

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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SUGGESTED DONATION \$2

## REPUBLICANS ON THE RUN

# WE NEED A WAVE OF MASS STRUGGLE



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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

## Kim Garrett Environmental Scientist Pittsburgh, PA

I am a socialist because I am a scientist. I work in environmental and public health, and I see the ills of capitalism daily. Capitalism operates reactively rather than preventively, which creates widespread health and wealth disparities, industrial accidents, and keeps resources from those who need them most. It prevents us from developing creative and essential solutions by quarantining ideas behind national borders, intellectual property barriers, and paywalls. Capitalism is inherently unscientific and leads to bad research and biased regulations. I am tired of seeing people suffer because of this shortsighted system.

I have been disillusioned with capitalism for a long time, but coming from a family full of Republican politicians allowed me very few outlets to explore these feelings. I became involved with organizing in the Democratic Party in college, but found myself questioning the extent to which I agreed with their politics. What were the Democrats actually doing for the environment or for queer people? Selling reusable rainbow totes? I felt drained and lethargic, like my politics didn't belong. I stopped organizing for a time because of these feelings.

The Bernie Sanders campaign re-energized me. I saw someone making an impact talking about the real issues that working people face. While in graduate school for public health, I was excited to hear his proposals for social programs, health inequalities, and climate change. Despite the limitations of his politics, it was refreshing to see

## Afraid of Revolution, Super-Rich Preparing Escape Bunkers in New Zealand

Toiya Shester

Bloomberg recently put out an article that at first glance could almost be mistaken for a prequel to *The Walking Dead*. The setting is the edge of the Earth, an island nation called New Zealand. The year is 2018, right before the disaster. The protagonist is the 1%. The plot is that the world is about to be thrown into catastrophe. There will soon be a world war, natural disaster, or maybe even a zombie attack that will kill billions of people. The super wealthy are preparing for their life after by building bunkers in the most peaceful, secluded place on Earth: New Zealand.

This is not a screenplay! This is actually happening. A small handful of capitalists are buying up land in New Zealand and building underground bunkers. They range in size and price per person, some of them extremely large with the ability to house up to 300 people - some cost \$8 million per person.

The people building these bunkers know that soon people will be fed up with the inequality, joblessness, and the lack of equal distribution of resources. They are preparing for the coming social upheaval by building a place to hide as well as for looming natural disasters that the capitalist system has



someone uniting people of all backgrounds around a platform that at least identified a system of oppression. Eventually, the Democratic establishment let our country down again, and I decided I was done with their false promises and dedication to the status quo.

Thanks to a group of activist friends, I joined Socialist Alternative in the spring of 2018. I was drawn to their emphasis on learning, analysis, and combining diverse skills and ideas toward one goal. It is incredible to work with such an intelligent group of people. In contrast to capitalism and the political establishment, socialism is based on evidence and observations of material conditions. Socialists accept this reality, no matter how grim or difficult, and plan accordingly. As I read socialist theory, I am amazed at how much it reflects the scientific method. The socialist method of planning and analysis follows the methods through which robust research is conducted. I feel fulfilled knowing that we are working toward real change, a paradigm upheaval, and a scientific, socialist world. ✦

created.

The Kiwi government has tried to prevent these (mostly American) billionaires from buying up these areas and pushing residents out by creating laws banning foreigners from purchasing land.

An exponentially small group of people have accumulated vast amounts of wealth based on savage exploitation. This creates the very problems they are now running from.. In reality, this wealth could be used to fix those problems. Human civilization is at a point where we could properly prepare for natural disasters or epidemics of diseases. Right now, there are over 30,000 people in shelters due to Hurricane Florence. This of course is terrible but imagine how much worse things will be with runaway global climate change. The current system is unable to deal with massive human displacement and the decimation of infrastructure. The building of these bunkers is a disgusting display of extravagant spending by the billionaires. It confirms the need to tax the super rich to fund people's needs including disaster relief under democratic control and rebuilding our infrastructure on the basis of renewable energy. It confirms the need to end the rule of the super rich altogether ✦

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Midterm Elections

# The Coming “Blue Wave” and Growing Radicalization

Andy Moxley and Tom Crean

The background of the current midterm elections is a chaotic situation for U.S. capitalism – an out-of-control dysfunctional regime in the White House and a growing political radicalization in society, starting first among young people but beginning to spread its way into sections of the working class. As we explain on p. 5 there is a significant increase in strikes and strike authorization votes this year – following the heroic example of the West Virginia teachers - by workers who want to push back against corporate power and stagnant wages.

The most recent manifestation of the radicalization and willingness to fight is the ferocious mass opposition to Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination to the Supreme Court which has forced the Republicans to make a concession by ordering an FBI investigation into the accusations of Christine Blasey Ford and other women.

Looming in the background is the threat of a major economic crisis fueled by massive levels of debt and overheated financial and housing markets, among other factors. The exact timing of the downturn remains unclear but the crisis of “emerging market” currencies, including Argentina and Turkey, show how developments in the world economy could contribute to pushing the domestic economy over the edge. The worsening trade war with China could also be a factor. Now there are indications of a slump in the housing market as ordinary people, whose wages have stagnated while profits have soared, cannot afford escalating prices. The next economic crisis will further exacerbate the contradictions in society, making it even more difficult for the American ruling class and traditional two-party establishment to govern in the old way.

## Blue and Progressive Waves

As we go to print, trends point toward a significant “Blue Wave” nationally with the Democrats likely taking control of the House, some

state houses, and possibly, though less likely, the Senate. Though Trump’s hardcore base of support still remains largely unmoved and even hardened by “Russiagate,” millions of working people will be looking to the ballot box as the key way to push back against the whipped up racism, nationalism, and chaos.

Many places across the U.S., like New York, experienced record-breaking voter turnout in the primaries. In addition, reflecting the new #MeToo era, there were a record number of successful women candidates for major parties the bulk of them Democrats - 256 in congressional races and 16 in governors’ races. There are also over 500 teachers running as political candidates on the back of the teachers’ revolt against neoliberal assaults on public education.

There have also been a number of key victories in the Democratic primaries by progressive challengers to the establishment. However, these challengers do not represent any sort of cohesive ideological bloc. They range from Democratic Socialists of America members like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Julia Salazar in New York to Ayanna Pressley in Boston who adopted a Berniecrat program but has a record as a mainstream Democratic city councillor.

If Bernie Sanders had adopted the approach - which we advocated - of turning Our Revolution into a membership organization which built a movement in the streets as well as at the ballot box, a far bigger challenge to the corporate Democratic establishment could have developed in 2018. Of course the resistance from Schumer and Pelosi would have been ferocious and this would have pointed more clearly towards the need to break from the Democrats altogether and establish a new party. In this sense, 2018 was also a missed opportunity but the dynamic points to a sharper conflict between the corporate leadership and the radicalizing base in the next period.

Despite the limitations, these primary and likely subsequent general election victories for many left and socialist candidates represent



a significant development. Socialist Alternative called for votes by registered Democrats for both Ocasio Cortez and Salazar and we were active in their campaigns. Despite our disagreement with them running within the Democratic Party, a victory for these open socialists with their large, active support base standing on a pro-working-class program would represent an important defeat for the establishment.

Furthermore, their campaigns have the potential to be lay the basis for a wider struggle for key demands like Medicare for All, abolishing ICE, and tuition free college. We also pointed out that, if victorious, they would come under fierce pressure by the establishment to moderate their policies. In order to counteract this pressure they will need to use their positions to help build and be accountable to a sustained movement of working people as Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant has done for the past five years as a Seattle city councilmember.

