

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

ISSUE #44 • JUNE 2018  
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# AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL

**TAX BIG BUSINESS! #TAXAMAZON**

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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

## Layla Nader Student Worcester, MA

In 2014, I immigrated to the United States from the Dominican Republic to escape a country consumed by government corruption and financial instability. There is still widespread belief in the Caribbean in the mythology that the American Dream can fix all your problems, but this is totally unrealistic since the highly expected golden opportunity is a product of the American ideology to keep the masses from questioning the system. And even when things started to slowly unfold for the best here in the U.S., there was always a high probability of calamity looming just around the corner.

In my mother's case, I see her struggling through minimum wage jobs while trying to learn English as well. Few breaks, long hot hours, all back-breaking labor. No one could love these jobs, but this is what many immigrants do, since they have few options. And it is unconscionable that in a nation with so much wealth, so many must survive with so little and that there is such income disparity, which allows the cycle of poverty to exist. We depend on poorly paid immigrants to feed us, and then point the finger at them as the problem.

Through my high school experience, I tried to inform myself about the political system and how it works. I got involved with politics in 2016, canvassing for Bernie Sanders and working on campaigns such as the Save Our Public Schools, trying to find answers for myself about how society works and how can



it be improved. But seeing how Democrats and Republicans keep feeding people false alternatives, which allows the corporations to flourish while pushing concepts of selfishness, cynicism, greed, and indifference, I had no answers.

After Trump's election, I am extremely proud to say that I joined Socialist Alternative. I see how issues like poverty, immigration, racism etc. are interconnected through the profit-hungry system of capitalism. To break these societal chains, we have to understand them and take a class struggle approach. I realized that people's longing for freedom – true liberty – is impossible to break no matter how brutally and persistently colonialism, imperialism, racism, and religious terror occur, which are all symptoms of capitalism. From experiencing culture shock as a newcomer, to dealing with being objectified as a woman, I could see through the system's lies but instead of retreating, I keep educating myself about the project of socialism to win the fight for justice and equality. ✦

## Oakland March for Our Health Draws Hundreds for Medicare for All

### Daniel Hilsinger

Two hundred and fifty angry and vocal working people marched on California's biggest health care corporation at the May 12 March for Our Health. Behind the banner "Tax the Rich! Free Health care for all!" health care activists, the under-insured and health care workers chanted through downtown Oakland: "Single payer is our fight! Health care is a human right!"

The March for Our Health came out of many people's experiences with the current profit-based health care system. In California, the Democratic Party shelved California Senate Bill 562, the bill that would establish health care as a right to all California residents, on behalf of health insurance and pharmaceutical companies. This occurred despite the Democrats' base supporting Medicare for All and their state party platform actually including support of a statewide single-payer plan. We decided that we needed to take our fight to the streets to confront Kaiser Permanente, the largest health care corporation publicly opposing SB 562. Oakland-based Kaiser is both California's largest private employer with over 160,000 workers in the state and its largest health insurer, covering 8.8 million Californians, 22% of the population.

In April 2017, Teresa Stark, the California

State Lobbyist for Kaiser, testified at a California Senate Health Committee hearing that Kaiser would "be dismantled" if SB 562 passed. She also compared Kaiser not being able to sell insurance anymore to "cutting off one of our limbs and saying it's still Kaiser Permanente."

Afi Kamboon, the Secretary of Berkeley NAACP and a speaker at the March for Our Health, was outraged that Kaiser compared selling insurance to amputation. Afi was born at Kaiser's Oakland hospital in a racially segregated maternity ward. At age 11, she lost her left leg to bone cancer. At age 18, Kaiser cut her off from their health plan because they considered her a financial "liability." Afi, like the other speakers, believes we need free health care for all now and that the rich must be taxed to pay for it.

Organizing a fight for Medicare for All will develop the skills and relationships of a whole new section of activists. Members from Socialist Alternative, Democratic Socialists of America, Health Care for All – California, Physicians for a National Health Program, California Nurses Association, Our Revolution, and many others worked together to organize the March for Our Health. Moving forward, we will need to continue to build a broad united front rooted in the working class to win Medicare for All. ✦

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Defend Palestinians; Build A Movement Against War

# Trump Provocations Destabilize Middle East

Read more on the Middle East at  
[SocialistAlternative.org](http://SocialistAlternative.org).

Tom Crean

Recent weeks have seen the Trump administration engage in a series of provocations in the Middle East which are escalating tension in the region and could even contribute to detonating a full scale conflict. This points to the need for working people in the U.S. and internationally to stand up to Trump's reckless moves and build a powerful movement against war and imperialism.

## Series of Provocations

On May 14, Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner represented the administration at the opening of the new U.S. embassy in Jerusalem in the city which Palestinians also claim as their capital. The move was seen as a triumph by the reactionary Netanyahu regime on the very day that Israeli forces massacred 60 Palestinian protesters at the border between Israel and the Gaza strip while shooting nearly three thousand more. Rubbing salt into the wounds the administration echoed the Israelis in blaming the Palestinians for the massacre.

This follows Trump's order to bomb targets in Syria in April in response to an alleged chemical weapons attack by the Assad regime on a community near Damascus. The real purpose of the U.S. raid though was to assert U.S. imperialism's interests as Assad and his Russian and Iranian allies increasingly have the upper in the Syrian civil war.

But by far the most consequential step taken by Trump is to pull out of the Iran nuclear accord that also included key European nations as well as Russia and China. Trump and Netanyahu assert that the Iranian regime was still pursuing nuclear weapons but almost all credible experts agree that the deal was achieving its stated purpose of preventing Iran from moving rapidly in that direction.

Trump's threat to re-impose sanctions on Iran and on companies that do business in Iran is clearly aimed at forcing "regime change" in Iran. But in the short term it will probably rally support behind the



*Ivanka, Jared Kushner, and Netanyahu celebrate while Israeli forces shoot Palestinians.*



clerical regime despite the massive social discontent in Iranian society. It is also a slap in the face to European "allies." By trying to blow up a treaty the U.S. helped craft Trump shows how little interest he has in maintaining the postwar architecture of "international relations."

Trump's moves against Iran are enormously destabilizing and point toward a regional war with the U.S., Israel, and Saudi Arabia arrayed against Iran, with the backing of Russia and perhaps China. The Syrian as well as Yemen wars already have had elements of proxy conflict between these alliances. Recently Israel bombed a series of positions inside Syria targeting Iranian forces fighting on Assad's side.

## Shift to the Right

It is very consequential that Trump has replaced his secretary of state and national security adviser with the superhawks Mike Pompeo and John Bolton. As part of the Bush administration, Bolton was one of the most fiercely committed to the Iraq war and also called for bombing Iran. Since coming on the job, he has advocated the "Libyan solution" for North Korea's nuclear program, clearly implying regime change. As we go to press, Trump has announced he is cancelling his much-hyped summit with Kim Jong-un as the administration started

ratcheting up the bellicose rhetoric again.

While it seems hard to imagine how the reactionary Trump regime could turn to the right, he has abandoned his isolationist rhetoric from the 2016 campaign – when he criticized the Iraq war and talked about getting out of Afghanistan – in favor of an aggressive reassertion of imperialist interests.

Trump's posture is also clearly an attempt to distract from the crises encircling the administration. It is a classic move by dictatorial or would-be dictatorial regimes to distract from problems by threatening a "small war." In the tinderbox that is the Middle East today, this is a very dangerous game. On top of this, Trump's utterly uncritical support for the Israeli regime are linked to his political alliance with the Christian right in the U.S. Prominent evangelical pastors who see support for Israel in apocalyptic theological terms spoke at the Jerusalem embassy opening.

In reality, despite all the bluster, the position of the U.S. has been enormously weakened globally and in the Middle East in the past 15 years with the catastrophic Iraq war, the never-ending occupation of Afghanistan, and the increasing assertiveness of Russian and Chinese imperialism. Trump's ascendancy is both a reflection of this decline and now contributes to

it directly. But working people in the U.S. have no stake in continuing imperialist policies based on maintaining control of oil and other resources which entail the massive costs of the military industrial complex, terrorist blowback, and the enormous suffering that these policies have caused to people around the world. These policies serve the interests of corporate profits not the interests of ordinary people.

