump harbored real authoritarian tendencies. He clearly admires "strongmen" like Putin, Turkish president Erdogan or Philippines president Duterte. He would like to follow Erdogan's example and purge the state of "disloyal" elements.

But even though Trump's attacks on his opponents in the state apparatus have been almost as incompetent as the roll-out of the Muslim ban or his pursuit of a wall on the



*Trump and Comey earlier this year.*

Mexican border, they still must be taken seriously. Socialists absolutely oppose these attempts to concentrate more power in the already hyper-powerful "imperial presidency." We are for the maximum democratic reforms to limit and control the capitalist state apparatus.

The liberal elite and increasing numbers of Republican leaders are very worried that if Trump is not stopped he will continue to greatly undermine the credibility of U.S. imperialism. As socialists, we don't care about the credibility of this rotten system but like millions of others we want this dangerous regime which has targeted immigrants, women, poor people, people of color and the working class as a whole, brought down

## Trump and the Ruling Class

Up until now Wall Street has backed Trump and his billionaire cabinet because of his promises to blow up regulations and push through massive tax cuts for the superwealthy. This is undoubtedly a short-sighted approach. But even these people have their limits, and their patience will definitely run out if Trump's scandals continue to careen out of control and threaten their broader interests and the legitimacy of their system. Likewise the Republican leadership have been prepared to put up with a great deal because of the enormous opportunity presented by controlling both Houses of Congress and the White House.

But while we want Trump and his agenda out of office, it will take a mass movement, a more serious collapse in his support and greater revelations to force impeachment proceedings. The ruling class will look for every

other avenue, including persuading Trump to leave of his own accord, however unlikely that may seem. This is because of the massive political damage to their interests that would be caused by an impeachment trial. Some on the left point out that if Trump is pushed out, he will be replaced by Mike Pence, who is a dyed-in-the-wool Christian right ideologue. This is true but the key point is that any post-Trump government would be objectively far weaker. Such a government could be put under enormous pressure from mass movements who would be empowered by Trump's defeat.

Another important element in the situation, of course, is Trump's base. Up until now Trump's support remained at around 40%, the lowest for a new president in the history of polling, but still enough to keep most House Republicans in line. A lot of Trump's working class and middle class supporters see the Russia accusations and the firing of Comey as a liberal witch hunt, although obstruction of justice might be another matter. What has more immediately degraded his support are anti-working class attacks like Trumpcare. But what would lead to a serious collapse in support is if Trump voters concluded that his promises on jobs were a fraud. Many will be willing to wait a while longer before drawing this conclusion because tragically they don't see any other credible alternative politically. It certainly isn't coming from the corporate-controlled Democrats.

## How Will Trump Be Brought Down?

What does history show? Democratic

President Lyndon Johnson was effectively brought down by the mass movement against the Vietnam War in 1968 and forced to not run for re-election. On the surface it seems that Richard Nixon was brought down by the Watergate break-in against the Democrats that was orchestrated by Nixon's operatives. But that fiasco, ordered by an increasingly unhinged and paranoid Nixon, was also the indirect by-product of the massive pressure of mass movements and the radicalization of the youth.

While sections of the ruling class are, for the time being, increasingly moving against Trump to try and protect the overall interests of their system, the biggest mistake for working people and the left would be to rely on them to force Trump out. All evidence points to the timidity and cowardice of the Democratic Party leadership in opposing Trump. Their pro-capitalist agenda has greatly undermined their popular appeal and stops them from mobilizing the maximum public opposition by fighting for Medicare for all, taxing the rich, free higher education, public works programs to create millions of good paying union jobs, etc.

Take the example of Trumpcare. While the Democrats are focused on opposing it they look at it narrowly from the perspective of how they can use it to win the House back in 2018. But while we want to see the right defeated at the ballot box, even more important is to build our own power as working people, from below. We can defeat Trumpcare now by building a powerful mass movement now. Yet the Democratic Party leaders, and their billionaire backers, are utterly opposed to such an approach. This points clearly to the need for a new party representing the interests of working people, the poor and all the oppressed.

The resistance against Trump's economic, social, and undemocratic agenda needs to be linked to fighting to drive him from power and preventing his successor from attempting to continue Trump's policies. This will require a sustained movement on a massive scale amounting to a popular revolt as we saw in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Such a development would also very likely force big sections of the establishment to seek to impeach Trump, or bring him down through other means, precisely to cut across and tamp down a growing social upheaval. It is true that our movements are currently far from that point, despite their size, given their weak level of organization and leadership, but the depth of the crisis that Trump's regime has unleashed is preparing the ground for exactly those kind of explosions.

Sanders' Political Revolution Continues

# Where Is Bernie Headed?

**Calvin Priest**

Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential primary campaign has had a profound and continuing impact on working people and youth in the U.S. Millions of Americans, from big cities to suburbs to rural areas, were inspired by something that most had never seen before: working-class politics.

Sanders' call for a "political revolution against the billionaire class" was paired with bold, fighting demands like single-payer health care, free college education, a federal \$15 minimum wage, and big taxes on Wall Street.

Since the election, Sanders has continued to have a huge influence on the American political discussion, with the self-described "democratic socialist" becoming the most prominent left critic of the Trump administration.

## Taking on Trump

Rather than demonizing working-class voters, as many Democratic leaders have done in their search for scapegoats since Clinton's humiliating election defeat, Sanders has worked from the beginning to undercut Trump's support on a class basis. He has gone on the offensive against Trump's billionaire cabinet, Republican health care plans, the president's tax-cutting plans for the rich, and brutal attacks on social services and education. Sanders has taken up the concrete issues that affect the day-to-day lives of working people, while highlighting the president's hypocritical failure to represent the "forgotten men and women." Perhaps most effectively, Sanders has spoken at rallies around the country to not only oppose Trumpcare, but to continue building support for Medicare for All.

In sharp contrast, Democratic Party leaders since the election have continued to push back hard against demands for progressive policies—with the party standing firm against



*Sanders' and Perez's "unity tour" served to expose divisions between the two.*

single-payer health care, with Tim Kaine and other prominent Democrats standing with Big Pharma against Bernie's pharmaceutical bill, with Clinton praising Trump's bombing of Syria, and most recently with Nancy Pelosi saying support for abortion rights should not be a "litmus test" for Democratic candidates. Remarkably, in spite of the ongoing dumpster fire of the Trump presidency, as well as growing support for left-wing ideas like Medicare for All, support for the Republican Party has remained steady, while Democratic Party approval ratings have declined almost continuously since November.

Polls now find Sanders to be one of the most popular elected officials in the U.S., with an impressive 60% approval rating at a time when politicians from both major parties are broadly viewed with suspicion.

## Transforming the Democratic Party?

But while Sanders does a great many things right, he has not yet converted the huge enthusiasm built up through his historic presidential campaign into a mass organization capable of effectively fighting for the policies he campaigned on. In spite of launching the small, top-down Our Revolution group, Bernie is still mostly a one-man army.

Sanders has repeatedly asserted that "right now" he's

working to "transform" the Democratic Party rather than building a new party, while at the same time insisting that he is "not a Democrat." These contradictory statements have been recently repeated by Sanders during his "unity tour" with new Democratic National Committee chair Tom Perez.

In a telling sign of the fundamental contradictions built into Sanders' current approach, the Democratic "unity" tour turned overnight into a "disunity tour," further exposing the sharp differences opening up within the party. Berniecrats booed Perez in city after city, as Perez held the party line on for-profit health care, corporate campaign cash, and the status quo party platform. Meanwhile, Democratic Party loyalists angrily called for Bernie to be thrown out of the party he's not formally a member of.