Another significant development has been the emergence of a new wave of black progressives winning primaries including former NAACP head Ben Jealous in Maryland and Andrew Gillum in Florida. This reflects the political shift in the black community since the 2016 Democratic primary, when over 70% of the black vote went for Hillary Clinton. However, young African Americans, affected by Black Lives Matter, had no enthusiasm for Hillary and have largely rejected the traditional black leadership in the

Democratic Party.

## 2019: A Year of Struggle?

It is completely understandable that millions of people are looking to the midterm elections as a way to punish and push back Trump and the Republicans. Indeed if the Democrats win control the House and some state legislatures this could open the door to a ramping up of popular resistance against Trump and his right wing cronies. Both in Congress and at state level, Democrats will then be tested, coming under pressure to resist the attacks of Trump and the Republicans and to pass progressive legislation.

Big struggles spearheaded by women, young people, and sections of the working class could push the Democratic leadership beyond what it wishes to do around health care, immigration, impeachment, and other issues. Already there is a debate about whether Pelosi should be Speaker of the House for the Democrats after elections or should step out of the way.

However to achieve what’s possible in the next period, it will take turning the programs of left progressives and socialist candidates into real fighting campaigns around different issues like Medicare for All, as well as constructing a cohesive, organized force to fight for them. Ocasio-Cortez and DSA in particular could play a key role in

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# How Do We Win the Fight Against the Right?

Theresa Powers

During the last two years, Trump and the Republicans have attacked nearly every portion of the population imaginable: women, children, immigrants, people of color, LGBTQ folks, poor people, and the broader working class. *This looks like:*

- ✦ Trump actively fueling racial division and nativist hatred of immigrants.
- ✦ A regime of ICE terror in immigrant communities and violation of the basic human rights of refugees by separating children from their families and holding them alone in detention centers.
- ✦ Kavanaugh’s potential appointment to the Supreme Court, a direct threat to women’s reproductive rights, LGBTQ people, and anyone resisting corporate power.
- ✦ Millions of Americans losing health care through Trump’s campaign to repeal Obamacare. The Republicans are determined to continue attacking Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security, a massive assault on the poor, elderly, and working Americans generally.
- ✦ The relentless rolling back of environmental regulation which makes big business happy but worsens the threat of drastic climate change.
- ✦ The totally inadequate and racist response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico which led to thousands of preventable deaths.
- ✦ The Supreme Court’s Janus decision, a direct attack on the public sector workers’ right to union representation.
- ✦ Massive tax cuts for the rich and removing restrictions on the banks which crashed the economy in

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Chicago: Trial of Laquan McDonald's Killer Sparks Protest

# Convict Killer Cops!

Ryan Watson

Two years after the release of the video showing Chicago Police Officer Jason Van Dyke shooting black teenager Laquan McDonald 16 times, his trial has begun. The community anger around this case shows the potential for mass protests to reemerge.

In the weeks following the release of the video, city streets and Interstates were repeatedly blocked by massive crowds calling on Rahm Emanuel and State's Attorney Anita Alvarez to resign. Emanuel's reputation was irreparably damaged after the video was suppressed for months - with even establishment figures speaking openly of having no confidence in his ability to govern. Rahm has now announced that he will not run for Mayor again.



*Hundreds of people protested as the trial of Laquan McDonald's killer opened in Chicago.*

## Mass Action to Pressure the System Needed

There have been regular protests at the Cook County courthouse on trial days, but so far there have not been mass demonstrations demanding a conviction for killer cop Van Dyke. There's an urgent need for such mass action to pressure the system to convict him.

The courts are not immune to public pressure. A victory in this case could also ignite a new phase for BLM around the call to bring the police system under a public review board with the power to subpoena, investigate, hire, and fire.

What is required is a mass movement, not only against police violence, but also against the generational poverty, unemployment, and community destruction that capitalism has inflicted on Black people. This movement needs to demand the support of labor unions. Black workers are the most highly unionized

ethnic group in the U.S. and yet the needs of our communities are neglected by the Democrat-friendly policies of these worker-based organizations. We have seen that we can't rely on Black - or any - Democrats to fight for what our community needs. Corporate politicians represent corporations first, no matter what their background, and the Black misleadership class in Congress has repeatedly voted for the militarization of the police. In Chicago's Democratic Party establishment, all of the Black Caucus, and all but one of the Latino caucus, voted to build a \$95 million police academy on the West Side of Chicago instead of investing that money in the community. This is in an area where the median household income is \$22,351.

We need to connect the attack on Black and Brown individuals to the system as a whole. The straining of resources in our communities points towards a larger struggle,

and converging these movements means connecting the struggle to everyday working class demands: full community control and oversight over the police, fund education and youth job programs, demilitarize our schools, rent control, and housing justice for all!

## Convict Van Dyke

Socialist Alternative demands the conviction of Jason Van Dyke. But imprisoning one murdering cop is far from enough. This is not just a case of one rotten apple, but a tree rotten to its roots

If Officer Van Dyke is convicted, this will be a victory for those who fight against police brutality. We as working people should use that momentum to build a mass movement against police violence and racism, demanding elected community boards with the power to subpoena, investigate, hire, and fire the police. If he's acquitted, we need to

immediately organize mass action. We should make Black Friday the rallying point for mass protests to shut down profits, on the third anniversary of the shut down of the Magnificent Mile shopping district and call for major unions to join the actions with a one-day strike in solidarity.

In the broadest sense, challenging the corporate political establishment that relies on racism means forging unity around a program to end police violence and poverty. This includes challenging the Black leaders who have colluded in keeping institutional racism intact through the war on drugs and mass incarceration. Behind the politicians stands the capitalist system itself, which has always used racism to keep working people divided and will never agree to end discrimination. This can only be accomplished by the multiracial working class fighting together for a socialist future.

Socialist Alternative Demands:

- ✦ Convict and sentence killer cops.
- ✦ Create elected civilian boards with full powers over the police. Independent anti-racist candidates from community organizations and unions should run for these boards.
- ✦ End the policies which have led to mass incarceration of Black youth.
- ✦ Stop the militarization of the police! For the billions being spent on military-style weapons to be put toward schools, child care, health care, and other community services.
- ✦ For economic justice! For a \$15 an hour minimum wage, guaranteed jobs for all.
- ✦ A massive investment in public education and transit paid for by taxes on the super-rich and corporations. End the cycle of capitalism that puts profits before the needs of working people. ✦

## The Coming "Blue Wave" and Growing Radicalization

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this process though (as we explain in the center pages) like Sanders, this is far from certain and will require sustained pressure from her supporters.

Any sort of move in this direction will immediately come into collision with the Democratic Party leadership and expose the limits of trying to "reform" the Democrats into a party in the interest of working people. The Democratic Party establishment showed its teeth in its vicious and unsuccessful campaign against DSA member Julia

Salazar in New York. They will try to co-opt some of the new left elected officials and may be forced to tack a bit to the left but they will also fight ferociously to keep the party as a tool of corporate rule.

This process will continue to play to out in the 2020 presidential primary. In reality, the presidential campaign will begin the day after the midterms. On the Democratic side this is not likely to be a simple repeat of the 2016 Hillary vs. Bernie battle, with a host of Senators and others being named

as possible candidates. Nevertheless the battle between the new left and the "centrist" corporatists will be very much reflected in the presidential primary. As in 2016, opportunities can open up to make the case for independent left politics in a way that will resonate with millions.

This inevitable confrontation poses big questions for organizations like DSA who argue the "inside/outside" strategy is viable and portray this as a question of being "pragmatic." But in order to

develop a decisive challenge to corporate power, the only possible way forward is an independent mass party based on the interests of the working class alongside a fighting labor movement and other mass social struggles. Even initial moves in the direction of independent left politics by significant figures and forces would have an electrifying effect on millions of people who hate the establishment, want to fight to change society, and are embracing the idea of socialism.