## A Socialist Solution

People looking for a sharp opposition to Trump's policies from the leadership of the Democratic Party will be very disappointed. While they defend the Iran deal crafted by Obama and John Kerry, they have supported Trump's bombing of Syria. The Democrats also advocate an even more aggressive posture towards Russia. At every stage, even if they seem more rational than Trump, they base their position on the interests of corporate America not those of working people.

And although not a single Democratic politician attended the embassy opening in Jerusalem, Senator Chuck Schumer supported the move saying "I sponsored legislation to do this two decades ago, and I applaud President Trump for doing it." Historically, the Democrats have been the more pro-Israel party based on U.S. imperialism

seeing Israel as a key bastion along with reactionary Arab regimes during the Cold War. Among well known politicians, Bernie Sanders was virtually alone in openly criticizing the Israeli state's murderous policies in Gaza.

The Committee for a Workers International – with which Socialist Alternative in the U.S. is in political solidarity – opposes all the reactionary capitalist regimes of the Middle East many of them brutal dictatorships. We stand with working people like the courageous trade unionists in Iran and Egypt who stand up for their rights and often face savage repression. The working class is the only force capable of ending endless wars and communal divisions. We are for the withdrawal of all imperialist forces.

We stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people who demand an end to occupation and for the realization of their legitimate national aspirations. But we also recognize the national rights of the Israeli people. We do not see the Israeli population as one reactionary mass but as a class-divided society. As a recent statement from the CWI pointed out:

"It is a class society like others across the globe with one of the worst gaps between rich and poor – a small number of "tycoon" families at the top control the economy. Israeli workers are regularly forced into struggle."

On the basis of capitalism there is no way forward except more wars. That is why we call for two socialist states in Israel and Palestine where working people can come together to work out their differences as part of a socialist confederation of the region.

Internationally and in the U.S. there is growing criticism of Israeli policies especially among young people. Before Trump and his allies drag the region into a new and possibly much more devastating war, we must turn the solidarity with the Palestinian people into a mass movement against war and imperialism. ☺

# Socialist Candidates Win PA Primaries

## Movement in the Streets Needed to Fight for Pro-Worker Policies

Jim Grant

In a rebuke to the agenda of the corporate-controlled Democratic Party establishment, four progressive state representative candidates in Pennsylvania, all women, won primary elections on May 15. Most of them will almost certainly go on to win in November. The fact that they won by double digits on similar platforms of Medicare for All, a \$15 an hour minimum wage, affordable housing, and ending mass incarceration shows that a bold progressive program – along the lines of Bernie Sanders campaign in 2016 – resonates among wide sections of working-class people.

Significantly, all four of the candidates were endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Three of the candidates, Elizabeth Fiedler, Sara Innamorato, and Summer Lee, are also members of DSA, whose membership has exploded to over 35,000 in the past year and a half. DSA played a particularly critical role in the Pittsburgh-area campaigns for DSA members Sara Innamorato and Summer Lee, where the chapter now has over 500 members and a string of electoral successes over the past year behind them.

Socialist Alternative is excited by these campaigns and the impact they have had on politics in Pennsylvania, which will now have socialists in its state legislature for the first time in many decades, and we congratulate DSA on their impressive work. Going forward, it is important to be sober about the fact that Harrisburg, the state capital, is hostile territory for working class people. Both the Republican and Democratic parties are dominated by big business donors who will fight tooth and nail to defend their interests Upon

taking their seats in the legislature, the full weight of the Democratic establishment will be brought to bear with its intense pressures to adapt to what it finds suitable. To fight this, it is necessary to link holding office to building movements in working class communities free of corporate control.

### Democratic Costa Dynasty Defeated

Innamorato and Lee both defeated members of the Costa dynasty, the cousins Dom and Paul Costa, who represent the most regressive wing of the corporate Democratic machine. While Innamorato and Lee ran a grassroots campaign that took no corporate cash, the Costas, like most Democratic politicians, received big business donations from the likes of the health care giant Highmark, business associations, and Verizon.

The DSA campaigns in Pittsburgh engaged a large number of workers and young people, amassing an energetic army of volunteers and door-knockers. The campaigns also contributed to an excited political mood in the city, which was expressed in much higher turnout than is typical for a primary election, as well as a buzz and increased interest in socialism.

The Costas may now be gone, but the Democratic Party establishment which they represent and are supported by are still alive and well and have the Democratic Party apparatus at their disposal at every level of government. DSA and their candidates will need to use their new platform, organizing experience, and activist base to fight back against this and build a powerful working-class movement around a fighting program for single payer and a \$15 minimum wage state-wide in Pennsylvania and taxing big business

to pay for affordable housing. Such a fight will meet stiff resistance at every step from the Democratic Party leadership. The experience of Kshama Sawant as an independent socialist in Seattle using her position to help win important gains for working people and the experience of Bernie's sandbagging by the DNC in 2016 point toward the necessity of forming a new party by and for working people.

### Running As Open Socialists

Throughout the campaign, DSA and their candidates found themselves subjected to red-baiting and other attacks in the media and elsewhere. We defend DSA against these attacks, and it is very significant that these were openly socialist campaigns by DSA members and heavily supported by the organization. However, while the socialist affiliation was never hidden and they did not reject the label, it was rarely emphasized either. Mailers from Innamorato, for instance, didn't list endorsements from DSA among the other progressive organizations despite DSA being a core component of the campaign. Bernie Sanders and Kshama Sawant show that being an open socialist is not a barrier to popular appeal – this is the best defense against red baiting.

There are now huge opportunities in front



Sarah Innamorato and Summer Lee at the Pittsburgh Women's March.

of us to build a fundamentally new political force, in our view, a new left party based on a pro-working class program, that is fully equipped to fight the right and corporate domination over society. Running five to ten independent socialist campaigns around the country would be a big step forward in this direction. But winning real victories will require a mass movement in our communities and workplaces that goes beyond the ballot box with protests, nonviolent direct action, and strikes. ☘

# Races Show Potential for Independent Left

Ginger Jentzen

The midterm elections are being framed by many as either a fight for or against the Trump administration. The Democratic establishment however continues to fight for something right in the middle, shunning and even trying to force out more progressive candidates (although progressives in a number of states won primaries). The GOP hopes to maintain its majority but struggles to keep control over their Trump-like candidates across the country who, like Trump, can be unpredictable.

The question that is beginning to be posed more broadly for those of us on the left is

whether it makes more sense to run inside the Democratic Party or as an independent? We in Socialist Alternative are sympathetic to those who want to fight Trump and the right wing within the Democratic Party, but Bernie's treatment in 2016, plus the accomplishments of Kshama Sawant in building movements that win change in Seattle, show that working people need independent candidates as a step toward a new party of working people. Two independent campaigns worth paying attention to are those of Tim Canova in Florida and Gayle McLaughlin in California.

### Tim Canova - Florida

In April, Tim Canova made a bold

announcement that he was leaving the Democratic Party and would continue running for congress in Florida as an independent, challenging the notorious Debbie Wasserman-Schultz. Wasserman-Schultz was catapulted into the national spotlight in the 2016 Democratic Party Primaries when she was exposed for helping to rig the primary in favor of Hillary Clinton over Bernie Sanders.

Like Sanders, Canova often cites Wasserman-Schultz's insidious financial backing from big pharmaceutical corporations and payday lenders. In a three-way race going into the general election, Canova's run in South Florida is a long-shot and unfortunately his program falls short of Sanders'. But

defecting from the Democratic Party to challenge a powerful party insider is a very exciting development in the ongoing debate about building a party to the left of the Democrats that fights for Medicare for All, ending for-profit prisons, and taxing the rich.

