

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

ISSUE #50 • FEBRUARY 2019
SUGGESTED DONATION \$2

SHUT DOWN TRUMP

FIGHT FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING
AND MEDICARE FOR ALL

ALSO INSIDE

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WHAT WE STAND FOR

FIGHTING FOR THE 99%

Raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour, as a step toward a living wage for all.

Free, high quality public education for all from pre-school through college. Full funding for schools to dramatically lower student-teacher ratios. Stop the focus on high stakes testing and the drive to privatize public education.

Free, high quality health care for all. Replace the failed for-profit insurance companies with a publicly funded single-payer system as a step towards fully socialized medicine.

No budget cuts to education and social services! Full funding for all community needs. A major increase in taxes on the rich and big business, not working people.

Create living-wage union jobs for all the unemployed through public works programs to develop mass transit, renewable energy, infrastructure, healthcare, education, and affordable housing.

For rent control combined with massive public investment in affordable housing.

A guaranteed decent pension for all. No cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid!

A minimum guaranteed weekly income of \$600/week for the unemployed, disabled, stay-at-home parents, the elderly, and others unable to work.

Repeal all anti-union laws like Taft-Hartley. For democratic unions run by the rank-and-file to fight for better pay, working conditions, and social services. Full-time union officials should be regularly elected and receive the average wage of those they represent.

No more layoffs! Take bankrupt and failing companies into public ownership.

Break the power of Wall Street! For public ownership and democratic control of the major banks.

Shorten the workweek with no loss in pay and benefits; share out the work with the unemployed and create new jobs.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Fight climate change. Massive public investment in renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies to rapidly replace fossil fuels.

A major expansion of public transportation to provide low fare, high-speed, and accessible transit.

Democratic public ownership of the big energy companies, retooling them for socially necessary green production. A "Just Transition" for all workers in polluting industries with guaranteed re-training and new living-wage jobs.

EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL

Fight discrimination based on race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, and all other forms of prejudice. Equal pay for equal work.

Black Lives Matter! Build a mass movement against police brutality and the institutional racism of the criminal justice system. Invest

in rehabilitation, job training, and living-wage jobs, not prisons! Abolish the death penalty. Defend immigrant rights! Immediate, unconditional legalization and equal rights for all undocumented immigrants.

Fight sexual harassment, violence against women, and all forms of sexism.

Defend a woman's right to choose whether and when to have children. For a publicly funded, single-payer health care system with free reproductive services, including all forms of birth control and safe, accessible abortions. Comprehensive sex education. At least 12 weeks of paid family leave for all. For universal, high quality, affordable and publicly run child care.

Fight discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ community, and all forms of homophobia and transphobia.

MONEY FOR JOBS AND EDUCATION, NOT WAR

End the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. Bring all the troops home now!

Slash the military budget. No drones. Shut down Guantanamo.

Repeal the Patriot Act, NDAA, and all other attacks on democratic rights.

BREAK WITH THE TWO PARTIES OF BIG BUSINESS

For a mass workers party drawing together workers, young people and activists from environmental, civil rights, and women's campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the corporate parties.

Unions and other social movement organizations should stop funding and supporting the Democratic and Republican Parties and instead organize independent left-wing, anti-corporate candidates and coalitions as a first step toward building a workers' party.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

Capitalism produces poverty, inequality, environmental destruction, and war. We need an international struggle against this failed system. No to corporate "free trade" agreements, which mean job losses and a race to the bottom for workers and the environment.

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

Take into public ownership the top 500 corporations and banks that dominate the U.S. economy. Run them under the democratic management of elected representatives of the workers and the broader public. Compensation to be paid on the basis of proven need to small investors, not millionaires.

A democratic socialist plan for the economy based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people and the environment. For a socialist United States and a socialist world.

WHY I AM A SOCIALIST

I could write at length about every single reason why I am a socialist, but there is a single reason that I think is by far the most important. The largest single reason why I'm a dedicated socialist is that we only have so long to stop the effects of global climate catastrophe. A UN report released last year described how we could see global food shortages, massive forced migration, sea level rises, and other nightmares as soon as 2040. I'm 21 years old now and I'll be around 45 years old when that starts to disrupt our world. I'm in school right now to be a teacher because I have a passion for education and a commitment to the youth. I feel I would be failing my students if I wasn't doing everything I could to solve the biggest problem threatening their future.

This is a crisis that capitalism created and one that it can't fully address. The massive political influence of big businesses – namely fossil fuel corporations – makes fighting for any kind of regulation or environmental protection an uphill battle. Without taking all of the major polluting energy corporations into our own hands and running them democratically, it will be nearly impossible to stop the damage of climate change. If we want to be able to face the single biggest issue facing our planet we need a bolder approach that isn't afraid to break with the past or challenge



Cole Weirich

Cincinnati, OH

the power of the elites. Being a socialist offers a method of understanding and fighting back against a million injustices in our society. Building a socialist society is the only way we can end the existential threat to humanity that climate change poses and ensure a safe, livable future for ourselves and our children.