The mood exists nationally and

internationally for a serious push-back against the right-wing agenda but as Bernie Sanders himself pointed out in his recent call for a new "international progressive front" maintenance of the status quo at any level is not a viable basis for progressive politics. 2019 will be full of opportunities that progressives, activists and socialists need to seize upon to fight for real systemic change. ✦

Strikes Begin to Spread

# Workers Beginning to Fight Back

Tony Wilsdon

Since the 1980s unions have been almost constantly on the defensive, facing a relentless neo-liberal offensive by the bosses. Despite some spectacular rear-guard struggles, the trend has been toward defeated strikes and a retreat by the unions leaders.

This had a big effect in weakening the confidence of workers that they could win gains by striking. Yet strike action is the main weapon the working class has to improve its living standards. The failure of labor to win improved living standards - combined with a union leadership in retreat - weakened the ability of unions to attract other workers who are seeing their living standards and conditions on the job decline.

This decade started with the Wisconsin uprising in 2011, which had enormous potential, but was derailed by a combination of the labor leadership and the Democratic Party. 2011 also saw the sudden emergence of Occupy, as an expression of the increasing class division in the U.S. Signs of a fight back have increased in recent years. There was the UFCW organizing at Walmart, fast food strikes, and important strikes by nurses, teachers, and communication workers.

## 2018: Teacher Uprisings and Increased Strikes

This year has seen important new developments. Most visible

has been the teacher uprising in the South and Southwest. These strikes contain a number of important new features: 1) rank-and-file based organizing; 2) adoption of a program that broadened the appeal to wider group of workers; 3) refusal to be limited by the union leadership's narrow strategy; 4) taking on state legislators and, in the process, turning around the whole political narrative; and 5) winning clear victories.

Since then, there has been an important uptick in strikes, and also strike-authorization votes. Most important is the situation at UPS (see page 10), where a possible strike could have a huge effect on the U.S. economy. At present there is a strong mood to vote "no" on a very poor tentative agreement which could well be defeated, despite an all-out push by the Hoffa administration. The hotel strikes in Chicago are a major development and has sparked a strike authorization vote among hotel workers in Boston. A wave of teachers' strikes in Washington State in September shows the teachers' revolt is far from over and there is the possibility of a major strike by LA teachers. 30,000 steelworkers at Arcelor Mittal and U.S. Steel have passed strike authorization votes. There is also a bit of an uptick in overall union membership as more young people join unions.

Of course, underlining this increase in union activity has been the savage attacks on living standards and working conditions on the job, particularly directed against young workers, women, and people of color. Further, the spiraling



West Virginia teachers strike sparked teacher revolt.

cost of housing affects all workers and many middle-class people. A new understanding is beginning to develop that only by collective struggle can improvements be won.

## Growing Support for Unions

A recent article in *Jacobin* by Erin Dirnbach explains that there is a dramatic increase in the number of large work stoppages, albeit from a very low level, with 16 in the first half of the year. At this rate the number of large work stoppages this year will be the highest since 2000.

A *Los Angeles Times* article citing a Gallup poll showing support for unions at 62%, the highest in 15 years states: "Like slowly simmering frogs, Americans have required

some time to grasp just how dire their situation has become."

The article goes on to point to the "overwhelming public support for striking teachers this spring in such red states as West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Arizona...the venerable education pollster PDK, found 73% support for teachers' strikes, and a remarkable 78% support from parents of school-age children." Further evidence of the shift in public opinion was the two-to-one vote to overturn a right-to-work law in Missouri this summer.

The recent struggle by International Union of Operating Engineers Local 302 in Western Washington, who operate cranes, lifts, and heavy equipment essential to the massive local housing boom shows the mood to fight is spreading to sectors

normally considered more "conservative." A rank-and-file group organized two successful no votes on contracts similar to those accepted by the rest of the building trades. A strike vote was passed by a very small margin of votes against the leadership. The resulting 17-day strike shut down all major union construction sites in Western Washington, including Seattle. Cranes across the region stood conspicuously silent.

The union leadership were dragged into a strike they did not want. Quite quickly, coordination of the strike was taken over by a rank and file grouping which communicated through a closed Facebook page. The strike won most of its demands, although the ratification vote has not been completed.

## Need for Fighting Leadership

These struggles happened against the background of union membership in the private sector falling to below 7% of the workforce, and a continued ruling-class offensive against public-sector unions. The recent Janus decision effectively makes the whole public sector nationally "right to work." The biggest challenge is the need for fighting leadership. This is why the beginnings of alternative leadership - including the role of socialists - in the teachers revolt is so important as is the role of more militant unions like the National Nurses United in pushing the labor movement as a whole. ✪

## How Do We Win the Fight Against the Right?

2008.

And this is by no means a comprehensive list!

### Mass Movements in the Streets

As the policies of the Trump administration continue to affect people's everyday lives, and the bulk of elected officials show no serious response or leadership, ordinary people have taken it upon themselves to call for mass actions to demand change. Since Trump

was elected there have been mass occupation of airports against the Muslim Ban, Women's Marches, anti-far right marches, student walkouts to protest rampant gun violence and the NRA, and "Keep Families Together" marches against the inhumane immigrant detention centers. Teachers rose up in state after state to fight vicious austerity imposed by (mostly) Republican state governments.

Incredibly, in almost all cases the resistance in the streets has not been organized by the unions,

traditional women's and civil rights organizations, or other forces that are supposed to defend the interests of working people and the oppressed. People have certainly not been mobilized by the leadership of the Democratic Party which has capitulated to Trump on defending Dreamers and was prepared to give Kavanaugh a pass until brave women stood up.

History shows us that when working people come together and fight, we can win: the 8-hour workday, the right to organize a union, women's

right to vote, ending Jim Crow, gay marriage, etc. In order for movements to take on a sustained form and strike real blows against the billionaires and bigots like Trump, they need to be organized with democratic structures and a cohesive political program. This type of organization would point towards a new left political party, a party for working people, that would fight unapologetically to win things we desperately need!

This new party would:  
 ✪ FIGHT FOR: impeaching Trump; a \$15 living wage for all;

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rebuilding the nation's infrastructure on a green basis and thereby creating millions of good paying union jobs; health care for all; affordable housing; and free education paid for by taxing the rich.

✪ DEMAND: candidates take no corporate money; accept the average wage of a worker if elected; and fight unapologetically for working people.

✪ HOLD ALL candidates accountable through elected democratic structures. ✪

# The Role of Socialists

A wave of socialists elected to office shows the growing openings for building the socialist movement. But it also poses new challenges for how to translate wins at the ballot box into wins for more fundamental change. Below, **PATRICK AYERS** outlines how Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez could use her position to fight for working people and lays out some key lessons from the success of Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant on the Seattle City Council.

## How Ocasio-Cortez Could Provide a Bold Lead

The victory of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez earlier this year launched the 27-year-old and self-described democratic socialist into the public imagination. She was invited onto *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* and Sunday-morning political talk shows, while *The View* and several Fox News programs discussed socialism and her platform.

Her election put Democrats on the spot. Nancy Pelosi reminded us once again that she supports capitalism, while Elizabeth Warren assured us she is not a socialist and wants to save capitalism from itself. In effect, the victory of Ocasio-Cortez's campaign exposed growing divisions between those who defend the status quo and a new generation moving in the direction of socialist change.

However, there was another side to this story. Some left voices on social media expressed frustration when Ocasio-Cortez was seemingly bowled over in a PBS interview and backed off her previous support for Palestinians. Later, she praised John McCain as an American hero - to the disappointment of members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), who helped elect her - and she told Jake Tapper on CNN that the importance of electing Democrats this November included supporting Governor Andrew Cuomo, who has worked to block progressive legislation.