### Gayle McLaughlin and the Richmond Progressive Alliance

The most advanced local coalition for independent politics in the country is the Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA) in California. Gayle McLaughlin, former RPA mayor of Richmond, is campaigning for

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New York

# Cynthia Nixon Challenges Establishment Democrats

Cora Bergantiños

For the second election cycle in a row, Andrew Cuomo, the powerful governor of New York, is facing a left challenger in the Democratic Party primary; this time his opponent is the famous actor from *Sex in the City*, Cynthia Nixon.

Nixon has used her celebrity status for over a decade to fight for progressive causes, particularly defending public education. Now she is running an insurgent, left populist campaign against the “centrist” politics and “bullying” methods of Cuomo and the Democratic Party leadership. Instead, she calls for “a New York for the many, not just the few.”

Like Bernie Sanders’s 2016 presidential campaign, she rejects corporate campaign donations and advocates for pro-worker policies like fully funded public schools, an end to the school to prison pipeline, and taking on real estate developers and landlords. She regularly talks about racism and inequality, and supports a DREAM Act along with an end to the over-policing of communities of color.

Her campaign has attracted support from several progressive groups including Our Revolution and the Working Families Party (WFP), along with ire from the establishment. Former New York City councilmember Christine Quinn called Nixon “an unqualified lesbian” (Quinn and Nixon both identify as LGBTQ) and the corporate media has labeled her “divisive”. It should be no surprise that Hillary Clinton has endorsed Cuomo – so much for electing more women!

## Cuomo on the Defensive

There are many indications that Nixon’s campaign has Cuomo somewhat worried. While his first public response was to dismiss her as part of what he called, “the season of silly,” behind the scenes he’s been using his large patronage network to browbeat and line up his support.



Cynthia Nixon speaking at a rally for LGBTQ rights.

When three prominent member organizations of the WFP – Make the Road, New York Communities for Change, and Citizen Action – endorsed Nixon, Cuomo made a chilling threat: “If unions or anyone give money to any of these groups, they can lose my number.” Cuomo’s political bullying contributed to a split in the WFP, with one section defiantly endorsing Nixon, while key unions including the CWA, SEIU 1199, and AFSCME 32BJ left the party to start a new ballot line and endorse Cuomo.

The governor is not so much worried that he will lose the election to Nixon. The most recent poll from Quinnipiac College gives Cuomo a comfortable 50 to 28 percent lead among registered Democrats and he has a \$30 million campaign chest. He’s more worried that Nixon can do serious damage to his so-called credentials as a progressive ahead of a potential bid for president in 2020.

Even if Nixon doesn’t win, she is shaking up New York politics, stirring important debates, and sharpening opposition to the corporate leadership of the Democratic Party. With the right approach, her campaign has

the potential to be a launching pad for an even stronger challenge to corporate establishment politics in the years ahead.

## How Do We Win Real Change?

The main limitation toward a real challenge to the corporate establishment is the lack of a clear strategy about how to most effectively win the bold policies her campaign advocates. What Nixon puts forward is a flawed populist idea that electing “better” Democrats could win all her policies. Undoubtedly, elections right now offer opportunities to elect more left-wing representatives. But elections also have inherent limitations. Taking on the power of the billionaire class – who have enormous control over the economy in addition to almost unlimited political resources – requires a real struggle at the grassroots involving millions of people. Such efforts by working people will inevitably come up against the corporate interests that dominate the Democratic Party.

Nixon’s campaign, by rejecting corporate cash, points beyond the pro-corporate

framework of the Democrats, whose primaries and structures are rigged for the establishment. A key question is what will Nixon do if she is defeated in the primary? Will she capitulate and support Cuomo, thereby demobilizing the momentum behind her insurgent challenge? Or will she seize a unique opportunity to continue her campaign all the way to the November general election when more people will be paying attention?

## Run Until November

Under New York’s “fusion” election law, if she loses the primary, she could still legally appear on the November ballot as a WFP candidate. The WFP, who endorsed Cuomo in 2014, will need 50,000 votes in the general election to maintain its ballot line. That means either Nixon runs, or they capitulate to Cuomo. We urge them to not be blocked by the primary and to continue running through the general election to build a stronger movement independent of corporate cash.

Unfortunately, Nixon and the WFP won’t commit to this. Meanwhile the WFP has a long record of endorsing establishment candidates, including Cuomo twice. In Queens, they have endorsed corporate Democrat Rep. Joe Crowley against a primary challenge from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialist of America. The WFP should stop endorsing any candidates who accept corporate cash, and transform itself into a vibrant membership-run organization that puts forward its own independent working-class candidates and energetically builds struggles on housing, jobs, education and health care.

For Nixon to make the strongest impact for progressive change in 2018, she must be prepared to break with the Democratic Party establishment entirely, and to build a genuinely independent political movement with a perspective that a new, completely independent left party is both needed and possible. ☪

## Independent Candidates

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lieutenant governor . The RPA organized a massive fightback against Chevron’s dominance of Richmond, raised the minimum wage, and fought to expand rent control while McLaughlin served as mayor. McLaughlin has extended a call for organizing progressive alliances across California based on rejecting corporate money, advancing Medicare for All, repealing the Costa-Hawkins law that limits rent control, taxing the rich and oil corporations, and to build a statewide coalition to

advance independent politics.

McLaughlin has the backing of DSA and Our Revolution, and is running against a who’s who of the Democratic Party establishment, all of whom are funded by corporate developers and big business interests. In California’s non-partisan primary elections, McLaughlin must come in the top two in the June 5 primary or she will be knocked out. While a fierce battle would have to be waged in order for her to make it to the next

round, McLaughlin’s campaign as well as the new progressive alliances in several cities are helping lay the ground a for a viable California-wide party to the left of the Democrats.

As the energy behind the recent strike wave in “red states” across the south shows, there is a real discussion happening nationally around what political force would be needed to combat the corporatization of public education, attacks on union rights, and Trump’s massive tax cuts while big corporations make

record breaking profits. Our Revolution and the DSA have energized thousands across the country and internally continue to debate their ability to pull the Democratic Party to the left. McLaughlin, Canova and others’ independent challenge can play a valuable role in this debate by offering a viable left alternative, connected to advancing grassroots movements and to continue a political revolution against the billionaire class. ☪

# TAX amazon And the Billionaire

## Meanwhile the Movement to Tax Big Business Spreads to Other Cities

Calvin Priest and Keely Mullen

On May 14, the Seattle City Council passed a historic tax on Amazon and other big corporations to fund permanently-affordable, publicly-owned housing, under the leadership of Socialist Alternative, Democratic Socialists of America, and socialist City Councilmember Kshama Sawant.

The final bill, a \$48 million annual tax on the biggest 3% of corporations in Seattle, was the end result of a powerful campaign by housing activists and socialists over the last nine months. What we won, even though it was substantially reduced under big business pressure and Amazon's extortionary threat to take away jobs, is nonetheless a major victory and inspiring example for workers around the country – especially as it comes alongside Trump's corporate tax cuts and as Amazon demands handouts from cities around the country competing for HQ2.

### Big Business and the Right Wing Fight Back

Within days of the passage of the #TaxAmazon ordinance, big-business-funded groups launched a ballot referendum to repeal it, raising already more than \$350,000. In addition to paid signature gatherers, big business is being assisted by conservative NIMBY groups like Speak Out Seattle, who regularly employ anti-homeless and right wing arguments, as well as by far right forces like Patriot Prayer, whose local political candidate, Joey Gibson, announced his support for the referendum.

Financial backers of the anti-Amazon-tax referendum read like a who's who of big business and the super rich in the wider Seattle region, with Amazon, Starbucks, multi-billionaire Paul Allen's Vulcan mega-development company, and wealthy developer Howard S. Wright III (whose family owns the Space Needle) putting up some of the largest contributions.

Labor unions, spearheaded by Working Washington, and joined by housing activists as well as Socialist Alternative, are waging a "Decline to Sign" campaign in order to try to defeat the referendum before it gets on the ballot.