Of course, it's true that the main energy on the left right now is going toward attempts to "take back" the Democratic Party and use it to fight back against Trump. Certainly, it's an enormously important development that this serious effort by grassroots forces is taking place on a scale unmatched in decades. This reflects the politicization and radicalization of millions of people, albeit starting from a low level.

But what would be required to transform the Democrats into a "people's party"? At a minimum, it would mean accepting an end to all corporate donations, a consistent pro-worker program, a binding platform, and the genuine democratic structures capable of holding elected representatives accountable.

Corporate Democrats would almost certainly part ways rather than accept this.

But despite the deep crisis in the party, it remains far more likely that the Democratic neoliberal leadership and apparatus will prevail and it will be the forces of the left that will have to face the choice of parting ways and launching a new mass party.

While Sanders generally talks about the vital need to "transform" the Democratic Party, he is very careful to stress how difficult that will be and is effectively leaving the door open to building a new party to replace it. But while Sanders has clearly not drawn this conclusion, what is sorely needed right now in the struggle against corporate neoliberal politics and Trump's right-wing populism is a broad, grassroots, democratic membership organization, capable of fighting for and winning the things Sanders has campaigned on and that could give real life to his "political revolution."

The stunning growth of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), from 6,000 to 20,000 members in just one year's time, as well as the rapid growth of Socialist Alternative, shows the enormous potential to build the socialist left at present. A politically broader organization with Sanders' leadership and authority would have far greater potential for rapid development, and hundreds of thousands of people could be inspired and drawn into the effort and ongoing struggle.

But to fully take shape, such a mass organization would need a sustained organizing effort along with a bold, campaigning edge. To take one example, the fight for Medicare for All could go hand in hand with building such a force. Sanders has certainly succeeded in raising the profile and support for single payer, but at present he is mainly using it as a rhetorical counterpoint to Trumpcare – saying, for example, "Today we defend the Affordable Care Act, tomorrow we fight for a Medicare-for-all" (Twitter, 4/4/2017). Instead, a mass membership organization could dynamically organize on this key issue and grow its own ranks by holding health care rallies around the country, leading up toward a massive national day of action to demand Medicare for All.

Even if the organization's main orientation was toward the Democratic Party, such a force would, in fact, serve as the outline for a new mass party when, almost certainly, the "transformation" fight failed.

## Drafting Bernie

In February, former Sanders campaign

**continued on p. 11**



Ginger Jentzen, a member of Socialist Alternative and leader of 15 Now, is running for City Council in Minneapolis independent of the two-party system.

## Market Failure

# Seattle's Housing Crisis Fuels Political Revolt

**Ty Moore, Seattle Organizer for Socialist Alternative**

A growing majority of Seattle residents, facing a relentless rise in housing costs, are demanding real solutions from city leaders. However, with the real estate lobby dominating politics in City Hall, support is growing for left independent challenges to the Democratic Party establishment. The potential now exists for uniting Seattle's "new left" around bold socialist demands to transform Seattle's market-driven housing disaster.

For big developers, real estate investors, and wealthy landlords, things have never been better in Seattle. Rents have climbed 57% in six years. Renters now pay an average of \$635/month more to landlords, a huge upward transfer of wealth. Meanwhile the median home price has doubled in five years, now averaging over \$700,000.

Working and middle class people, especially in communities of color, are being systematically pushed out of the city or facing dramatic cuts to their living standards.

Homelessness is skyrocketing, with large tent encampments crowding into all available green spaces even as huge cranes tower overhead to construct high-rise luxury apartments. In the last year alone, police have carried out over 600 brutal sweeps of these

homeless encampments, disrupting the increasing efforts toward self-organization and neighborhood solidarity being built up in them.

Meanwhile Seattle's political establishment, backed and funded by big developers and big business, is doubling down on failed market-driven "solutions" to incentivize more private, for-profit development. Just days before deciding to enter the mayoral race, the leading Democratic Party contender, Jenny Durkin, "had a meeting with business leaders ... hosted by Allen's real-estate firm Vulcan," Seattle's most influential big developer (*Seattle Times*, 5/11/17).

Incentivized by city policy, Vulcan and other developers are set to open almost 10,000 new apartments in 2017, "nearly twice as many as in any other year in [Seattle's] history" (*Seattle Times*, 12/30/16). Unfortunately expanding supply alone will offer little relief to renters since the biggest profits come from constructing high-end condos and luxury apartments, and often involves the removal of existing affordable housing.

## Housing For People, Not For Profit!

Seattle is a booming city, flush with

tech-industry profits. There is no reason anyone should be homeless or spending half their income on housing. The total failure of capitalism to meet basic housing needs calls for bold socialist policies to cut across market forces and dramatically increase the supply of quality, public affordable housing and freeze out-of-control rent hikes.

At a joint press conference on May 17, Socialist Alternative and city councilmember Kshama Sawant, joined by People's Party mayoral candidate Nikkita Oliver and democratic socialist city council candidate Jon Grant, unveiled three far-reaching socialist policies they aim to make a centerpiece of Seattle's 2017 city elections:

Build tens of thousands of quality public housing units paid for by taxing big business.

Seattle needs rent control as an emergency measure to address the crisis of out-of-control rent hikes.

Require 25% of all newly developed housing be affordable.

Dubbed the representatives of "Seattle's New Left," Sawant, Oliver, Grant and Socialist Alternative will use the city election battle to build popular support for these demands. So far, none of the Democratic Party's



candidates are supporting these policies, despite popular support among rank-and-file Democrats in Seattle.

However, much like Seattle's victorious \$15 minimum wage fight – which at first was only backed by Sawant and Socialist Alternative – if Seattle's new left can build a real movement from below around these demands, major victories are possible.

Of course, skyrocketing rents and home prices are not unique to Seattle. Real estate speculation and big developers are fueling a housing crisis in most major cities across the country, and in many globally. Like in the fight for \$15, where the early victory in Seattle helped propel the \$15 movement and Socialist Alternative to national prominence, the potential exists for Seattle to transform the national debate again. A major victory on any of these three demands, especially if led by Socialist Alternative and the wider Seattle left, could help inspire a much-needed movement to create a public alternative to the failed capitalist housing market.

# Seattle's "New Left" Challenges the Democratic Party Establishment

On May 17, Socialist Alternative held a press conference in Seattle to announce our endorsement of Nikkita Oliver's campaign for Mayor and Jon Grant's campaign for city council, both running as left independents. Most major TV, print, and online media attended, and reports of our endorsement sparked a sharp public debate within the labor movement and beyond over what the press has labelled Seattle's "New Left."

Oliver is running as a People's Party candidate and Grant as an independent "democratic socialist." Despite a thick field of Democratic Party candidates, both have a real chance of making it through the August 1 primary, where the top two candidates in each race will face-off in the November general election.

Below is an excerpt of Kshama Sawant's statement at the May 17 press conference.

We're standing here outside of Yesler

Terrace public housing, much of which has now been torn down. What was once home to low income tenants, mainly people of color, is now being re-developed by one of our area's billionaires, Paul Allen, who owns Vulcan, one of the biggest real estate corporations in Seattle.