For some, these incidents can be chalked up to early mistakes of an inexperienced newcomer and don't say much about her actual political trajectory. But they are also reminders of the enormous pressures on elected representatives under capitalism. What stands out to most people is that her politics are far to the left of the Democratic Party leadership. Yet, given Ocasio-Cortez's heightened profile and her connection to DSA, her actions will provoke more debate about how best to fight for socialist transformation. So, what could Ocasio-Cortez do to help build the strongest left challenge in the period ahead?

### Build a Movement to Fight Trump

In many ways, the real test for Ocasio-Cortez will come when she enters Congress next

year. Whether the Democrats take the House or not, the dominant issue will be Donald Trump and his right-wing offensive. Ocasio-Cortez's actions can make an important difference for whether an effective resistance is built.

This fall, many people will vote Democrat to deny the Republicans control of Congress. But there is also growing anger at the corporate leadership of the Democratic Party for failing to consistently fight Trump or break with their big-business backers. Many will look to Ocasio-Cortez to hold the Democratic Party leadership accountable and to provide an alternative lead. It's unclear if Ocasio-Cortez will fully seize this opportunity, and she may take a back seat to "gain experience" and avoid rocking the boat.

At the same time, Ocasio-Cortez is a different type of politician from what most Americans are used to. She is more sensitive to pressures from the left and working people than typical Democrats, who overwhelmingly tend to be loyal servants of the establishment. However, there will also be enormous pressures on Ocasio-Cortez from the other side, and particularly from the corporate leadership of the party she has chosen to join.

She is likely to vacillate to some degree between conflicting pressures. The stronger the pressure from real movements of working people, the more likely she will be pushed to boldly represent their interests - but there are no guarantees. In the absence of movements, it's more likely that she will moderate her positions to appease establishment forces, as she did on Palestine.

### An Action Plan

Ocasio-Cortez is in office because millions of people are fed up with corporate politics and want new leaders who fight for working people. To strengthen this fight, the left and DSA - which she joined during her campaign - should call on Ocasio-Cortez to firmly reject the timid approach of the Democratic Party leadership to the Trump administration. She should not support Nancy Pelosi or any establishment Democrat for House speaker or minority leader. Ocasio-Cortez should only vote for a leadership that is prepared to break with

big business, fight for pro-working-class demands, and fight Trump.

That means mobilizing the anger of millions of people to help block Trump's reactionary agenda - exactly what the Democratic Party leadership has failed to do. If the Democrats take the House, she should call for them to immediately start impeachment proceedings and actively campaign to pass Medicare for All, a federal \$15 minimum wage, and other pro-worker legislation.

Of course, the Democratic Party is highly unlikely to abandon their loyalties to big business. Ocasio-Cortez will inevitably face ferocious resistance from them if she does wage a fight. This should not deter her from doing what is needed. Instead, the struggle will clarify that what can be won inside the halls of power depends on the strength of movements outside the halls of power.

Above all, Ocasio-Cortez should not base her strategy in Congress on building rotten alliances centered around horse-trading and backroom deals with establishment politicians. Rejecting this unprincipled maneuvering should also be a key feature of any potential new caucus she launches with other progressive members of the House like Ro Khanna, Rashida Tlaib, or Pramila Jayapal. They should take a principled stand, base themselves on building a movement of working people, and seek to work with Bernie Sanders in the Senate on this basis as well.

The key task for Ocasio-Cortez is turning the massive passive support for democratic socialism and progressive change into an organized and fighting movement. Big business is constantly using every tool they have to squeeze the politicians at our expense. The strength of working people lies in our ability to pose an alternative to the current system through our numbers and social power. Ocasio-Cortez is well positioned to help imbue working people with a stronger sense of this power, which means clearly warning people at every stage that we cannot rely on the establishment politicians or the political system and that we need to get organized and fight. This means relentlessly exposing the subservience of the



Democratic Party to big business.

She should immediately put out the call for mass action. If Trump and the Republicans are defeated in the midterms, it will raise the confidence of working people to resist. Ocasio-Cortez should encourage people not to wait for the 2020 elections by building for a series of mass demonstrations in 2019, starting with a radical women's march in January 2019 as part of a systematic plan to escalate mass action throughout the year.

### Accountability and a Democratic Movement

Politics doesn't happen only at election time. It's an everyday thing, and the best way to hold politicians accountable is to build the widest, most class-conscious, most organized, and most active possible movement of working people—and even then, success is not guaranteed.

Ocasio-Cortez, alongside Sanders, can play a key role in developing a mass movement with democratic structures. This is the best way to ensure that Ocasio-Cortez herself is representing the interests of the ordinary people. She shouldn't rely on consultants or "colleagues" in the Democratic establishment; she should make decisions in close collaboration with a democratically organized movement to ensure all her statements, actions, and votes are done in a way that strengthens the movement. She should take only the average wage of a working-class person to guard against becoming divorced from the everyday life of working people. The rest of her salary should be donated to the movement.

The scaffolding for a mass grassroots resistance could be provided by the growing activist layer around DSA, Our Revolution, Indivisible, Socialist Alternative, and also the thousands of union, #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, and immigrant-rights activists. Regional conferences could bring these forces together, along with broader layers of the public, to discuss steps toward a mass, organized, and democratic

# ists in Elected Office



## Lessons of a Socialist on the Seattle City Council

In 2013, Kshama Sawant was elected to the Seattle City Council without corporate cash, independent of the Democratic Party, and as an unapologetic member of Socialist Alternative. Six months later, Seattle became the first major city in the U.S. to pass a \$15 an hour minimum wage.

We won by building a movement. Our electoral victory helped bring the Fight for 15 - launched by fast food workers and unions - to a much wider audience. Immediately following Sawant's election, we used that momentum to launch 15 Now as an organization that anybody could join. When the establishment tried to co-opt Sawant into their closed-door process by setting up a committee of labor and business leaders, we gave them a hard deadline: come up with an acceptable proposal in six months or we will go to the ballot with our own binding referendum.

While the committee met, 15 Now and Socialist Alternative built the framework for a mass movement. We launched action groups and held a democratically organized convention to develop our proposals for a ballot initiative. The credible threat of a mass campaign behind our own \$15 an hour proposals put enormous pressure on the establishment to quickly concede.

Before we Sawant was elected, not a single city council member would support a \$15 an hour minimum wage. We had just a single vote out of nine; yet, six months later, a \$15 an hour was passed unanimously.

Since then, Sawant's office has continued to act as an organizing center for struggles and working-class campaigns in Seattle. It has been part of fighting and winning important gains for tenants, indigenous people, LGBTQ people, and more. Most importantly, it has helped build a vibrant left in Seattle. With so many socialists being elected around the U.S. here are some keys to our approach:

### 1) Take a clear side - you can't represent two masters.

You can't represent both workers and bosses, tenants and landlords, communities and developers. As a member of Socialist Alternative, Sawant refuses corporate campaign donations, and in office she has only taken the average wage of the workers she represents, donating a large part of her \$120,000 salary back to the wider movement.

### 2) Speak the truth to working people.

Under capitalism, politics is about conflicting class interests and forces. Sawant takes every opportunity to expose the real interests behind the actions of the political establishment. When Seattle proposed building a new \$160 million police precinct, Sawant went on television to expose that the existing police precinct was not collapsing and to argue that the \$160 million would be better spent on affordable housing. Sawant has been crystal clear about the role of the Democratic Party as a party of big business and the need for a new party.

### 3) Base yourself on the movement - not negotiations behind closed doors.

Some people think the way you win change is by simply electing enough progressive politicians. But capitalism is a flexible system, and big business has many tools to rein in politicians. Seattle City Council unanimously passed a small tax on Amazon, but seven of the nine council members then betrayed working people by repealing it a month later. Leaked text messages showed that, behind closed doors, enormous pressure was being applied to the left Democrats who caved. Sawant and Socialist Alternative took a principled stand for working people, voting against the repeal and calling for a stronger movement. We explained: "what can be won inside city hall depends on the strength of movements outside city hall"—not on one's

ability to negotiate with billionaire bullies like Jeff Bezos.