Big business is enraged by the tax in spite



of its modest size relative to the enormous profits they're making off the backs of Seattle workers. This is in part because our movement's victory bucks the overwhelming trend over the past decades of growing inequality: the slashing of taxes on big business and the rich, and the ongoing shifting of the tax burden to working people. These are central tenets of the neoliberal policy consensus and have been embraced by Republican and Democratic leaders alike. The #TaxAmazon struggle points in an entirely different direction. Rather than just defending against the endless attacks on workers' living standards, working people in Seattle turned the tables on the billionaire class to score a major offensive victory!

As with the \$15 minimum wage, opposition to the Amazon Tax has been fueled by distortions. In talking to signature gatherers, Socialist Alternative members have heard outright lies like the claim that the tax had already gone into effect and that Safeway (a local grocery chain) was already closing two stores.

If enough signatures are gathered by the mid-June deadline, and the referendum is not legally overturned due to the campaign's dishonest methods, then the run up to the November vote will almost certainly be an all out, epic battle between workers and the billionaire class with the eyes of millions of working people watching. Already the media

coverage of our #TaxAmazon victory has exceeded that of our historic victory on the \$15 minimum wage, with major stories in big national and international publications and broadcast media.

### Defending our #TaxAmazon Victory

We need to have a sober assessment of the political terrain in the referendum fight. While there is broad general support among working people for taxing big business, there is also genuine concern about Amazon's threat to take away jobs as well as considerable confusion stirred up by the dishonest arguments in the corporate media. This takes place alongside what is on trajectory to become a multi-million dollar effort to overturn the tax. While big business needs a substantial 17,632 valid signatures in less than a month's time, we should recognize they are most likely to succeed in putting it on the ballot, given the enormous wealth and clout of their backers and a growing army of paid signature gatherers.

To defeat the referendum effort by November, our movement will need a strong united front of the left and labor movement to wage the strongest possible grassroots campaign. Our central task will be to activate broad sections of working people and youth. To succeed,

we will need to not only play defense, but also put forward bold, offensive, fighting demands. We are calling not only to defend the Amazon Tax, but to extend it to a larger tax in this fall's budget battle; to prevent any of the spending going to homeless sweeps; and to make this victory a first step toward a massive expansion of permanently-affordable, publicly-owned social housing in Seattle that can provide an alternative to the broken private housing market.

We will also crucially need to politically defeat the referendum on doorsteps and sidewalks across the city and in the media. We won the \$15 minimum wage by organizing rallies and marches and mass meetings, but also because we answered all the big business political arguments and won 74% of working people to support \$15/hr.

### Amazon's Extortion and Capitalism's Race to the Bottom

In the weeks leading up to the final vote, Amazon sent a brazen threat to Seattle workers, promising to halt construction of its new office tower in Seattle if this tax was passed, and in so doing holding over 7,000 construction jobs hostage!

We should recognize that it was in no way financially necessary for Amazon to halt

# SEATTLE

## Working Class Fights Back

construction on this project part-way through. Amazon's share of the tax (\$11 million annually) is mere pocket change to Jeff Bezos, the richest man on earth, and the tax doesn't even come close to making a dent in the massive profits Amazon makes in Seattle. Their threat was instead a shameful act of intimidation by the billionaire class and a blatant attempt to divide Seattle workers.

Yet by halting construction of the tower they did succeed in creating real fear about job losses, including mobilizing ironworkers and other construction workers who are understandably concerned about the potential impact on their livelihoods. Nonetheless a large number of the biggest unions in Seattle support the tax, including the MLK Labor Council, all SEIU locals, and UFCW.

Under capitalism, such threats are all too common, but even when workers bend to them there are no guarantees of stopping job losses. This was shown again and again with Boeing in Seattle, where in spite of record breaking corporate handouts, jobs have been moved out of the area anyway, in search of more exploitable workers elsewhere. Many such threats are also empty ones – during the Fight for \$15, predictions of job losses were made repeatedly as well as that the Seattle economy would collapse. While any given threat by big business could be carried through, we cannot allow ourselves to be held hostage by their bullying. In the case of our current struggle, after our movement stood up to Amazon, they ultimately resumed construction of their tower.

As socialists, we are not naive about Amazon's enormous power or the number of jobs it holds sway over, but we completely reject capitalism's race to the bottom which seeks to pit housing against jobs, city against city, and worker against worker. Jeff Bezos' wealth sits on top of the shoulders of tens of thousands of Amazon employees, and it's those employees who make the company run and create its wealth. Rather than giving in to corporate extortion, we should take big corporations like Amazon into democratic public ownership and workers should run them instead. Trendsetting victories by socialists like the Amazon Tax or passage of a \$15 minimum wage are critical first steps, but our movements cannot stop there.

### Lessons of the #TaxAmazon Struggle

We should be crystal clear: the driving force behind this victory was the #TaxAmazon movement and ordinary working people, not the Democratic politicians who ultimately voted for the final bill.

Housing activists and socialists first put this

issue on the table last fall when we protested and occupied City Hall overnight and brought our fight for affordable housing and homeless services into the November City Council budget hearings. The original big business tax proposal, introduced by Kshama Sawant, was ultimately voted down by a majority of Democratic politicians. In the six months following, our movement continuously escalated the struggle with rallies, marches, a #TaxAmazon Town Hall, and again and again packing City Council chambers to bring maximum pressure to bear on the political establishment. We won because we were ultimately successful in making it politically unviable for city councilmembers to not pass the precedent-setting tax.

Even in the final week before the vote, big business and their purchased politicians like Democratic Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan furiously worked to water down the legislation. Mayor Durkan put forward a counter proposal, dubbed by housing activists as the Bezos-Durkan deal (after Amazon CEO Bezos and Mayor Durkan) that cut the proposed \$75 million tax nearly in half to \$40 million a year (after it was previously cut in half from \$150 million to \$75 million). It added other corporate loopholes such as a "sunset clause" to require a renewal of the tax in five years, and a redirecting of the majority of funding to temporary services – which will include inhumane homeless sweeps – rather than building permanently affordable housing.

As with the \$15 minimum wage, what we were able to finally win was based on the strength of our movement, our ability to continue to mobilize broad public support and to politically defeat the arguments of



big business. Amazon fought viciously against this tax in its entirety but we have nonetheless wrested tens of millions from CEO Jeff Bezos' hands to fund affordable housing.

There were many debates over the course of the struggle. Left Democrats and some liberal leaders were initially strongly opposed to calling the proposal an "Amazon Tax" or even talking about Amazon.

This would have been a huge mistake – big business wanted to make the tax about iconic local businesses like Dick's Drive In, and it was our job to keep the focus on the massive profits of the second wealthiest corporation in the world. It was the focus on Amazon that catapulted our struggle into national media, making it a signature issue that city councilmembers knew would be politically costly to oppose.

Another debate took place over the question of whether we should accept the cutting of our movement's demand in half from \$150 million to \$75 million. Socialist Alternative argued that \$150 million was just the beginning of what was needed to address the affordable housing and homelessness crisis, and that it was pocket change to Amazon, a claim that was ironically confirmed by the Chamber of Commerce's own study that said we need to spend an additional \$164 to \$214 million a year to remedy the affordable housing crisis.

We said that the movement should keep fighting for the \$150 million demand rather than negotiating with ourselves by cutting the demand in half. While left Democrats and liberal leaders argued that if we accepted \$75 million that would be the basis of a united proposal acceptable to all, we argued that big business would remain fiercely opposed to the tax in its entirety, and that \$75 million would in no way be supported by Amazon. We predicted it would be only the first concession, and that the political establishment would happily take it and then argue to cut the number even further, as well as insert various corporate loopholes.

This, of course, is what ultimately happened. Socialist Alternative fought till the final hour against every loophole introduced and every attempt to undermine the #AmazonTax, though we also recognize the final result for what it is – a historic victory for social movements.

Debates like these will be ongoing in social movements, and they play a vital role in helping clarify the best tactics and strategies. We should continue to discuss and take on board the lessons of this struggle into future



movements.

### We are Ready to Fight! Another World is Possible

The victory our movement has won in Seattle has the potential to spread around the country, and in fact it has already begun to do so. A discussion of a "Google Tax" and taxes on Big Tech is taking off in California, including San Francisco, Silicon Valley, Mountain View, Cupertino and East Palo Alto. Meanwhile, corporate media and political establishments around the country are trying to get out ahead and proactively discourage any such developments in their cities.