Vulcan and Allen are key players in the private development process which is rapidly turning Seattle into a playground for the rich. On the basis of the private housing market, big developers are getting rich. But for the rest of us, the overwhelming majority of working people, young people, people of color, the LGBTQ community, even families that used to be part of the middle class, that same private market is deeply dysfunctional.

For our movement to win the battle for affordable housing, we need our own candidates. Socialist Alternative and I, and the growing movement of working people in Seattle, have shown how we can get organized

and win real gains. In just three years, our movement has completely altered the conversation in Seattle politics. In just three years, we won the historic \$15 minimum wage, stopped 400% rent hikes at the Seattle Housing Authority, and have won a series of housing victories for tenants rights and for homeless people.

But to make more than a dent in this housing crisis we need more voices from our movement in City Hall, more elected officials willing to use their positions to build real movements from below. That's why I'm excited here today to stand alongside Jon Grant and Nikkita Oliver, and to announce Socialist Alternative's endorsement of them.

Both Jon and Nikkita are committed to fighting against the real estate lobby, against the city's Democratic establishment. They are committed to fighting for a massive expansion of affordable public housing, rent control, and requiring 25% of new

**Kshama Sawant**  
Seattle City Councilmember

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 facebook.com/cmkshama



housing development be affordable.

Jon is running as an independent, democratic socialist candidate for City Council, while Nikkita is running to become Seattle's mayor, as an independent left candidate of the People's Party. Both reject all donations from big business and big developers, and base themselves on grassroots funding, as I did, and as Bernie Sanders did last year.

Here in Seattle, Grant and Oliver are setting an example for the rest of the country by bringing a bold challenge against the corporate Democratic Party establishment. I am proud to stand with them here today to send a clear message to that business establishment that Seattle's working people do not accept this system based on massive inequality, unaffordability and homelessness for the many, to enable a piling up of profits for the few.

# Protesting for R LGBTQ Community Resists Trump

Tara Brown

The rights of oppressed communities, as well as working people more broadly, are under attack by Trump, and the LGBTQ community is no exception. Key steps forward for LGBTQ rights are now on the line, with Obama-era gains like trans bathroom protections in schools coming under fire within Trump's first weeks in office. Yet, as we enter the season of LGBTQ Pride, it is both inspiring and critical to our movement that this year's events are becoming politicized in response to the attacks on our community, with some planned marches even being formally turned into protests. We can use Pride as a launch pad for a revitalized LGBTQ movement to face down Trump and fight for our liberation, in solidarity with all working people struggling against this dangerous right-wing administration.

## Attacks Across the Board

Trump has moved quickly on his anti-LGBTQ agenda. In March, he gutted LGBTQ protections for employees of federal contractors and rescinded the Fair Pay and Safe Workplaces order that President Obama issued in 2014. The latter order had required companies doing business with the federal government to comply with various federal worker protections, including a prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Trump is also threatening billion-dollar cuts to research funded by the National Institutes of Health, including initiatives to help people with HIV/AIDS.

LGBTQ youth are also in Trump's cross-hairs, and they will need solidarity in their fight against Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. In Michigan, DeVos family money financed the push for what they called "students' expression of religious beliefs," in the form of a 2012 pro-bullying exemption passed by the Michigan State Senate. DeVos now has federal power at the head of the Department of Education, putting all LGBTQ youth at a higher risk of bullying as well as the higher rates of depression and



*Protests earlier this year at the Stonewall Inn, New York City on the anniversary of the Stonewall revolt.*

suicide that come along with it. Already, DeVos has gone along with Trump's reversal of the Obama administration's Title IX transgender-inclusive interpretation, threatening the everyday safety of transgender students who simply want to use the bathroom that conforms to their gender.

Recent gains won by our movements, such as federal-level protections for trans students, are being rolled back. While Trump claimed personal indifference during his campaign toward which bathroom a person uses, his actions and choices for his cabinet have since made crystal clear that his reactionary agenda will seek to undermine bathroom rights and other gains. A slew of bathroom bills, many inspired by the rise of Trump and Pence to the White House, have been launched around the country, with 16 states already considering anti-trans legislation to limit access to bathrooms or other gender-segregated facilities in 2017. These

attacks are being brought forward by the same right-wing bigots who are working relentlessly to kill reproductive rights one state at a time. Meanwhile, bigotry of all kinds has been emboldened by the administration, and hate crimes are on the rise around the country.

## Lessons From the Fight Against Reagan

This is not the first time the LGBTQ community has faced off against a bigoted, right-wing

president. Under Ronald Reagan, the LGBTQ movement demonstrated how to win victories in a hostile environment. Reagan said he "could not condone" a gay "lifestyle," while his communications director Pat Buchanan said AIDS is "nature's revenge on gay men." Reagan's homophobic views were backed up by his four years of inaction regarding the lethal HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s.

An international mass movement of working-class LGBTQ people fought back, a key part of which was ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), which stomped out erroneous claims about the transmission of HIV and called out the government's deadly silence. In their coordinated action on October 11, 1988, "Seize Control of the FDA," hundreds of activists stopped business as usual by occupying FDA headquarters for long enough to cover the building in ACT UP graphics and banners saying messages like, "The Government Has Blood on Its Hands. One AIDS Death Every Half Hour," and, "We Recognize Every AIDS Death as an Act of Racist, Sexist, and Homophobic Violence." The movement dramatically raised the public's awareness, and the Reagan administration was forced to speed up progress on HIV/AIDS research or risk further mass resistance and mass action.

## Uniting Our Struggles

Those movements that were built on the ground allowed us to pose a credible threat to the establishment and win major gains. Undoubtedly, the Trump administration presents new challenges. To defeat the Trump



*An anti-“bathroom-bill” protest in Texas.*

agenda, we must unite our struggles: The defunding of Planned Parenthood, for example, is a key battle that must be fought for by the LGBTQ community alongside working women. Trump's election represents a clear and present danger to LGBTQ people, women, and working people generally, and we need maximum unity in action to stand together against this right-wing assault.

While we need broad unity, the LGBTQ movement will be strongest when it does not limit its fight-back to what is acceptable to the corporate establishment of the Democratic Party. Both now and when Obama was in power, transgender people face triple unemployment rates and high levels of sexual and police violence, while issues of health care, homelessness, and mental health have continued to be endemic in the LGBTQ community.

The recent developments in the trans rights movement have already led to important gains in visibility and begun to make strides on safety, while renewing the fighting spirit of the LGBTQ community as a whole. While Democratic leaders have hesitated and stalled in the fight for trans rights, a radicalizing section of the LGBTQ movement, often led up by young trans activists, has begun to fight on a more independent basis and made substantial progress, although inequality, discrimination, and violence continue to plague our community.

We need a political program that acknowledges social and economic hardships head-on with clear demands, while calling for all those who claim to stand with us to help us fight for real gains. It was the mass movement for marriage equality that pushed the evolution of Obama's support for the cause.

Obama stood aside as California passed its infamous Prop. 8, which temporarily banned same-sex marriage and threatened to set back the whole movement, and he only came out in favor of marriage equality after there was majority support for the demand. Corporate politicians too often listen to the movement only once it has become too loud to ignore. We must continue to organize on a grassroots level and force the hand of Democratic politicians while fighting back against the right and for more radical, class-based demands.

## Politicizing Pride

It is important that Pride events are again taking on a more activist character, which can both revitalize the movement and push back against the commercialization that has run rampant in recent years. We should use this year's Pride to help build the broader movement against Trump and to take up demands that move from defense to offense: going beyond the struggle for acceptance to the fight for strong anti-discrimination and anti-bullying laws, free and accessible counseling for LGBTQ

# Pride

youth, free and accessible sexual reassignment surgery, and real solutions to LGBTQ homelessness.