### 4) Help turn passive support into organized struggle.

Sawant has helped turn City Hall into a place where people come to demand change from politicians and to get organized to fight against the effects of capitalism. In a struggle to stop a 400-percent rent increase for Seattle Housing Authority residents in 2014, Sawant encouraged and helped tenants in organizing their neighbors to build a serious struggle—and they won!

### 5) You can't do it on your own - you need an organization.

Sawant didn't run for office to build a career. She got involved to help build a Marxist organization - Socialist Alternative - that is committed to fight for a better world. We asked her to run for office to help us in that fight. We have her back, and, as a member of our organization, she is accountable to our organization and our politics. Together we work to develop a Marxist program to address the problems created by capitalism and to build a strong socialist movement that can help working people fight back in communities, in workplaces, and on campuses everywhere. As Kshama says, "You don't have to be a Marxist to fight for a better world. But it certainly helps." Join us! 🌟



Kshama Sawant helped to lead the fight to save the Showbox in downtown Seattle when developers wanted to build luxury housing.

resistance.

To mobilize a broader layer of people and coordinate the movement, organizing committees or action groups should be launched in every possible community, workplace, and campus. These would be a powerful tool for fighting against Trump and for a positive program of working-class demands. Further, they would provide the foundation for running socialist and left candidates in the years ahead and would create an outline of a new mass party of working people - a tool needed to take on the power of the billionaire class. We would urge Ocasio-Cortez to break with the Democrats now to begin laying the basis for a new party.

Any socialist in office should use their position to argue for a program that goes beyond reforms and poses a clear alternative to the dysfunctional capitalist system. This is important because Ocasio-Cortez will face continuous pressure from defenders of capitalism to moderate her positions. If she does, it could lower the confidence of working people to fight for even modest reforms. By promoting a bold vision for socialist transformation, she can help prepare a new generation for the type of struggle that will be needed.

However, it is unlikely Ocasio-Cortez will take this approach. We outline it here to raise the sights of our readers and explain a Marxist vision. Unfortunately, Ocasio-Cortez argues for a limited strategy of transforming the Democratic Party - a highly unlikely prospect - and electing more progressives to reform capitalism, which won't be enough to achieve real change. However, it is possible that she will be pushed further to the left under the impact of events. Nevertheless Ocasio-Cortez will be seen as an important left leader going forward, and the positive impact of her victory, which raised the banner of socialism, should not be dismissed. It is one sign among many of why we in Socialist Alternative are enormously optimistic about the potential to develop a mass, independent left force that decisively challenges the ruling elite. 🌟

After the Salazar Victory in New York

# Build a Movement to Demand Change

Leon Pinsky

On September 13, New York saw the biggest voter turnout for a Democratic primary in more than two decades providing further evidence of a “blue wave” coming for Trump this November. At the same time, the primary also showed the potential for socialists and progressives to gain ground. Most importantly, over 20,000 people voted to send Julia Salazar, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), to the New York State Senate.

Salazar’s campaign, which called for passing Medicare-For-All, stronger rent laws, an end to cash bail, and funding public transit, received a massive boost after another DSA member, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, defeated the boss of New York State’s Democratic machine in the primary for Congress in June.

Salazar volunteers knocked on over 100,000 doors - showing the growing opportunities to build the socialist movement. Salazar and the DSA should seize on the momentum of this victory to build a movement to compel the state legislature in Albany to pass the progressive legislation working people need as well as building real resistance to Trump and the right wing agenda in Washington. We are proposing to DSA:

Immediately organize rallies and

meetings across New York City and the state to discuss steps toward a movement next year and to get organized.

Call for a mass demonstration in Albany at the beginning of the state legislative session next year to demand progressive change, and as part of plan to escalate action afterward.

Launch a socialist ballot line in New York and run independent candidates in local elections in 2020.

## Nixon Loses But So Does the IDC

Meanwhile, in the highly publicized Democratic gubernatorial primary, Cynthia Nixon who also ran on a left platform and declared her support for socialism during the campaign, lost to Governor 1%, Andrew Cuomo.

Nixon’s 34% was impressive but also left many disappointed given the apparent momentum and high expectations. Reflecting the pressure from below, Nixon was pushed to the left during the campaign. While the establishment was clearly relieved, you don’t have to look hard to see that there is actually a significant political shift underway.

The other significant development was the defeat of six out of eight former IDC (Independent Democratic Conference) Democrats in the State Senate who had



DSA member Julia Salazar wins race for New York State Senate.

caucused with the Republicans and gave cover to Cuomo.

With the possibility of the Democrats retaking the New York State Senate this fall, there are real hopes that progressive legislation, such as the NY Health Act will go to Cuomo’s desk. However, many recent experiences show that electing Democrats in no way ensures progress given the corporate control of the party.

Left to their own devices, the NY Democratic machine can sabotage any progressive legislation. Salazar should use her platform to warn her supporters not to rely on the corrupt political process. That’s why we are

campaigning for a systematic mass movement on the streets, in the workplaces, and on campuses, to help mobilize tens of thousands of people to demand change.

## Building A Movement

Nixon is still on the Working Families Party line but her campaign appears over. If Nixon and the WFP were to use this to launch a truly independent political force in New York politics it would be an enormous step forward. Since it doesn’t seem likely, unfortunately, that she will take this step, we advocate a vote for Howie Hawkins

of the Green Party as a way to register a left vote this November.

Socialist Alternative members were active in Salazar’s campaign, while putting forward proposals for using the campaign to help build a mass movement for health care, taxing the rich, and fighting for affordable housing. We did not agree with Salazar’s decision to run as a Democrat and the reported 1,883 volunteers who were active in the campaign confirms our view that it would have been entirely possible to run a viable independent campaign as part of preparing the way for a new party.

Ultimately, our movement will need our own party, independent from the corporate Democratic Party and based on building mass struggles of working people. Nixon, Salazar, Ocasio-Cortez, Bernie Sanders, and others, have shown that millions of people are ready to support campaigns based on pro-working-class platforms. Launching a new mass party of working people is a necessary step to begin to challenge not only politics as usual, with its corruption and weakness in front of the right-wing, but the capitalist system of exploitation and devastation itself. ✪

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

# Seattle: The Showbox and the City

Nick Jones

Earlier in the summer, the Seattle music and arts community was shocked when it was announced that a beloved music venue, The Showbox - which since 1939 has hosted acts from Duke Ellington to Pearl Jam - was slated to be demolished. Onni Group, a multinational development firm, bought the theater and planned to turn the building into a 44-story luxury high rise. In response, a wave of indignation and fightback erupted in the city.

The Showbox is a cultural landmark in Seattle’s musical legacy, emblematic of the trends that have been churning through the city in

recent years. The city is every year becoming more and more a playground for the rich. Working-class Seattleites are being driven out of the city and/or onto the streets in record numbers.

For the city’s musicians, artists and community activists, many of whom are themselves working people struggling for affordable housing, the prospect of losing the Showbox felt like the last straw.

Far from a false choice between culture or housing, this was a question of whom Seattle as a city works for - people or profit. Already, downtown Seattle has a 26% vacancy rate, with rents too high for most to afford. Despite a slew of attacks

by political pundits, tens of thousands of ordinary people in Seattle decided to stand up and fight.

## A Resistance Emerges

Soon afterward on August 6, Kshama Sawant, Seattle City councilmember and member of Socialist Alternative, introduced legislation to save the Showbox by including it in the Pike Place Market Historic District. This protected district was a direct result of mass struggle in the city in the 1970s. It allows small businesses and the community direct say over how buildings are used in their district. This legislation passed 8-0 on August 13.