As with the \$15 minimum wage, one of the most important ways to defend our victory is to spread the movement. If the \$15 minimum wage we won in 2014 had remain isolated in Seattle, it would likely have been overturned or seriously compromised in the years following. Every gain by workers against the bosses is continually under assault and we must organize to defend and extend those gains. As Kshama Sawant said in her speech after the final vote on the Amazon Tax, referencing the bill's "sunset clause" loophole: "Capitalism inherently puts a 'sunset clause' on any reform that we succeed in winning."

We must continue the struggle. This system is incapable of providing quality affordable housing for all, and we need to fight for an alternative to the broken private housing market. Just to begin to seriously address the housing crisis, we need rent control and a massive expansion of tens of thousands of units of publicly-owned and operated social housing which is not susceptible to the whims of the market.

And we must fight not only for immediate gains in the present, but for an alternative to the bankrupt system of capitalism. We need to unite our struggles – to tax Amazon and big business, for a \$15 minimum wage, to strike for fully funded education, to end police brutality and mass incarceration – to fight for a different kind of society, based on solidarity, equality, and genuine democracy. We have a world to win.✪

Socialist Moments in History

# 200th Anniversary of Karl Marx's Birth

**Peter Taaffe, General Secretary of the Socialist Party of England and Wales**

The 200th anniversary of the birth of the great Karl Marx was on May 5. Marx, together with Friedrich Engels, formulated the ideas of scientific socialism which were to shake the world in the 19th century and even more so in the 20th.

The Russian revolution of October 1917 stood under the signboard of Marx's ideas. The Russian Bolshevik party – the greatest and most effective democratic mass party in history – under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, led the workers and peasants of Russia in the “ten days that shook the world.”

A wave of revolutions resulted from the example of the Russian revolution, particularly in Europe. These revolutions had a profound effect on the U.S. and provoked mass upheavals and revolutions in Asia.

For this alone, the birth of Marx deserves to be celebrated worldwide. Instead, there is a constant distortion by most of the pro-capitalist commentators of the real ideas of Marx.

## Scientific Socialism

Marxism – scientific socialism – represented the highest level of thought within society at the time when Marx formulated his ideas in the middle of the 19th century. It combined German philosophy with British political economy and French socialism.

Marx and Engels rescued “dialectics” – the method of thought which seeks to understand the all-sided character of phenomena – by refuting the German philosopher Georg Hegel's idealism. They “turned Hegel upside down” and put him “from standing on his head firmly back on his feet.”

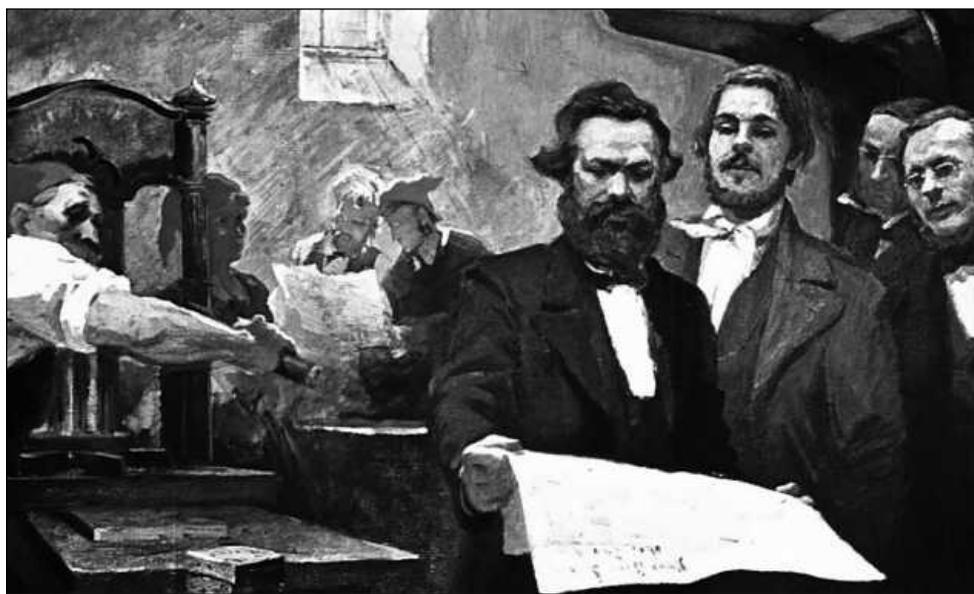
Hegel viewed the evolution of nature, humankind, and social relations as based on the development of ideas. But Marx and Engels argued that ideas and consciousness are expressions of material forces, which are the driving impulse of history.

It was Marx and Engels who first argued that the economy is the ultimate determinant of the “political superstructure,” the state, politics, etc.

But this did not mean that Marx had a crude determinist position. On the contrary, he and Engels analyzed how the state both had an effect on and is, in turn, affected by the development of economic processes.

## Marx Was Right

Capitalist commentators, while sometimes conceding a certain historic relevance of Marx and Engels, in their legions rushed to



*Marx and Engels in Germany during the 1848 revolution.*

argue that Marxism and its associated idea of socialism and the planned democratic economy were buried under the rubble of the Berlin Wall.

The collapse of the Stalinist regimes in eastern Europe, and with them their planned economies, albeit managed bureaucratically, resulted in unbridled capitalist triumphalism. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, on behalf of the capitalists, boasted “the lesson of the 1980s is that socialism has failed.”

The former USSR plunged into an economic abyss, which exceeded the collapse in the U.S. following the 1929-33 slump. But it wasn't long before even the capitalists themselves began to ponder the contradictions of their own system.

One of them, John Cassidy, delved into Marx's writings. His comments, made in the mid-1990s, were very revealing: “The longer I spend on Wall Street, the more convinced I am that Marx was right.” Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England, recently made the same point, saying that the automation of millions of jobs could lead to mass unemployment, wage stagnation, and the growth of communism within a generation. He warned “Marx and Engels may again become relevant.”

Cassidy went on to confess that Marx “wrote riveting passages about globalization, inequality, political corruption, monopolization, technical progress, the decline of high culture, and the enervating nature of modern existence – issues that economists are now confronting anew, sometimes without realizing that they are walking in Marx's footsteps.”

What to Learn From Marx's Methods

Using Marx's methods, we were able to predict the inevitability of a recession or

slump that was not evident at the time that these remarks were made by supporters of the system in the early 1990s. We wrote: “A serious recession or slump would inevitably result in the introduction of protectionist measures by the different national capitalists.” Is this not what the tendency has been in the aftermath of the devastating world economic crisis of 2007-08?

In the 19th century, when Marx was writing, capitalism was still playing a relatively progressive role in taking society forward, economically at least. However, it became absolutely reactionary only with the onset of the World War I, which was an expression of the fact that the productive forces had outgrown the narrow limits of the nation state.

It is true that capitalism subsequently experienced spectacular structural growth from 1950 to 1973. But this was a unique and special development, largely determined by the destruction caused by World War II and the opening of new markets to world capitalism.

However, that period was followed by a depressionary phase in which booms like that of the 1980s were lopsided, and the relative position of the working class declined, as did the living standards of the peoples of Africa, Latin America, and large parts of Asia.

However, even this scenario – which allowed working people to get a few crumbs off the very rich table of capitalism – came shuddering to a halt with the onset of the devastating crisis of 2007-08.

## Capitalism Increases Misery?

One of the alleged “myths” of Marx was the so-called “theory of increasing misery.”

Marx did not advance any idea that the working class would become continuously evermore impoverished, particularly in the simplistic and therefore erroneous way in which his critics presented it. He was well aware that there were periods when the working class was able to extract concessions, and important ones, from the capitalists.

Even in these periods, superficial appearances disguise the fact that often the working class' share of national income actually declines. In other words, there is a relative decline of the working masses' standards of living.

Furthermore, with the return of generalized malnutrition has not “increasing misery” become a reality in the modern world?