The resistance against bigotry also needs to be international, and many pride events around the world are also being politicized against the rise of right-wing governments. In Brazil, the brutal violence against trans and LGBTQ people in recent years has been further intensified with the reactionary interim Temer administration coming to power. The Brazilian LGBTQ and women's movement have also been fighting back through politicizing of Pride parades, including Carnival, which has become more and more an expression of struggle against bigotry, in spite of its roots in Catholic tradition. The brutal oppression of LGBTQ people in Chechnya has led to protests globally and demands for an end to the violence and arrests.

The most powerful way to defend the LGBTQ community against future attacks is through a broad-based working-class movement that stands for LGBTQ liberation and builds maximum unity in action around our collective struggle.

For example, the fight for single-payer health care can unite millions of workers opposing Trumpcare but also wanting genuine affordable and universal care that will disproportionately benefit LGBTQ people. We can unite our struggles by taking up demands for a \$15 minimum wage, affordable housing, and free public education through college. At the same time, a broader movement can fight side by side with us against bathroom bills, attacks on workplace rights, and other bigoted, anti-LGBTQ legislation. If you are serious about building a powerful struggle for LGBTQ and workers' rights alongside a broad movement led by working people and youth of all genders and sexual identities, join Socialist Alternative.

Capitalism has bigotry and inequality built into it. It relies on strategies of divide-and-rule and on hierarchical structures of church and family, in order for a super-wealthy ruling elite to defend their dysfunctional and massively unequal system. An end to homophobia, misogyny, and bigotry will require an end to capitalism, and in its place a socialist society based on equality, democracy, and solidarity.

**Edmund Schluessel,  
Sosialistinen  
Vaihtoehto  
(CWI in Finland)**

The socialist October Revolution in 1917 brought about fundamental, thoroughgoing changes in Russian society. Millions of people in the largest country on Earth quickly found themselves far freer than they had ever been under the despotic, anti-Semitic Tsar, the strictures of the church, and the brutality of Russian capitalism and landlordism. Alongside the working class taking control of the Russian economy, the Russian Revolution also led to unprecedented advances in the liberation of women and LGBTQ people. In *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*, Wales-based scholar Dan Healey relates the LGBTQ struggle in the Russian Revolution, the historic progressive gains made under Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and the later return under Stalin to state persecution and homophobic, sexist puritanism.

## Massive Advances

Famously, the Russian Revolution brought the decriminalization of homosexuality in an act both nearly unique in Europe and astonishingly advanced in a country with semi-feudal conditions in vast parts where religious hierarchy had long been a cornerstone of the state. Healey reveals long-forgotten, even concealed, facts showing even greater advances: the early Soviet Union was the first industrialized state to recognize same-sex marriage, the USSR alongside Weimar Germany briefly led the world in gender corrective surgery, and Soviet medical experts working alongside transgender people began exploring the idea of gender not being a simple binary of man and woman but, instead, a spectrum.

Even as reformist socialists like the followers of Karl Kautsky took conservative views on sexuality in the early 20th century, the Russian Bolsheviks forged ahead because they were based on a movement from below. Same-sex marriage recognition occurred almost organically: two people of the same legal gender applied to be married, and local courts and officials in the wake of the Russian Revolution quickly decided there was no basis on which to deny the request.

Healey discusses at length the case of one of the parties to this marriage, anonymized as "Evgenii Fedorovich M." Assigned female at birth, Evgenii Fedorovich struggled with gender identity and inconsistent support from family until the Russian Revolution gave him the chance to express himself as a

man. While working as a political instructor far from his village of birth, he courted and married a woman, "S.", and formed a family. Tragically, Evgenii Fedorovich's reassignment to a distant city split the relationship and, suffering from psychiatric issues, he sank into alcoholism.

## Revolutionary Rethinking of Sex and Gender

Evgenii Fedorovich's discussions with Soviet psychiatrists informed a revolutionary political analysis of sex and gender. Healey devotes chapter six of his book to describing how Russian attitudes toward same-sex relationships quickly evolved from the Revolution to the end of the first Five Year Plan (1932) from challenging the idea of same-sex relationships as "perverse," to medicalization, to the statement by biologist N. K. Kol'tsov that "there is no intermediate sex, but rather an infinite quantity of intermediate sexes."

Several Soviet doctors were assembled into an expert commission, and ideas such as Kol'tsov's found broad support. These doctors were being driven by experience: as soon as gender corrective surgery began to be practiced in the early 1920s, its practitioners were inundated with inquiries from ordinary Russians who had fought with their own bodies for their whole lives and finally saw a means of resolution.

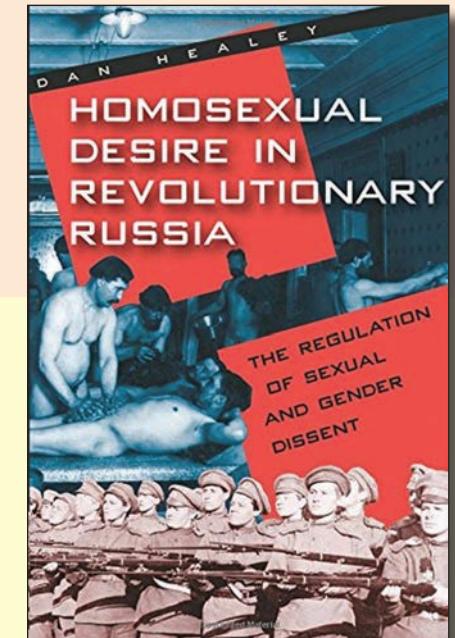
## Stalinist Reaction

While this commission of doctors put forward highly advanced ideas on gender and gender identity, their ideas were, tragically, never fully realized. With Stalin's consolidation of power in the late 1920s came a vicious social reaction. In 1933, the Soviet state terminated the commission, and in 1936 it restored homosexuality to the status of a crime in Russia. The legacy of this reaction stands today, with some Stalinist groups around the world still spitting upon the ideas of transgender identity, transsexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality as "undialectical."

Why did this happen? When the working class had political power after 1917, it moved ahead as rapidly as possible with a vast transformation of Russian society, including liberating women from domestic servitude. But they faced daunting obstacles caused by the devastation of World War I and the Russian Civil War, compounded by the isolation of the revolution after the failure of revolutions in Western Europe. This created the space for the conservative bureaucracy and Stalin to seize political power from the working class in the 1920s. While maintaining the collectivized economy, the bureaucracy turned inward, away from world revolution, and they increasingly sought to give a social base to the

# 100 Years Ago: A Forgotten Soviet Revolution in LGBTQ Rights

Review of Dan Healey's book:  
*Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*



regime through reverting to reactionary social ideology on the family, women's role, and sexuality. They also increasingly promoted Russian nationalism.

Moreover, this reactionary attitude toward sexuality is, tragically, embraced in today's capitalist Russia, as activists around the world shudder at the state-backed murder of gay people in Chechnya and ever-increasing legal and social homophobia in Russia under Putin.

Healey himself is no socialist, and his book presents the fascinating history of LGBTQ liberation in Russia through the lens of his own academic attitudes. Much of Healey's terminology and his use of naming conventions seem, at best, dated. Nonetheless, the people he discusses and their heroic advances deserve to be far more than footnotes. They certainly deserve to be remembered in the U.S. where, despite significant gains made by the LBGTQ community, under today's right-wing Trump administration and state-level Republican domination, states are once again charging ahead with anti-same-sex marriage legislation and purposefully transphobic "bathroom bills."