Councilmember Sawant’s proposal had an impact because of the determined and engaged resistance of working and ordinary people demanding that the Showbox be preserved for future generations. A local petition demanding the Showbox be saved has garnered over 100,000 signatures. Hundreds attended City Council meetings in August, spilling out of council chambers and filling City Hall.

It was a race against time; if Onni Group was able to process their legal paperwork before the legislation passed, they could go ahead with their development project. Predictably, the first response of the majority of the City Council

was to fiercely reject the campaign’s demand. When they couldn’t stop it, they tried to roll out delays.

Ultimately, however, the defiant stance of thousands won the day.

This fight however is still far from over - out of necessity the ordinance will only protect the Showbox for 10 months. In fact, the owner of the Showbox building is already suing the city to stop the legislation. We will still need to go up against the might of the real estate corporation Onni and the political establishment, who will no doubt attempt to undermine our efforts over the next months. ✪



## Swedish Far Right Gains in Elections

# Fight Back Against Neoliberalism and Racism



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

**Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna (CWI in Sweden) reporters**

On September 9, the Social Democrats [the historic ruling party] in Sweden had their worst election result for more than 100 years. The main right-wing party, the Moderates, did even worse. The racist Sweden Democrats, meanwhile, saw their highest vote ever. The instability and "chaos" that the established parties and bourgeois establishment feared is now in full swing.

The mistrust that exists toward the established parties was more prominent than ever before. Never have so many changed their party allegiance – 41 percent. More than one-in-three voters decided which party they would vote for in the last week before the election.

Contrary to the common image of Sweden internationally, inequality has increased faster than in most countries. Sweden has more dollar billionaires per capita than any other country. Cuts in health care and local councils have continued. In the last few years, big cuts have been made in sick pay and assistance for the disabled.

On top of this, in 2015 the government reversed its policy on refugees. The Swedish establishment has switched from offering permanent permits for everyone from Syria to attempting to close borders, blocking family reunification, and only offering 3 year maximum



Members of Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna (CWI in Sweden) the banner reads "Nazi-free Stockholm."

permits.

The official political debate in the parties and media has followed a pattern seen in many other European countries: linking migration to crime, social problems, and high costs. Housing areas with many immigrants – mostly low-paid workers – have been scapegoated as problem areas by the same parties that have made all the cuts in these communities.

Long-term attacks on the welfare state and migrants is behind the rising support for the Sweden Democrats.

## The Sweden Democrats

The racist Sweden Democrats'

(SD) vote increased from 5.7 percent in 2010 to 17.9 percent in the recent election. According to a poll on election day, SD was the largest party among men and second-largest among members of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation.

Perhaps there are some people who are comforting themselves with the fact that the Sweden Democrats did not become the first or second-largest party, as it appeared they could do in the polls this summer. But that's only a small comfort. Their racism will not disappear or be toned down. In the televised party leadership debate, Sweden Democrat leader Jimmie Åkesson said that those who are unemployed and come from another country "are not

Swedes" and "do not fit in Sweden" – a deliberate attempt to escalate racism.

Openly racist and sexist comments from SD representatives and voters have been more common in this election campaign than ever before, and even more frequent after the campaign. Like similar parties around Europe, SD presents itself as anti-party, while blaming "mass immigration" for the health-care crisis, housing shortage, and unemployment.

On TV and in the media, the SD party and Åkesson try to put on a facade, regularly denying that the SDs praise Nazism. But on social media they put out material subtly attacking immigration and refugees, especially Muslims. The SD has also been able to influence both the other right-wing parties and the Social Democrats.

Some right-wing commentators believe that the Moderates and Christian Democrats will soon start collaborating with the Sweden Democrats. Among a layer of Moderates and capitalists, there is confidence in the Sweden Democrats, especially since the party is now a strong supporter of for-profit welfare providers.

## Fight Against Racism

The Sweden Democrats' neoliberal policies must be a starting point for the movement against racism that is needed.

There's a strong willingness, especially among young people, to fight against the Sweden Democrats – their racism, sexism, and homophobia. New waves of struggle against racism and sexism are coming.

The best answer to racism is common struggle – in particular class struggle, where workers fight together against deterioration in social conditions, for higher wages, and better conditions. Also, given the emergency housing situation – the lack of apartments, high rents, and fraudulent "renovations" – tenants need to come together in battle. The lack of struggle is the strongest factor behind the drop in a fighting consciousness and workers' organizations in Sweden over the last period.

The trade union movement and the tenants' movement need to move into battle. What matters is real action against racists and Nazis. When the violent Nazi movement – NMR – was going to march in Gothenburg last year, the Sweden Democrats did not know what to do. They definitely did not want to stop the NMR. The fact that the march was stopped by 20,000 people on the streets was a big success in the fight against SD too.

This situation must lead activists based in a variety of social movements to form a new, red and green socialist alliance in the upcoming elections. ☸

## Hong Kong: Serious Escalation of Political Repression

**Socialist Action reporters**

On September 24, Hong Kong's government banned a political party for the first time, as the Beijing-driven political crackdown in the territory intensifies. The ban was first proposed in July, using the Societies Ordinance – a relic of British colonial rule – to ban the pro-independence Hong Kong National Party (HKNP).

The HKNP is a very small and largely irrelevant racist grouping which has clearly been selected by the government as a suitable test-case to impose further serious restrictions on freedom of speech and freedom of association in Hong Kong. This follows two years of

successive political restrictions, new repressive laws, banning of specific candidates from running in elections, and harsh prison sentences on young pro-democracy campaigners who have engaged in protests against the Chinese "Communist" (CCP) dictatorship and its puppet local government.

Socialist Action (Socialist Alternative's co-thinkers in Hong Kong) is completely opposed to the politics and methods of the HKNP – especially its racism toward mainland Chinese people and its support for European and American imperialism – which can only help the equally racist CCP state use divide-and-rule tactics to split and derail mass struggles in Hong Kong and China along ethnic lines.

Socialists stand for united struggle of all working people, regardless of where they were born, against the real enemy: billionaire authoritarian rule.

But the government is using a divide-and-conquer tactic, opening the door for further bans, the persecution of radical pro-democracy parties, manipulation of elections, and other oppressive laws. The aim is to suppress the voice of young people in Hong Kong who overwhelmingly oppose the CCP dictatorship.

But just as in mainland China, the ultra-repressive policy can't eliminate mass resistance and the struggle for democracy. In the long run, it will actually have the opposite effect and increase the radicalization and

politicization of working people, and then trigger greater waves of resistance. This is being demonstrated on the mainland through the struggle of the Jasic Technology workers in Shenzhen.

The struggle for democracy needs to be linked to the struggle against capitalism, and it must link up with workers in mainland China and globally who are organizing and resisting pay cuts, austerity and the escalating cost of education and housing. Connecting these struggles to a socialist alternative is the way to make the democracy struggle a genuine mass movement that can shake any government, including the Chinese dictatorship. ☸

# UPS Contract Struggle

## Interview with a Teamster Activist

After 90% approved strike authorization in August, Teamster members at UPS were given a contract to vote on. Here, Socialist Alternative interviews **Chuck Cannon**, a UPS worker from Philadelphia.

### What are the main aspects of the UPS contract proposal?

We are being offered a raise that barely keeps up with inflation and only catches us up to Amazon and Fedex, both non-union companies that pay a higher starting rate. In addition, there is a proposal for hybrid drivers, a two tier system that allows UPS to cut driver wages. This is at a company that made \$5 billion profit last year.

### Why are so many rank and file Teamsters advocating a "no" vote?

Many workers see their wages stagnant while transporting thousands of packages a day and only the top corporate owners reaping the rewards. Day in and day out, workers are overworked in warehouses with little ventilation and drivers are micromanaged on the road by electronic monitoring. Forced overtime is commonplace and with the low pay there is little

incentive to work late.