Following the onset of the crisis, the real living standards of the working class, not just in the neocolonial world but in the U.S., Europe, and Japan have stagnated and declined.

Moreover, the “inequality gap” – the massive abyss between rich and poor – has grown exponentially everywhere. As the Independent points out: “Just nine of the world's richest men have more combined wealth than the poorest 4 billion people.”

There are currently over 1,500 billionaires in the world, with more than 560 in the U.S. alone. China, Germany and India each have 100 or more billionaires. These are the “Masters of the Universe” who hold the fate of humankind in their hands, as Karl Marx brilliantly predicted. But not even Marx thought the concentration of wealth would be taken to such an extent as it has.

He believed that long before we reached this situation, the working class would have taken power and capitalism would have been replaced by socialism. Glaring inequality, matched by terrible and worsening worldwide poverty, let alone a world scarred by unending war, would have been a thing of the past.

The fact that this did not happen is entirely down to the failure of the leadership of the official labor movement who again and again remained within the framework of a rotten system, rather than mobilizing working people, as Marx advocated, in a mass movement to establish a socialist world.

When Marx died and was buried in Highgate Cemetery with just eleven people present at his funeral, his great friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels declared: “His name will live on forever.” So it will, particularly if we follow his ideas and realize the goals he stood for of a socialist confederation of the world. ✪

# Mexican Elections – Historic Opportunity to Defeat the Oligarchs

## Voting Is Not Enough, Build from Below for Real Change

*This article is based on reports from Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left) part of the Committee for a Workers International with which Socialist Alternative is in political solidarity.*

2018 is shaping up to be a transformative year for Mexico. The July elections are taking place against a background of economic stagnation, mounting poverty, inequality and violence. There is mounting wave of anger and disapproval of the traditional parties of the establishment (the PRI and PAN) among young people and broad sections of the masses. For the first time in the history of Mexico, there is the possibility of a government of the Left.

This is taking place against the background of instability in the world economy, the return of economic nationalism and authoritarianism, social and political polarization, and erosion of the legitimacy of the institutions of bourgeois democracy across the globe.

### Economic Stagnation

The Mexican economy has grown between 2.0 and 2.5% over the past decade and the outlook for 2018, according to the IMF, is for GDP to grow only 1.9%. The “structural reforms,” far from increasing investment, growth and jobs as they were supposed to have actually led to stagnation. The working class and the most impoverished sections of society have seen the price of fuel and other necessities increase while wages stagnated or decreased.

The political situation is one of polarization, instability and volatility. The working class has faced continuous attacks by the Peña Nieto government of the PRI with privatization of important sectors such as oil and electricity, and budget cuts in health and education. In response to this offensive, mobilizations, protests and revolts developed against the price of gas (the “gasolinazo”), against drug trafficking through the organization of self-defence groups in different towns of the country, for the rights of indigenous peoples, water rights.

There are also strikes in the maquiladoras in the north of the country and the heroic struggle of the teachers of basic education (CNTE). Right now important industrial struggles are taking place across the country with workers fighting for better wages and to create new unions independent of the state controlled federation CTM.

The systemic violence that women suffer in Mexico is now an epidemic that reflects the terrible degradation of Mexican



*Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, the head of MORENA, is running for president of Mexico.*

capitalism: seven women are murdered every day and this number continues to increase. The increasing mobilizations of the women's movement reflects the degree of radicalization that is taking place especially among young people.

One of the most outstanding struggles of the last period was in Mexicali, where the inhabitants of that region mobilized in what became known as “the war of water”, against the US brewer Constellation Brands. The struggle managed to prevent the construction of the brewery.

Most of these mobilizations have had a semi-spontaneous character, and have been based on self-organization, going beyond the traditional organizations of the working class and the left. The big independent unions, like the National Union of Workers (UNT), as well as MORENA (National Regeneration Movement), have not made any serious calls to fight back and as a result the protest movements from below have had an explosive character over the past period.

Despite repression, setbacks and defeats of the movement at the hands of the government of Peña Nieto, the PRI government has failed to stabilize the situation of Mexican capitalism: the workers and peasants are not paralyzed and now the Mexican ruling class faces the prospect of serious electoral defeat.

### MORENA and the Elections

Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (known as AMLO in Mexico) and the MORENA party (National Regeneration Movement) are ahead in the polls. The masses identify Lopez Obrador and MORENA as political forces of the left that can change the current horrible situation. Millions of workers, poor peasants and

young people, see the possibility of defeating the PRI government. Izquierda Revolucionaria supports the struggle to defeat the right wing and the establishment parties in these elections.

MORENA, however, is a cauldron of internal conflicts and contradictions. On the one side there is a reformist and bureaucratic leadership that leans more and more in the direction of the ruling class and is not willing to break with the logic of capitalism. On the other, there is the radicalized social and electoral base of MORENA (mainly workers and peasants) who do not forget the electoral fraud and stolen elections in 2006 and 2012 and want to turn the party into an instrument of their struggle and defeat the ruling elite. Despite the struggles that have taken place across Mexico, Lopez Obrador has not called for mass actions in solidarity with them or to unite the movement. Furthermore, Lopez Obrador has made concessions and conciliatory moves seeking to reassure the ruling class and the capitalists.

The leadership of MORENA has increasingly abandoned social struggle to become an electoral apparatus. The logical consequence of this is the recruitment of careerists that come from the discredited PRI, PRD or the PAN, who previously implemented austerity and anti-worker policies. To this is added the alliance with the Social Encounter Party (PES), an openly right-wing party that is opposed to the right to abortion and marriage equality.

This situation has created skepticism, confusion and criticism among the more politicized young people, workers and indigenous people about the direction of MORENA's leadership.

### Building A Mass Movement

Izquierda Revolucionaria fully supports the movement to defeat the capitalist establishment. But it is also necessary to warn that Lopez Obrador's moves toward class conciliation is a recipe to frustrate the expectations of the Mexican people. Once again, historical experience in Latin America (Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina etc) or in Europe (Greece most recently), shows that capitalism “with a human face” has not solved the serious problems that the working class suffers, nor has it eliminated the logic of exploitation and poverty created by the system. Lopez Obrador has already announced that he will not undertake any radical steps like nationalization of big monopolies or stopping privatizations and cuts. If elected this will put him in conflict with the aspirations of his social and electoral base.

Izquierda Revolucionaria (CWI) points out that voting and waiting for a candidate to pass laws that improve our situation, no matter how honest the politician is not sufficient. In order to face the crisis of Mexican capitalism, we need a working class socialist program, and to rely on the power of workers and young people as the only force that can implement social transformation.

The electoral campaign so far has shown that the bourgeoisie is not only unwilling to make any concessions, but instead is launching a huge smear campaign against Lopez Obrador, while once again preparing the ground for large scale fraud and even repression. In reality, they are playing with fire. Any attempt to repeat the electoral fraud that stole the election from Lopez Obrador in 2006 could open the door to an uncontrollable, explosive situation.

Workers, young people, indigenous people and poor peasants and those who want real change must organize and demand Lopez Obrador implement a socialist program as the only way to defeat the oligarchy and transform society in Mexico. This program must include the nationalization of banking and of large monopolies and strategic sectors of the economy; the expropriation of big land owners and large agro-food companies; the defence of the rights of indigenous peoples; the repeal of all counter-reforms; and an end to state violence. ☸



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

# 50,000 Workers Strike UC System

**Erin Brightwell, member  
UPTE-CWA 9119  
(personal capacity)**

Three University of California (UC) unions, representing over 50,000 workers, went on strike on May 7-9, in the biggest strike at UC in history. Pickets of hundreds of workers protested at UC campuses and medical centers across the state, with turnout surpassing all expectations. UC management put on a brave face in media interviews, but the impact was significant. Medical centers were forced to cancel 12,000 appointments and, at one campus, 300 surgeries. Some clinics closed entirely and, at UC Berkeley, managers struggled to deal with the crush in dining halls.