Yet the best, most rational, most ethical arguments or plans for LGBTQ liberation mean nothing without a mass movement to back them up. Historic gains on LGBTQ rights made after the Russian Revolution were tragically lost in Stalin's USSR due to the counter-revolutionary political expropriation of the working class. In the U.S. and around the world today, working people of all genders, orientations and identities must organize together, as a class, in order to stop the right wing assault, and to fight for the full freedom not just to exist but to love.

# Obama's Wall Street Payout

## Eight Years of Serving Big Business has Lifelong Benefits

**Darletta Scruggs, Chicago**

In 2008, Barack Obama was elected president on the back of a movement expecting change. During the next eight years, the majority of any economic growth went to the top 1%. In the past month, Obama spoke at two separate banks, receiving \$400,000 each time – the equivalent of what taxpayers paid him for a year of being president.

The 2016 presidential elections exposed the myth of a “post-racial America” and showed that millions of people are completely fed up with Wall Street’s domination over U.S. and worldwide politics. The disgust at Hillary Clinton’s ties to big business should have been a signal to Obama and the DNC that the Democratic Party’s voter base is much more radical and anti-corporate than they are capable of pretending to be.

### Media Defends Obama

So, if the role of Wall Street was a deal breaker for people on the fence about Clinton, why does Obama get a pass? Recently, the liberal media has been doing back-flips to defend Obama’s speeches.



Obama was paid \$400,000 apiece for two speeches to Wall Street in April 2017.

A *Slate* article put it, “If one speech irreparably poisons Obama’s image as a counterweight to the forces of Trumpism, then we haven’t given nearly enough credit to his accomplishments” (4/26/2017). There have also been claims that these criticisms are due only to the fact that Obama is black, that all the previous presidents, who were white, did paid speeches and there is a double standard when it comes to Obama. In an article for *The Root*, one writer says, “asking a man to work for eight years cleaning up the sloppy mess some white

guy made, and then telling him he shouldn’t ask for money, just feels racist” (4/27/2017).

The right-wing media is using this criticism to whip up racist sentiments among its viewers, but the majority of people, including black people, are finding it hard to accept Obama’s cozy relationship with the very institutions that have devastated so many working-class lives. Is there a greater gift to the right that paints Obama and people on the left as “out-of-touch limousine liberals” than two \$400,000 speeches?

### The Terror of Wall Street

Obama’s Wall Street windfall should in no way let Trump off the hook. Many Trump supporters are already disillusioned with a cabinet which looks more like a swamp than the draining of one. Trump immediately appointed billionaires to his cabinet with ties to investment banks, big corporations, and the oil industry. Corporate America is howling for massive business tax cuts to go along with deep cuts to programs like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Yet working people have not recovered from the Great Recession of 2007-08.

When you look at how Wall Street exploited black communities, you too would wonder, why would the first black president see any alignment with such people, let alone be put on their payroll? Banks like Wells Fargo targeted Blacks and Latinos for subprime loans, resulting in a \$175 million settlement with the Justice Department. Wall Street and financial institutions have no interest in the needs of working people, the law, or even the economy – yet, in 2008, the first order of Obama was to bail out the banks.

### Where the Money Comes From Matters!

The wealth gap between the rich and poor has dramatically widened since the 2007-08 crisis. Even Obama himself admitted in 2013 that 95% of all wealth since the recession has gone to the top 1%. Big business benefited most from Obama being president, while working-class people have been living on a hope and a dream ever since he was elected. But clearly the dream went sour for millions – which helped open the door for the right.

It’s time we stand up to big business. We need a party and candidates who are not doing the bidding of Wall Street, but act in the interests of workers and the most marginalized communities – communities that have been targeted, exploited, and marginalized by Wall Street. We need a party that is going to advocate for single-payer health care, free college education, a \$15 minimum wage, an end to the systematic targeting and discrimination against black and brown communities, and an end to the destruction of our planet.

## The Rise of Jeff Sessions

**Nicholas Wurst**

Attorney General Jeff Sessions has led a long and highly controversial career. Starting in the 1970s as an Alabama lawyer, he entered politics in 1981 as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama. In 1986, he was nominated by Ronald Reagan to be a judge in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Alabama, sparking considerable controversy. His nomination was opposed by the NAACP and multiple other civil rights groups due to his record of racist actions and language. For example, as a U.S. Attorney in Alabama, he prosecuted three African-American community organizers for voter fraud, all of whom were declared innocent by a jury. Coretta Scott King, the widow of Martin Luther King Jr., sent a letter to the confirmation committee, saying:

“Mr. Sessions has used the awesome powers of his office in a shabby attempt to intimidate and frighten elderly black voters ... The irony of Mr. Sessions’ nomination is that,

if confirmed, he will be given a life tenure for doing with a federal prosecution what the local sheriffs accomplished twenty years ago with clubs and cattle prods.”

Ultimately, Sessions was deemed too racist to be a judge and his nomination failed.

In 1994, Sessions was elected as Attorney General of Alabama, where he defended a local school-funding model that starved poor and black schools of resources. This model was ultimately found to be unconstitutional. In 1996 – the same year he won an Alabama Senate seat – he defended the state of Alabama against a lawsuit from the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance. The Alabama legislature had denied funding to student groups that defended homosexuality, and Sessions used the state’s “sodomy and sexual misconduct” laws to defend the decision. Those laws were ultimately ruled unconstitutional.

As U.S. Senator, Jeff Sessions’ record has been wholly right-wing and reactionary. He has consistently opposed immigration reform, opposed additional funding for

the VA medical system, and opposed a bill that prohibited “cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment” of government detainees.

### “Make America Great Again”

Jeff Sessions is now the face of Trump’s “law and order” agenda. He has re-escalated the racist War on Drugs, ordering federal prosecutors to charge defendants with the “most serious, readily provable offense,” as well as reinstating the DOJ’s use of private for-profit prisons. This shift in policy cuts across the emerging bipartisan agreement from Republican conservative figures like the Koch Brothers, Newt Gingrich, and Democratic Party liberal stalwarts Van Jones and New Jersey Senator Cory Booker that the War on Drugs, which led to a mass incarceration boom in communities of color, had to end in its current form.

Sessions has also promised to renounce consent decrees – a tool utilized by the DOJ to monitor and reform police departments

that have been found responsible for abuses – essentially letting police off-leash again. In the context of the growing anti-Trump movement, states have already made various attempts to criminalize protest. There is the potential that Sessions’ DOJ could make national efforts toward attacking the right to protest, evoking the historical examples of the Palmer Raids, McCarthy’s House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1950s, and J. Edgar Hoover’s COINTELPRO in the 1960s and ‘70s.

We need a mass movement with enough momentum and energy to create a sustained, strategic fight-back against the reactionary domestic agenda of Trump and Sessions. Black Lives Matter, unions, and community organizations should unite and escalate the resistance, building working-class power and solidarity independently of the Democrats and Republicans. Capitalism and its state-sponsored attacks on our communities must be opposed. Socialism offers an alternative, but only if we fight for it.