Teamsters United and other rank and file groups are advocating a no vote both because the contract is an outrageous concession to the UPS bosses and to build support for their slate in the next union elections. Overall the contract fails to address the issues of low wages and worker power at UPS.

### What are the strengths and weaknesses of the forces around "no" vote?

The primary strength of the forces around the no vote is how terrible the contract is. However, Teamsters United and other groups advocating for a no vote are doing so in a short sighted way and without any type of mass organizing. They should be building a campaign of pressure on the union leadership to negotiate a better contract. They should also be pointing to the need for serious preparations for a future strike as a way to bring pressure to bear on UPS.

In addition, the company and the union leadership have dragged out a vote, knowing that the low-paid workforce can only wait so long for a raise. Many workers who



would have voted no in August when the contract expired will now vote yes, because have little confidence in the union to negotiate anything better.

### What happens if it is approved or rejected?

Regardless of how the vote goes, the authority of the Hoffa leadership has already been undermined for failing to negotiate a proper contract. If it is approved workers will see a minimal boost in wages and little change in workplace conditions. Next time around they will look to other tactics and options to

secure a better contract than voting for Hoffa.

On the other hand, if the contract is rejected, the situation is less clear. The Hoffa leadership is claiming that a no vote will automatically lead to a strike as a way to scare people into voting yes. This is actually extremely unlikely at this point. The contract would have to be renegotiated and changes would need to be made to encourage workers to vote yes the second time around. There is also a danger of demoralization after a no vote if there is no escalation or further organizing efforts by those

advocating a no vote.

### What are the implications for the broader labor movement?

The Teamsters occupy a hugely important place in the U.S. labor movement. Logistics and shipping make up a huge section of the US and global economy. Industry wide, the capitulation of Hoffa and the Teamster leadership to corporations like UPS directly undermine labor struggles at Amazon and Fedex. Why should workers at Amazon and Fedex unionize if the Teamsters can offer them only \$13 dollars an hour, an amount many of them are already making? There is a need in the Teamsters as in many other unions for a new fighting leadership.

In the lead up to the 1997 UPS strike, the Teamsters spent a year preparing with public rallies and internal organizing. We need a return to this type of preparation for contract negotiations and leadership as an alternative to the rotten leadership of Hoffa. More than anything, this contract battle points to the need for rank and file organizing within the union, as was seen in the victorious West Virginia teacher's strike. ☘

## #MeToo Hits the Workplace

# McDonald's Workers Strike Against Sexual Harassment

Sarah Champernowne

On September 18, 2018, McDonald's workers, who have also been fighting for \$15 an hour, went on strike against sexual harassment in 10 cities across the U.S.. This walkout, backed by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), is historic as the first ever nation-wide strike explicitly against sexual harassment. Building on the #MeToo phenomenon from the past year, it was led not by the elites of Hollywood or D.C., but working class women, and especially women of color.

In May, ten McDonald's employees, after multiple incidents of sexual harassment, bravely spoke up and filed a federal complaint against the company and their unwillingness to address issues of sexism and sexual harassment. But after months, nothing was done to address the problem, so workers decided to walk off the job to force the company to take their complaints seriously. Hundreds of workers participated in the powerful lunch-hour

walkout.

On the website workers created for the walkout they list out a clear set of excellent demands:

- ☘ Enforce the existing zero-tolerance policy against sexual harassment,
- ☘ Hold mandatory anti-harassment trainings for managers and employees
- ☘ Create a safe system for responding to complaints
- ☘ Form of a committee (including restaurant workers) to address sexual harassment

### Women's Labor Struggles Continue to Spread

Fast food workers organized by SEIU were at the forefront of the fight for a \$15 minimum wage several years ago that led to victories in Seattle, Minneapolis, and other cities. This time the workers organizing this McDonald's strike are taking action as part of an existing movement, not only against sexual harassment

but also the beginning of a resurgence in the labor movement. Over the past several years, and increasingly since Trump's inauguration, an upsurge of radical political and strike action started in sectors of labor traditionally dominated by women.

Who's been lifting labor back up? Teachers, nurses, hotel workers, and now fast-food workers. National Nurses United (NNU) didn't just endorse Bernie Sanders but rank and file members organized themselves energetically for his campaign. This past spring the West Virginia teachers set off a wave of teacher strikes across the country, and just this summer hospitality workers rose up and won panic buttons for housekeeping staff that experience harassment and assault from guests.

The McDonald's walkout reminds us that it's time for #MeToo to hit the streets, our classrooms, and our workplaces, in solidarity with low-wage women and trans\* workers, the most likely to experience sexual harassment at work.

### Unions Need to Lead Movement Forward

Ordinary people cannot rely on the same huge public platform famous actors have to support them in standing up to harassment. For working people, a strong union willing to back them up with legal fees and protection from retaliation makes coming forward more possible.

Although most workers in the U.S. are non-unionized, interest in unions has increased tremendously. Existing unions should boldly take up this opportunity so that no woman has to be afraid of retaliation from their boss. The fight against sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace needs the combined strength of public campaigns by labor, emerging independent political organizations like DSA, and women's organizations at the federal, state, and local levels. The McDonald's strike, as well as strikes by teachers and hotel workers, are an exciting step in this direction. ☘

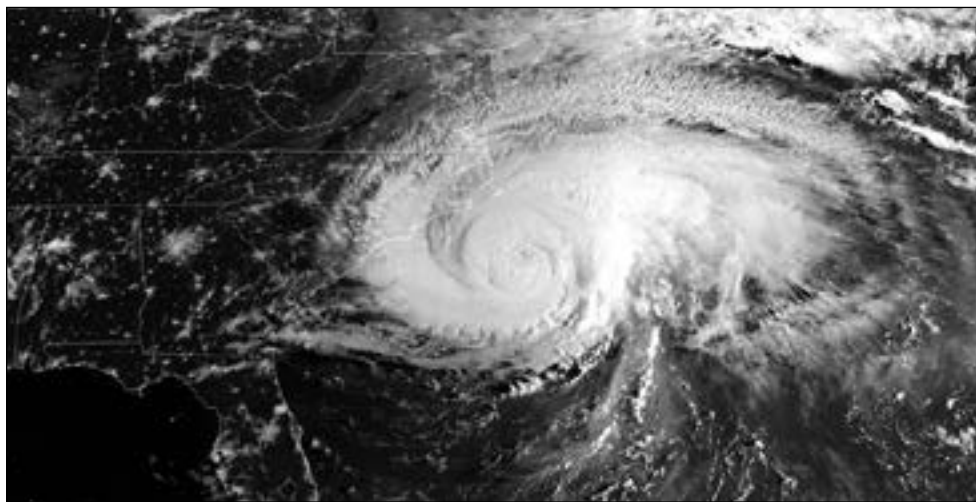
Hurricane Florence

# Global Warming Fuels Destruction

Eva Metz

Unleashing a torrent of destruction in the wettest storm to ever hit the Carolinas, Hurricane Florence engulfed farms, overflowing open pits of hog feces; flooded coal ash ponds, inundating waterways with toxic byproducts; killed dozens, and destroyed thousands of homes.

In an era that many are calling the “anthropocene” - characterized by the decisive human impact on the environment - supercharged, devastating climate catastrophes are becoming the new normal. Mitch Colvin, the Mayor of Fayetteville, acknowledged that with the intensity of recent storms, it’s clear that “something has happened” related to climate change: “You know, this is our second 500-year storm in two years.”



Hurricane Florence hits the Carolinas as seen from satellite.

## Unnatural “Natural Disasters”

California wildfires, Hurricanes Harvey, Maria, and now Florence - there is nothing “natural” about the havoc wreaked by these recent disasters.