The picket lines were diverse in the San Francisco Bay Area. While some workers have been on strike in the past, there were many, especially younger workers, who were on their first ever picket line. The mood was upbeat as the picket line circled the three-year-old, state-of-the-art Mission Bay hospital, part of a large new multi-billion dollar UCSF campus in San Francisco. In multiple conversations, workers agreed that UC clearly has the

money to negotiate decent contracts with the unions.

## UC System Wealthier than Ever

Administrators and managers now outnumber professors in the UC system and the average compensation for UC executives has increased 58% over the past 10 years. The state of California decreased its funding to UC by 30% between 1999 and 2015, yet UC revenue is up 80% over the last decade. The UC system is rolling in money and is being run like a for-profit corporation, with all the economic inequality that that entails. It prioritizes plush administrative jobs over its employees' right to a decent and stable living.

UC has been offering workers essentially the same dismal contract through months of bargaining. Management wants a dismantling of the employee pension system, full control over health care costs, and minimal wage increases. One-in-ten workers at the UC is now a contract worker, many of whom lack basic job protections and benefits. Why is management refusing to negotiate a decent contract when

the state of California is projected to have a \$9 billion budget surplus in the upcoming year? Part of UC management's thinking in taking a hard line, is the looming Supreme Court decision on Janus, a case that is funded by a who's who of right-wing corporate interests including the Koch Brothers, designed to weaken public sector unions. UC President Janet Napolitano is clearly hoping the right wing led Supreme Court will help solve their problem by weakening the unions.

## Unity in Struggle Needed

UAW Local 2865, representing UC graduate student instructors, will be out of contract at the end of June, adding the potential to shut down the classrooms. Workers' strength is in our numbers and in our solidarity. It's critical to maintain and grow the union coalition that was established with this strike, at both the leadership level, and in the workplace. Union actions up to and including strikes will be much more effective if service employees, nurses, other patient care workers, instructors, researchers, and others



*The University of California's largest employee union is holding a three-day strike.*

are united in the medical centers, labs, and classrooms. Launching an organizing drive against the contractors providing low wage workers for the university can turn a union weakness into a strength.

The University of California system is an enormously important public resource providing education, health care, research and jobs that are all critical to California. Increasingly, UC has built its prestige with corporate partnerships and massive donations from billionaires for gleaming new facilities, while cost-cutting on labor and hiking student fees. The fight against the privatization of the university should be widened to unite UC workers with students, potential students, and their communities.

We need to show management

that the teachers' strike phenomenon can catch fire in California, with campaigns and actions that draw new layers of workers and students into the heat of struggle. Another strike may be necessary to win a decent contract. An escalating series of smaller actions can strengthen our forces, boost new members' confidence, and increase the pressure on management. A broad campaign to fight the corporatization of UC aimed at workers, students, faculty, and community members can transform the struggle into an open debate on the need for a truly public university in society. We need a UC that pays workers good wages and benefits, cuts student fees, and we need to tax big business and the billionaire class to pay for it. ✪

# North Carolina Continues Teachers' Rebellion

**Andy Moxley**

The wave of teachers' rebellions continued on May 16 in North Carolina, where tens of thousands of teachers, support staff, students, and allies marched on the State Capitol in Raleigh. The demonstration, organized by the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE), called for better pay, more funding for education, and broader demands, such as an expansion of Medicaid and an end to corporate tax cuts. It is the latest of the teachers' struggles started by the historic strike by West Virginia teachers at the beginning of the year.

Despite raises in wages over the past few years, North Carolina teacher salaries, have actually decreased and are \$9,000 below the national average. North Carolina ranks 39th in per student spending, \$2,400 less per student than the national average.

As a "right-to-work" state, North Carolina does not give teachers the legal right to

strike. Teachers used "personal leave" for the walkouts, which effectively took on the character of a one-day strike. This strike is unprecedented in the history of North Carolina teachers and shuttered schools in many districts around the state, representing 68% of NC students, including the six largest school districts.

Democrat Roy Cooper was recently elected governor, but the state legislature has been controlled by the Tea Party wing of the Republicans since 2010 and North Carolina went for Trump in 2016. In response to the walkout, the state legislature is considering altering the two-year budget proposal passed last year that included a \$2.5 million cut to education. Governor Cooper has previously expressed support for an 8% increase in teacher pay, while state Republicans have capped their proposals at 5-6%. The other issues brought up by teachers have not been directly addressed and it is unclear if any progress will be made.

## Energy Turning to 2018 Elections

A key question for the movement as head to the midterm and state elections in November is can we count on Democrats to defeat the right-wing agenda? While in opposition in state government the Democrats have pledged support for the teachers' action and goals as a mass movement which is in large part directed at the state Republicans. However, the Democratic Party ruled for almost 150 years in North Carolina until 2010. State and national Democrats' unpopular policies of supporting the privatization of education and cuts, are big reasons that states like North Carolina now lie in the iron grip of the right wing.

In some of the teacher revolt states, teachers themselves are running for different political offices. This is a step forward. However, they are overwhelmingly running in the Democratic Party instead of independently,

which we disagree with. Teachers across the country should consider running their own independent candidates, accountable to the needs of teachers and other working people.

With the end of the school year fast approaching, it is possible that this may be the end of the teachers' strike wave for now. However, the key lesson of 2018 so far is that mass collective action has fundamentally changed the balance of forces in the teacher struggles – not waiting for the politicians to act. It is this fighting spirit that will be the biggest determining factor in what teachers and other workers will be able to win in the future, as corporate politicians in both parties will bow to big business pressure without a counterforce. North Carolina shows that even in the states with some of the lowest levels of unionization, the fighting spirit and tactics of a mobilized working class can have a massive impact. ✪

Exposing the History of Housing Segregation and How to Fix It

# Review of *The Color of Law*

Rob Rooke

Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law* explains how housing became so highly racially segregated in America, and details the partnership between federal and local governments and the big developers in this process.

Rothstein studies America's reception to the three great waves of northern migration of African Americans from the South – after Reconstruction and during the two world wars. During the first wave, racial segregation in the North was less common. Tenement city housing was often racially mixed. For instance, the great left-wing poet Langston Hughes grew up in a mixed race building in Cleveland, and went to a mixed-race high school. The subsequent waves of African Americans from the South did not fare as well in Cleveland, where the New Deal federal government replaced Hughes' old neighborhood with two public housing projects, one for whites, one for blacks, ending the previous integration.

## Public Housing Explicitly Segregated

During World War I, the federal government built its first public housing: 170,000 units across America. They were all designated "whites only." The Great Depression led to more public housing developments to create work and to ameliorate the housing shortage that the market had failed to fill. In line with new federal guidelines, all this public housing was racially segregated.

During World War II, the federal government and private enterprise worked together to create housing close to the war industries and co-operated to ensure that this was also racially segregated.

In the post-war period, national policy combined the building of freeways to connect suburbs and cities with the breaking up of

African American communities. Alongside federal laws and rules that shaped segregation, local authorities enacted policies to further enable housing divisiveness. While "separate but equal" was ruled unconstitutional in education in 1954, housing segregation remained untouched by any serious legal challenges until much later.

## Promoting Home Ownership and Segregation

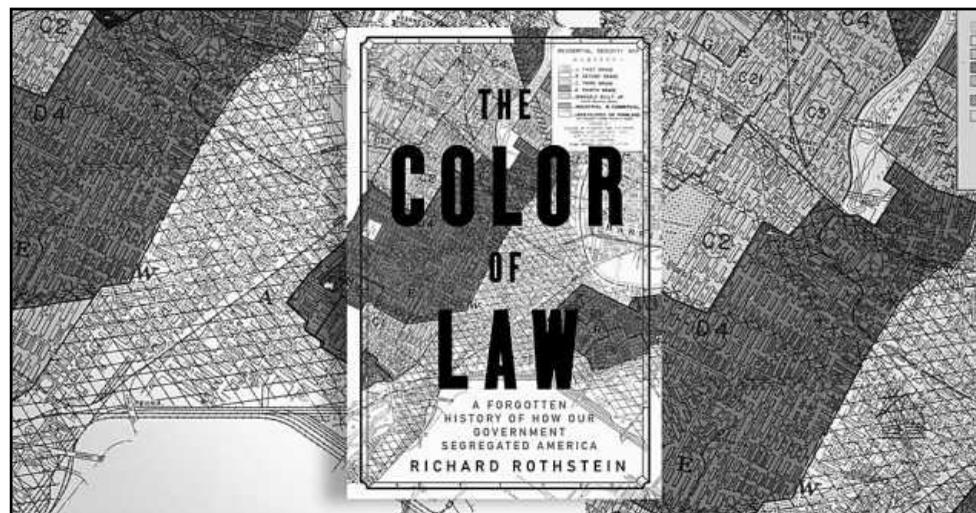
"Terrified by the 1917 Russian Revolution," Rothstein explains, "government officials came to believe that communism could be defeated in the U.S. by getting as many white Americans as possible to become homeowners – the idea being that those who owned property would be invested in the capitalist system."