# Ireland: Jobstown Trial Exposes Establishment

**Ann Waddell**

Two and a half years ago in Ireland, nationwide protests against water charges – a new double tax introduced along with massive austerity measures – were building steadily. As the rate of nonpayment by households was rising toward 70%, Joan Burton, a leading government minister and member of the Labour Party, attended a graduation ceremony for adult students at An Cosán community centre in Jobstown, a working-class community which had felt the brunt of the austerity measures.

A protest was quickly organized by local anti-water-charges activists. Members of the Socialist Party – part of the Committee for a Workers International, with which Socialist Alternative is in solidarity – including Paul Murphy, the parliamentary representative (TD) for the area, and two local councillors joined the protest. Burton attempted to avoid hearing the protesters' complaints by ducking out the back of the building to a waiting Garda [police] car, but the car was quickly surrounded by the protesters, determined to have their voices heard. A two hour stand-off followed, as Gardai attempted to force the crowd back and Burton remained in the car. Ultimately, an agreement was reached to slow-march her car out of the area at the back of the protesters.

The government, the media, and the police seized on this standoff as a way to divide the anti-water-charges movement by discrediting its most radical wing – those calling for mass non-payment – as dangerous, violent rabble-rousers.

Incredibly, the state has charged 18 people with "false imprisonment" – essentially kidnapping – a charge which can carry a sentence of life imprisonment. The trial of the first seven, including Paul Murphy and both the local councillors, started on April 24 and is expected to conclude in early June.

## Trial Begins

While the state saw this trial as an opportunity to discredit the movement, the first two weeks of the trial have been an opportunity for the activists, through their lawyers, to expose the web of lies built up by the Gardai and leading politicians for political purposes.

The first week of the trial saw a tearful Joan Burton testify that she was "terrified" by the crowd who shouted abuse at her and banged continually on the roof of the car. Karen O'Connell, the aide who was with her in the car, described it as "one of the most



*The Socialist Party, Ireland, calls for international solidarity. Follow Jobstown Not Guilty on Facebook.*

scary experiences of my life" and called the protesters "an angry mob."

The defense responded by showing cell phone footage from the day, both from protesters and from Burton's own cell phone, that clearly showed her calmly reading a paper or talking with O'Connell while protesters surrounded the car chanting slogans such as, "They say cut back. We say fight back."

In one clip, O'Connell refers to the protesters as "fucking dregs." In another near the end of the protest, Burton is advising O'Connell on how best to spin the event on social media: "What you should do now is go on social media and say it is just shameful: all the little kids there, no one minding them – they were just free to roam the streets."

This apparent concern for the children of Jobstown is particularly ironic coming from a minister who ended Family Support payments for many single parents, forcing them and their children further into poverty.

## Police and Politicians Collude

Week two saw the trial shift to testimony from the Gardai. Over the course of the week, multiple Gardai contradicted their own sworn statements, and each other, while giving a picture of events clearly at odds with the video evidence. The most striking alternate reality presented was the picture of Paul Murphy as the commander of the crowd – egging them on to "keep her all night." Multiple Gardai gave some version of this testimony, and it was put to all of them by the defence that, not only had Murphy not said this, but that there had been a democratic vote by the protesters. None of the Garda could remember any such thing.

This caused further problems for them when the defense showed the court cell phone footage of Paul Murphy coordinating not only a vote, but a debate, where a female protester put the case for maintaining the standoff and keeping the car where it was, and Mick Murphy – one of the local councillors – put the case for marching the car out of the area. The video clearly shows Paul Murphy voting for Mick's proposal, while the majority of the protesters at that point vote to stay put.

As this case has unfolded, the collusion of the Gardai and the political establishment in trying to suppress political dissent has become incontrovertible. As Paul Murphy wrote, "The trial has the potential to cause a significant crisis of legitimacy for institutions of the state including the Gardai. Convictions will rightly provoke anger and protest, with wide sections of society shocked that anybody could be convicted of false imprisonment or violent disorder because of participation in a peaceful protest. Acquittals will provoke a widespread questioning about why the state spent millions trying to victimise protesters."

This trial is also contributing to the complete discrediting and collapse of the base of establishment parties – in this case, Labour, which used to be a workers' party but has become an enforcer of neoliberal policies. The crisis of the "mainstream," "center-right," and "center-left" parties can be seen across Europe, most recently in the French presidential election. Faced with the deepening crisis of capitalism, working people and youth are searching for a solution. This creates a huge opening for the genuine left like the Socialist Party and the broader left alliance, Solidarity, of which it is part. But



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

## Britain: Corbyn and Labour Begin to Close the Gap

As we go to press, the latest polls in the British general election show a tightening race with Labour, under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, beginning to gain on Theresa May and the Conservatives (Tories). Corbyn was elected by the party's membership two years ago, in a sharp shift to the left from the neoliberal policies that Labour supported under Tony Blair and his successors. Since then, the party's Blairite right wing, which holds most Labour seats in Parliament, has relentlessly sought to undermine Corbyn.

But now Corbyn has created real enthusiasm by launching a manifesto declaring that Labour is the "party for the many," while the Tories are the "party of the rich." Polls show overwhelming support for Corbyn's policies, including public ownership of railways, Royal Mail, and the energy sector; banning zero-hour contracts, higher taxes on those earning over £80,000, and building more council homes.

As our sister organization, the Socialist Party of England and Wales, has explained:

"The Tories and the rich they represent are terrified that these policies are very popular."

"Unfortunately, over the last year Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity message, which has twice swept him into the leadership of the Labour Party, has not been heard by the majority of the population. Endless attempts to compromise with the pro-capitalist Blairite wing of the Labour Party have, to put it mildly, muffled his voice."

"But a bold campaign could overcome this. Corbyn and his trade union backers, like general secretary of the Unite union Len McCluskey, need to get out to mass rallies and workplaces, with fighting talk against the rich, the 'rigged system.' If they boldly argue for jobs, workers' rights, homes and services, they could defy the 'experts' and win."

in Ireland, we also see the road of repression that the ruling class will take to defeat working-class resistance to austerity. For this reason, the trial and its outcome have huge international significance.

Socialist Students Interview

# Massive Puerto Rico May Day Strike

*May Day in Puerto Rico saw a partial general strike of union and nonunion workers, alongside the student movement, fighting the draconian cuts to public education, health care, and other social services on the island. Puerto Rico has officially declared bankruptcy, with the largest bankruptcy filing in U.S. history: \$123 billion. At the time of writing, eight out of the twelve University of Puerto Rico campuses are still shut down by the strikes.*

**Elan Axelbank** interviewed **Danilo Trinidad Pérez Rivera**, Secretary General of Confederación Estudiantil Nacional de Puerto Rico, in the lead-up to the May Day general strike, but the content of the interview is still relevant as the movement pushes forward. This is an abridged version of the interview. The full text can be found at SocialistStudents.net.

**Elan:** What's been going on in Puerto Rico? Why are people upset?

**Danilo:** Well, it all goes back to the 2008 financial crisis. The U.S. entered into a recession and Puerto Rico followed, and there's



A massive strike in Puerto Rico of students and workers on May 1, 2017.

just never been a recovery. Luis Fortuño [Puerto Rico's governor from 2009-2013] oversaw layoffs of 50,000 government employees, public school closures, and regressive tax measures that hurt the working class, combined with tax cuts for foreign corporations.

Then, in 2016, under Governor Alejandro Padilla, the PROMESA Bill was passed, which established the "Financial Oversight and Management Board." Made up of seven members of U.S. Congress [unelected by the Puerto Rican

people] that has the power to veto any legislative measures that the Puerto Rican government makes, this board basically strips us of any decision-making power in our own country. The U.S. did this so that they could get the maximum amount of debt payments from Puerto Rico, even if it meant harsh austerity. And our debt payments aren't even to the U.S. government; it's to Wall Street banks and corporations.