The five hottest years on record have all occurred since 2010. Higher temperatures and extreme weather patterns make wildfires more likely and more severe, while warmer sea temperatures and rising sea levels “supercharge” hurricanes, intensifying their impact and damage. One study estimates that climate change increased the volume and extent of rainfall from Florence by 50%.

The impact of these storms is amplified by politicians from both parties who protect the profits of big business and wealthy developers over the interests of working people and the environment. Most of the nearly 3,000 deaths from Hurricane Maria were caused not by the storm itself but by systematic underfunding of basic public services and an abysmal response from the Trump administration

which left many in Puerto Rico without electricity for 11 months. In 2012, in order to artificially prop up real estate values, conservative North Carolina lawmakers even passed a bill preventing policy makers from using the latest science on rising sea levels to plan for coastal development!

Trump, a climate denier, has blatantly prioritized his reactionary agenda - especially attacks against immigrants - over the needs of the millions affected by Hurricane Florence. Estimates project Florence’s damage to tally \$38-\$50 billion. But what has the Trump administration focused on instead? Further underfunding disaster response, diverting \$10 million from FEMA to fund immigration detention centers. Many undocumented immigrants in areas affected by the storm understandably feared deportation if they sought help. An ICE spokesman said that they would not carry out raids in areas affected by the storm, yet an administrator with FEMA also said that he could not “guarantee” that undocumented immigrants would be safe.

## Need for a Political Alternative

Politicians and their corporate backers often emphasize the importance of a consumer driven approach to solving the crisis facing the environment. This can be seen through the new drive by food chains to minimize their customers’ use of plastic straws. Yet this greatly misses the mark on the who the real drivers of climate change are. Just 100 companies are responsible for over 70% of global emissions. Even if carbon emissions stopped today, we would still see effects of climate change and rising temperatures. The real culprits in the intensifying climate crisis are massive corporations and the politicians who refuse to bring them to heel. While Trump and reactionary Republicans represent the most egregious refusal to act on climate change, we can’t rely on simply electing Democrats to address this crisis.

In response to Trump pulling out of the Paris Climate Accord, California’s Democratic Governor Jerry Brown organized the Global Climate Action Summit, where politicians,

business leaders, and philanthropists discussed steps to address to the climate crisis. But their proposed “solution” still falls short of the commitments made in Paris Climate Agreement. The Paris Agreement itself, even if fully implemented, would still fail to keep global warming under two degrees Celsius, an amount that already would have a dramatic impact on the environment. The impending catastrophe of climate change cannot be resolved through piecemeal, market-based reform.

Earlier this year, under pressure from below, the Democratic National Committee voted to ban contributions from fossil fuel companies. Within two months, they had completely backtracked and tried to cover their capitulation to the energy industry by citing objections from some unions. Too often, substantial action on the environment is falsely pitted against the preservation of union jobs. A socialist plan for the environment would create millions of living-wage jobs, taking the big energy companies into democratic public ownership, retooling them for green production, and transitioning all workers in polluting industries into living wage jobs.

Under capitalism, natural disasters are used as an excuse for corporate interests and real-estate developers to ram through privatization of housing, education, and infrastructure, leaving working people to foot the bill. Imagine if, instead, we prioritized climate resilience and genuinely fighting climate change with a massive public investment in renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies to rapidly replace fossil fuels. Only a planned economy, democratically controlled by workers, will be able to transform the profit-driven, fossil-fuel reliant capitalist system to a green economy that can meet the needs of people and the planet. ☘

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## KAVANAUGH: THREAT TO WOMEN AND WORKING PEOPLE **BUILD THE MASS WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

Erin Brightwell

The Senate testimony of Christine Blasey Ford and Brett Kavanaugh has reignited the #MeToo movement. Millions watched live as Blasey Ford was unwavering in her testimony, and Kavanaugh fought back by painting himself as a victim, albeit a belligerent and dishonest one. Anger at sexual abuse, and its casual acceptance by the ruling class, is reaching a boiling point.

As we go to press, Trump and the Republicans have conceded a "limited" FBI review of Kavanaugh. This is a partial victory in the face of widespread outrage and gives time to build mass demonstrations. It is still possible to defeat Kavanaugh's nomination. This would be an enormous victory for MeToo and could be the starting point of a true mass movement against Trump and the Republican agenda.

On the other hand if the Republicans manage to push Kavanaugh through it will be a defeat for women, LGBTQ people and working people generally who are all threatened by an even more reactionary tilt on the Supreme Court.

### Elite Culture Exposed

Brett Kavanaugh should have been forced to withdraw on the basis of his right-wing politics and the threat he poses, particularly to reproductive rights and *Roe v. Wade*, which is supported by 64% of Americans. He also has a long record as a judge

of consistently taking the side of corporations over their employees. But if his nomination is defeated, it will be due to the mass anger at sexual abuse reflected in the #MeToo movement, and not at all to the so-called resistance of the Democratic Party establishment.

The Kavanaugh sexual assault allegations have exposed the culture at the elite, private high schools, and Ivy League university fraternities and societies. This is a horrifying, misogynistic world where there is literally a culture of raping women that is passed from generation to generation of ruling-class youth. This is the culture that future judges, politicians, CEOs and presidents are steeped in, one in which rich, white men make a game of objectifying, humiliating, and assaulting women.

### Political Establishment in Crisis

The Republican leadership appears to have learned nothing from the reaction of women to Trump's history of sexual abuse. Fearing that the chance to get another right-wing justice onto the Supreme Court could be slipping out of their grasp, especially if they lose control of the Senate in the midterms, they appear willing to brand themselves as the party of predator enablers if that's what it takes.

Prior to Christine Blasey Ford coming forward, Kavanaugh's confirmation seemed all but assured. The Democratic Party leadership refused to enforce a party line vote

on Kavanaugh for fear of hurting midterm chances of Democratic Senators in states Trump won. The Democrats' "resistance" was limited to some combative questioning in the Senate confirmation hearings.

### Women Fight Back

From the Women's Marches to the recent McDonald's strikes against sexual harassment, women have shown they are ready to move into action against sexual abuse.

Increasingly, there is a contradiction developing between the willingness of ordinary women to fight back and the Democratic Party establishment which does virtually nothing to organize a real resistance movement in the streets and the workplaces. The Democrats fear that once women, young people, and working people experience a big victory through struggle they will demand changes that may not be acceptable to the party's billionaire backers.

Currently there is understandably a massive desire on the left to punish the Republicans by electing Democrats. There are also significant expectations in the record number of women running and especially in the candidates running and winning on a pro working class program similar to that of Bernie Sanders, some as open socialists. The whole situation points to a sharp fight with the leadership of the Democrats in 2019, if they control the House, on impeachment, Medicare for All, as well as taking real steps forward on

women's rights.

Big sections of U.S. society and young people in particular have been moving to the left in recent years on economic issues, LGBTQ rights, union rights, and fighting racism and sexism. #MeToo, galvanized by the predator Trump's election has the misogyny of the elites in its sights. This is sparking a broader women's movement in the streets, communities and workplaces to take on the epidemic of sexual harassment and sexual assault but also to defend the gains women have made from the relentless attacks of the right.

From fast food restaurants to the highest court in the nation, a movement that utilizes the traditions of the working class - mass protests, direct actions, and strikes - can force the ruling class and political establishment to make serious concessions on women's rights. This movement also needs a program that challenges the ruling class and capitalism which perpetuates sexism, racism and mass inequality. We stand for a socialist feminism that points towards an egalitarian society where a privileged elite would no longer exist.

- ✦ Unions, women's organizations, and other forces must launch a mass campaign against sexual harassment in the workplace.
- ✦ Defend *Roe v. Wade*: for free, legal, accessible abortion as part of a national Medicare for All health system.
- ✦ No predators on the Supreme Court or in the White House, Impeach Trump. ✦