The huge expansion of the suburbs after World War II was deliberately designed to exclude black families. From the mid-1970s, as real wages stagnated and fell, large numbers of non-black workers were able to inherit their parents' homes, while most young black people were not. Today's housing-based wealth divide continues to grow, where black families' average wealth equals only 10% of white families' average wealth.

The huge civil rights movement forced the federal government to step back from its policies of promoting segregation in housing. However, the worst damage in housing segregation had been done.

## Revolutionary Change Needed

Undoing racial segregation in housing is far more complicated than allowing people the right to vote, to sit where they want on a bus or in a restaurant, or to apply for a job. The integration of America's highly segregated neighborhoods, as Rothstein argues, cannot be carried out by small reforms, it will



require a huge mobilization of resources and a revolutionary political will on the scale of the period of Reconstruction after the Civil War.

Today, capitalism, its governments, and its big businesses no longer openly promote racial segregation. The main barrier facing racial integration today is not explicit racist federal or local laws. African Americans are primarily unable to move out of ghettoized neighborhoods because of high rents, high house prices, and low pay. Today, it is the continuous rise of economic inequality that has strengthened housing segregation. On top of historic segregation, there is now a massive crisis of affordable housing which affects large sections of the working class, and young people especially.

Some integration has occurred in recent decades for several reasons including gentrification as whites return to urban neighborhoods and, ironically, with rising rents, many black families are often forced to move to the sprawling suburbs.

Massive investment will be required to rebuild American cities with decent housing

that is racially integrated. The big developers are of no use to us, as they are only interested in building luxury housing for the super rich. We need to turn this situation upside down. We need cities to build housing that acts as an example of the future society we want: housing with low rents and racially integrated from the beginning. But we must point the finger at capitalism and understand why capitalism constructed racial segregation in the first place.

Richard Rothstein's book helps us see the road that got us where we are. However, where he falls short is in explaining why capitalism segregates. He documents the process but leaves the reader scratching their heads over the big "Why"? In pointing to the role of some unions as one of the few forces to challenge the process historically, he begins to answer the question of motivation.

Capitalism is a system of inequality. The ruling class, numerically, will always be the few against the many. To maintain this, they use ideological weapons – the media and education systems – and at other times, direct brutality and violence. Through education and the media, big business seeks to constantly accentuate differences between working people based on race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. They hope these divisions will encourage working-class people to blame those next to them for their oppression, and away from blaming the ruling class. Racism and racial segregation has been key to the rule of the American ruling class from its inception.

Black liberation, in the last analysis, will not be possible without a united mass movement of all the oppressed centered on the social power of the working class. An egalitarian socialist society will consign race segregation, alongside poverty and all other forms of oppression, into the history books where they belong. ☺

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# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

## RIGHT WING ESCALATES WAR ON LGBTQ PEOPLE

# WE REFUSE TO RETURN TO THE CLOSET

Freeman Ryan

After decades of hard fought progress on LGBTQ rights, the Trump reaction threatens to drive us back. We stand firm and refuse to return to the closet. A generation of young people are invigorated to fight for LGBTQ rights, against racism, and against sexism.

While 7% of youth identify as LGBTQ, they make up 40% of homeless youth. The average household income for same sex couples is 20% less than heterosexual couples. And, devastatingly, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs reports that there was a 86% rise in anti-LGBTQ homicides in 2017 compared to 2016. The unequal and often dangerous conditions LGBTQ Americans face has been intensified under the Trump presidency which has emboldened bigots of all stripes.

### Trump's Anti-LGBTQ Agenda

The election of Trump and his strongly anti-LGBTQ Vice President Mike Pence was immediately felt by LGBTQ folks as hate crimes spiked the day after his election in 2016. Meanwhile, local Republican legislators have stepped up to pass more discriminatory anti-trans "bathroom bills," with 129 anti-LGBTQ laws introduced in state legislatures in 2017.

Beyond the rise in discrimination in the Trump era, his general right-wing, anti-worker policies will disproportionately impact LGBTQ people. Trump's massive tax cuts give corporate giants like Amazon over \$789 million

annually while placing the burden on working people to fund critical social service programs.

However, Trump and the political establishment's ability to carry out this agenda is by no means guaranteed! Boston's demonstration of 40,000 people last August against the alt right following Charlottesville pushed back far right organizing in a way that no legislation could. Another example is the recent historic victory in Seattle to tax Amazon to fund affordable housing which will disproportionately help LGBTQ people. In both of these instances and countless more, it is the power of our movements that wins victories.

### We Need a Real Political Alternative

Despite their rhetoric, the corporate leadership of the Democratic Party refuses to take a fighting stance for LGBTQ people and stand against Trump's anti-worker policies and hateful rhetoric. The infamous anti-trans "Bathroom Bill" HB2 in North Carolina was voted for by eleven Democrats.

Despite mass public support, the national leadership of the Democrats still hasn't come out in support of Medicare for All and in California they blocked enacting a statewide single payer system. Medicare for All would be a massive step forward for LGBTQ people by ensuring their access to gender-affirming health care, and prevention and treatment for HIV/AIDS.

This shows how badly we need a new political party that doesn't take corporate

money, that could truly fight for the interests of LGBTQ and working people. The hypocritical approach towards LGBTQ needs by the political establishment is perhaps best embodied by the corporatization of Pride parades themselves. These actually originated in the Stonewall Riots in New York City in 1969 led by trans women in response to police violence. They now serve partially as a marketing tool for the same huge corporations that actively lobby against universal healthcare, funding affordable housing, and higher minimum wages; all policies that would disproportionately help LGBTQ people.

### Need for a Fighting LGBTQ Movement

The radical roots of Pride show the way forward. We need an approach to LGBTQ liberation based in struggle and mass movements that fight for real change.

Whether it's the teachers strikes which have won big pay raises for teachers and increased funding for students, or the recent Tax Amazon victory in Seattle, the biggest victories come when all working people stand together in solidarity. Likewise the LGBTQ movement needs to link the defense of our gains to broader demands that will benefit all working people but LGBTQ people disproportionately. While we fight against hate crimes and bathroom bills, we fight for affordable housing for all, living wages, and universal health care.

At the same time, we need to arm these

movements with the strongest strategies and tactics necessary to win gains for LGBTQ people. Our movements need to be prepared to harness our collective power by using rallies, marches, strikes, and non-violent civil disobedience. At the University of Washington, graduate-student workers made trans-inclusive health care one of their central demands in their recent strike. This approach shows the way forward.

### A Socialist World is Possible

As Trump and Pence try to roll back the gains made under the Obama administration, we are reminded that in a capitalist society, every victory we win is vulnerable and fragile. That's why Socialist Alternative is fighting for a socialist transformation of society, where the needs of people are put over the needs of shareholder profit, where discrimination is left in the past, and our differences are celebrated and cherished rather than used as a wedge to keep us apart.

The bosses and their purchased politicians know that if working people and all the oppressed were united in common struggle for guaranteed housing, employment, education, and health care, their massive profits would be threatened. It is only by linking our movements together and fighting arm in arm that we will win the world we deserve. The struggle for that world is how we can win real liberation for LGBTQ and all oppressed people. ✪