Now, our new governor's proposed fiscal plan includes \$1

billion in cuts to health care, \$500 million in cuts to universities, and \$300 million in cuts to K-12 education. Of course, this plan has been approved by the Fiscal Control Board. So this is why people are upset.

**Elan:** What role do you see the system of capitalism playing in the crisis in Puerto Rico?

**Danilo:** Within the student movement, everybody is against all forms of exploitation – which is, of course, a principle of capitalism. So, in this sense, students are completely aware that the issues we've been facing are a symptom of the capitalist market agenda. There's no discussion there.

**Elan:** Are student protests the most prominent anti-austerity protests happening right now? What type of support does the movement have from non-students?

**Danilo:** Yes, definitely. On May Day, many workers' unions will be going on strike alongside the students. We try to get articles published in local newspapers, and we've

been noticing recently that parents, aunts and uncles, and even some political figures are starting to sympathize more with students' claims. More and more people are starting to see the measures being taken by our government for what they are: crude austerity that benefits the rich, not us.

**Elan:** What would it take for the movement to win and stop all privatization and cuts to education?

**Danilo:** The number one challenge is convincing people that isn't just a student movement and that it's a movement for all people that everybody has to get involved in. An uneducated society doesn't work for anybody. This is why it's great that the unions are joining us. The unions are our fathers and mothers. The fight against tuition hikes and school closures is just the flash point. We're fighting to defend all the people of Puerto Rico. ... Eventually, the democratic spirit of the people will impose itself on those in power.

## AT&T Workers Strike Back

**Steve Edwards**

In more than 37 states, 38,000 AT&T workers represented by the Communications Workers of America (CWA) went on a three-day strike – the first major strike of the Trump era. It follows on from last year's successful strike by CWA members at Verizon.

The strike affects 17,000 workers who provide phone, cable, and landline services in California and Nevada, as well as 21,000 members employed by AT&T Mobility, most of whom are either retail sales or call center workers with no previous experience of going on strike. The strike may be the biggest job action by retail workers at a single company in U.S. history.

Main demands of the Mobile units include a pay raise to cover increased healthcare costs, a higher base pay and/or a fixed rate of commissions for retail sales workers, no increase in health contributions in 2021, and an end to a two-tier plan that puts health care beyond the reach of new employees – who are not covered at all for their first six months of employment, according to workers

on the picket lines. Equally importantly, contract demands call for job security language against contracting out the retail stores to subcontractors whose employees have no union representation, against outsourcing networks to outside contractors and call centers to countries where employees have no union rights. CWA is demanding that outsourcing be reversed, creating more union jobs.

Employees on the picket line report that, under the current policy, they have no sick days. When they call in sick, they earn a "point"; eight points in a year means discharge.

AT&T is the largest telecommunications company in the country, with \$164 billion in sales and 135 million wireless customers nationwide – almost a third of the market. With \$13 billion in profits in 2016, CEO Randall Stephenson was paid \$25 million. After buying up DirecTV for \$67 billion in 2015, it's now bidding \$85 billion for Time Warner. It has eliminated 12,000 call center jobs in the United States since 2011, representing more than 30 percent of its call center

employees, and closed more than 30 call centers.

The company has also outsourced more than 60 percent of its wireless retail stores to subcontractors who pay much less than the union wage.

The relocation of jobs to call centers in Mexico, the Philippines, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and other countries is a major issue in negotiations. In an inspiring display of labor internationalism, CWA has supported organizing efforts in these countries, where workers face violence and intimidation and get paid as little as \$2 an hour.

As Seattle socialist Councilmember Kshama Sawant pointed out in her message of support:

"Our sisters and brothers in the CWA have done an incredible job of bringing together many regional contracts and strike votes, comprising landline phone workers, wireless store retail workers, and call center workers, into a powerful common national strike."

Workers and supporters on the picket lines could see that the strike is cutting into



profits, with management employees flown in from out of state to try to keep most stores open and very few customers willing to cross the picket lines. The workforce is both young and diverse, as a new generation discovers the power of the union. The fight for a decent contract will most likely not end here and will quite possibly require an indefinite strike, which the union seems to be preparing.

At one Chicago location, picketers welcomed supporters, and the chant of "Ain't no power like the power of the people cuz the power of the people don't stop!" had passers-by getting into a dance rhythm as they walked by. This is what union-building looks like in the age of Trump.

# Defeat Trumpcare

continued from p. 12

re-voted in the House, where the divisions among the Republicans make the outcome very uncertain. Nevertheless there is no room for complacency.

## How Did We Get Here?

Though it includes important progressive elements like Medicaid expansion and covering people with pre-existing conditions, serious weaknesses in the basic design of Obamacare make it vulnerable to the current attacks by Republicans. The state exchanges, actually modeled on Republican ideas, only function when insurers are making a level of profit acceptable to their Boards of Directors. That made even subsidized plans expensive for consumers. Insurers pulled out of markets that weren't profitable enough, limiting choices in those areas.

While defeating Trumpcare in Congress would be a huge blow to the Republican agenda, it will not, unfortunately, prevent the Trump administration from using its executive powers to undermine the precarious balance that is Obamacare. The administration has threatened, for example, to stop funding the cost-sharing payment that helps 70% of those participating in subsidized plans afford their portion of the premium and out-of-pocket expenses.

Cumulatively, these attacks will increase the number of sick people in the exchanges relative to the healthy ones, increasing costs and pressuring insurers out of even more marketplaces. Trump has the ability to kill Obamacare by a thousand cuts, to bring its internal weaknesses to a crisis. This points to why we need to fight for a health care system that works for everybody – that is not based on maintaining the profits of the insurance industry.

## How Do We Stop It?

Democrats in the House and Senate have correctly attacked Trumpcare, and they clearly view health care as an effective political wedge against the Republicans in the 2018 midterms.



*Trumpcare has re-ignited talk of Medicare for All, or single payer, around the country.*

But a movement whose aims are limited to scoring political points against the Republicans within the bounds of what is acceptable to the Democrats' corporate masters is far short of what is demanded by the situation. Obamacare's weaknesses are what opened the door to the attacks of the right in the first place. There is no standing still. Trumpcare must be defeated and replaced by a Medicare for All type plan which covers everyone regardless of income, employment, or legal status.

During his election campaign last year, Bernie Sanders popularized Improved Medicare for All and laid out a very detailed plan to pay for it that could be used as the starting point for a public debate. The idea enjoys strong popular support; in May 2016, 58% of those polled told Gallup they supported "federally funded healthcare providing insurance for all Americans." Key figures in the party have made clear that they oppose Medicare for All.

This includes the Democratic governors of California and Washington, who could be in a position to sign into law state-based single-payer plans that would be a major step toward national Medicare for All. The health care debate

reveals, yet again, why working and poor people need their own political party that fights unapologetically in their interests and takes no money from the corporations, including the insurance and pharmaceutical industries.

Such a party would also fight for a \$15 federal minimum wage, tuition-free college, and taxing the rich to pay for a massive infrastructure overhaul on the basis of renewable energy.

Protest has stopped or slowed other Trump initiatives. Trumpcare can be defeated by a serious campaign including well-organized and escalating series of mass protests which culminate in a national day of action. This could lay the basis for more widespread workplace action, including strikes starting with healthcare workers.

This campaign needs full engagement from the unions that support Medicare for All, including health care unions like National Nurses United that are playing a leadership role in statewide initiatives for single payer. The coming weeks are shaping up as a critical battle with the Republicans, who are prepared to literally put people's lives at risk for their reactionary agenda.

# Where is Bernie Headed?

continued from p. 4

staffer Nick Brana launched "Draft Bernie for a People's Party," a petition campaign similar in many ways to the one Socialist Alternative organized in the final months of the 2016 primary, ultimately garnering 125,000 signatures. So far, Brana's petition has 36,000 signatures, which is significant given the overwhelming focus on Trump and the Republicans at present.

In April, Cornel West joined Brana on *Democracy Now*, bringing the call to draft Bernie to a broader left audience. Brana and West used the occasion to jointly invite Sanders to a town hall to discuss the launching of a new party.

Unfortunately, Sanders has, so far, passed on the invitation.

Socialist Alternative feels Sanders should attend the town hall, even if he is not prepared to be "drafted." He can use the event to have an honest and open debate about the way forward, bringing his plans out in the open and making the case to his supporters. At the same time, Berniecrats can draw up a balance sheet on how current "transformation" efforts are working, while having a serious discussion about tactics and strategies.

We believe a new mass left party, independent of corporate money and power, is objectively what's necessary to decisively defeat the right wing, the billionaire class, and to win transformative gains. As we have explained before, Sanders missed a historic opportunity last year, when he endorsed and campaigned for Clinton, instead of running all the way as an independent and launching a new party. The window has not yet closed, but history does not offer an unlimited number of opportunities to challenge the pro-corporate, racist, anti-worker forces that dominate our society under capitalism. We must take them when they come, and make the most of them.

In addition to a new mass organization, the best way to advance this struggle at present is to run strong independent left and socialist election campaigns across the country, which we have invited DSA to join us in doing. In Minneapolis, Socialist Alternative candidate Ginger Jentzen is running for city council, fighting for a \$15 minimum wage and a bold affordable housing program. In Seattle, we are supporting People's Party candidate Nikkita Oliver, and have joined up with the DSA to support independent democratic socialist Jon Grant's campaign (see page 5).

A new mass left party will require a massive organizing effort, correct timing, and the involvement of broad forces. But it will happen. Global capitalism and its two pro-corporate parties in the U.S. are utterly failing to address the real needs of the working class, and offer no way forward from a future of massive inequality, instability and crisis. A new party can and must be built – even if it ultimately has to go forward without Bernie Sanders.

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### INTERNATIONAL (CWI)

Socialist Alternative is also in political solidarity with the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), a worldwide socialist organization in 47 countries, on every continent. Join us!

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# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

# FIGHT FOR MEDICARE FOR ALL

DEFEAT AND REPLACE  
TRUMPCARE



**Marty Harrison, Philadelphia,  
Registered Nurse,  
PASNAP member**

If truth is the first casualty of war, then the battle to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA), widely known by its nickname, "Obamacare," is no exception. Candidate Trump promised to repeal Obamacare and replace it with a much better plan that relied on market forces to cover everyone at reduced cost: "I am going to take care of everybody. I don't care if it costs me votes or not. Everybody's going to be taken care of much better than they're taken care of now" (*60 Minutes*, 9/27/2015).

The American Health Care Act (AHCA), the legislation passed by a slim majority of Republicans with the support of the Trump administration on May 4, does none of those things – except repeal the ACA. The AHCA will forever be known as Trumpcare. If enacted, it would represent a savage attack on large sections of the working class and poor, literally killing or shortening the lives of many people who will no longer have access to vitally needed services.

Trumpcare will increase premiums and out-of-pocket expenses, most markedly for women, for many in rural counties, for older people and for those with pre-existing conditions. It eliminates the requirement that insurers offer a minimum package of essential benefits, which would mean they could go back to not covering mental health care and maternity care. It essentially ends Medicaid expansion and bans all Medicaid funding for

any services provided by Planned Parenthood. Lifetime caps on coverage will return. Millions would return to the ranks of the uninsured, or worse yet, be paying for insurance too expensive to use.

### Attacking the Most Vulnerable

Internal divisions within the Republican Party prevented the bill coming to a floor vote in the House on two previous occasions. "Moderate" Republicans opposed the measure because it stripped some of the most popular provisions of the ACA, particularly protections for people with pre-existing conditions.

The inclusion of the MacArthur Amendment, which professed to preserve those protections, has been widely credited with bringing enough Republican opponents on board to pass the measure narrowly, 217-213. The MacArthur Amendment does not protect anything. Theoretically, it allows states to choose to preserve protections for pre-existing conditions. Actually, pre-Obamacare, states had the option to regulate protections for pre-existing conditions; however, only seven did, because it drives up costs for the insurer.

The ACA is a very complex piece of legislation whose parts interlock like Jenga blocks – pull the wrong one and the whole tower crashes to the floor. ACA's individual mandate, though never implemented as written, compelled millions of young, healthy people to buy health insurance, spreading risk and lowering costs. Only the inclusion of the young and healthy made pre-existing protections, and many other ACA reforms, financially feasible

in insurance company "logic."

Trumpcare eliminates ACA's "10 essential health benefits" clause, which is also necessary for preserving protections for pre-existing conditions and overall access. Under Trumpcare, an insurance company free from essential benefit provisions but bound by pre-existing conditions protections could offer someone with a pre-existing condition a policy which fails to cover the very services that person would need. In addition, while the MacArthur Amendment does not allow insurers to refuse to offer plans to anyone, it also doesn't limit how much they can charge for them. This is a purely formal distinction because prohibitively expensive health insurance is no health insurance at all.

The savagery of the Republicans and their complete lack of connection to the reality of ordinary people is shown by the comment of Rep. Robert Pettinger of North Carolina, who said that, if Trumpcare passed, people with pre-existing conditions could just move to another state if their state opted out of ACA protections. Not to be outdone, Rep. Mo Brooks from Alabama declared that people who have pre-existing conditions should, on principle, pay more to help those "who lead good lives" and "live the right way." As though people with breast cancer or congenital heart conditions are guilty of a moral failure!

### The Real Agenda - Looting The Public

If enacted, Trumpcare would transfer literally billions of dollars from the poorest to

the very richest Americans by restructuring Medicaid – or, more honestly, eliminating Medicaid as we know it. An analysis of the role of Medicaid in the current health care system reveals the wholesale impoverishment of the American working class over the last 40 years. Medicaid provides coverage for low-income people, primarily children, the elderly, and disabled adults. In 2015, 20% of Americans, a total of 74 million people, received Medicaid benefits, and in four states and Washington D.C., the percentage is 25% or more.

Trumpcare makes huge cuts to Medicaid funding by eliminating the ACA's Medicaid expansion, instituting per-capita caps on spending and block granting Medicaid funding to the states. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that these changes would cut \$839 billion from Medicaid spending over the next decade and – conveniently – pay for the \$729 billion in tax cuts included in the repeal legislation. These tax cuts benefit medical device companies and the extremely wealthy almost exclusively – the wealthiest 400 taxpayers, the 0.00001%, would each get an average tax cut of almost \$7 million every year, starting in 2017 (CBPP.org, 4/4/2017).

The bill now moves to the Senate. Senate Republicans will not introduce a less draconian attack on health care, only one more competently written and expertly delivered. However, it will then have to be reconciled with the House bill and the final product

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