Green New Deal Gains Popularity Corporate Democrats Shut it Down

Jordan Quinn

In November of last year, young activists with Sunrise Movement held a sit-in at Nancy Pelosi's office in DC demanding that she support a select committee on climate change to propose a Green New Deal. They were joined by newly elected democratic socialist Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) who has since been a champion of the Green New Deal demand.

The general proposal that AOC has advocated would rapidly transition U.S. energy production to 100% renewables by 2030 through a federal jobs program that guarantees retraining and job placement for workers currently in fossil fuel jobs. It's no understatement to say this would be the boldest action ever taken to combat climate change in the U.S. Actual legislation could have been drafted by a select committee on a Green New Deal in the House, but Nancy Pelosi struck it down and formed a toothless committee.

Climate change is a global issue and an international movement of working people is vital if we want to stop it. It will take massive mobilizations, like the 2014's People's Climate March, to win the bold step for a Green New Deal program.

But we need an even bigger transformation to end climate change. We should combine the proposal for a green jobs program with a call for taking the fossil fuel companies into democratic public ownership and retooling them for sustainable production in the interests of workers and the environment as part of a necessary overall

socialist transformation of society.

How Could We Win a Green New Deal?

The biggest obstacle confronting the Green New Deal isn't low popularity or Republican obstruction, it's big oil's influence in the Democratic Party itself. A recent poll found that 80% of registered voters support a Green New Deal, including 92% of Democrats and 64% of Republicans. But the Democratic establishment, Trump, and Republican politicians all oppose the Green New Deal. Fundamentally they defend corporate interests.

AOC proposed to fund a Green New Deal with a 70% marginal tax rate on incomes over \$10 million. This is a bold demand though as some have pointed out it's not unprecedented given that in the 1950s the marginal tax rate on the super rich was actually 90%. We should tax the rich, who have profited off of destroying our environment, to fund green jobs!

While it is very significant to have even a handful of progressive public representatives taking a bold stand, the determining factor in winning social change is the strength of mass movements. A mass movement being democratically organized through a new party, rooted in the working class and oppressed communities could win a Green New Deal. Armed with a socialist program it could win a new world.

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Threat of Workers Action Leads to Trump Retreat

Shutdown Horror Over: What Now?

Tom Crean

January 25 – As we go to press, President Trump's has been forced to retreat from his demand that the Democrats agree to fund a border wall as the price for reopening the government.

But while the Democrats refused, under pressure from their base, to cave to this demand, they were in no way prepared to mobilize the forces needed to win this fight.

It took working class action to force Trump's hand. As the weeks of the shutdown dragged on it became clear that the airports and air traffic system were reaching the breaking point because of the huge pressures on federal employees including TSA workers and the air traffic controllers, all of whom were required to work without pay. Already call outs from TSA workers had forced the temporary closure of terminals at some airports.

This morning it was announced that LaGuardia airport in New York was being temporarily shut and that other airports might be shut because air traffic controllers were not coming into work in sufficient numbers. This was not an official strike but the Air Traffic Controllers Association did make clear it supported their members. Their president Paul Rinaldi declared, "Controllers are stressed; they're worried; they're tired; they're distracted. And they're not going to come to work if they're not fit for duty." While the FAA authorities were able to scramble and get the system back up in a few hours, the message had been sent.

There was enormous sympathy from other airport and airline workers. When the airports appeared to be starting to shut down, Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, which represents 50,000 flight attendants in 20 airlines, urged her members to go to the offices of their congressional representatives until the shutdown was resolved, declaring, "We're mobilizing immediately." When asked if this meant that flight attendants would not be going to work, she responded, "Showing up to work for what? If air traffic controllers can't do their jobs, we can't do ours."

Literally within hours, the shutdown was over with Trump saying that he would sign legislation to reopen the government with no money for the wall. But this is a temporary three-week reopening with negotiations on "border security." While Trump threatened to shut down the government again at the end of three weeks if he doesn't get agreement

on money for a wall, it is very hard to see how triggering another shutdown would be a sustainable political position. Nevertheless, unions should continue mobilizing and making it clear that another shutdown will be met with more decisive action. This position would have massive popular support.

What Socialists Said About the Shutdown

While the whiff of working-class action played a crucial role in ending the government shutdown, it was also clear that the shutdown was having increasingly dire effects and huge pressure was mounting to bring it to an end. Millions of working people were affected, including the 800,000 federal employees who were not receiving a paycheck as well as the hundreds of thousands of contract workers who not only were not being paid but will receive no back pay. If the shutdown had continued, tens of millions of people faced losing SNAP food benefits. There were increasing warnings that the shutdown could be the trigger for a recession.

Socialist Alternative completely rejected Trump's racist campaign for a wall, premised on an invasion of "criminals" and "terrorists" causing a national security crisis. We pointed out that:

"In the face of astronomic health care costs, \$1.5 trillion in total student debt, low wages, and exorbitant housing costs in the big cities – daily concerns for many working-class people – being murdered by somebody who is statistically no more likely to commit murder than anybody else is hardly the biggest 'security' concern for working people and their families."

We called on the labor movement to organize mass demonstrations to support federal workers around the demands to end the shutdown and "No Unpaid Work." We pointed toward workplace action especially at the airports which are key to the functioning of the U.S. economy.

As the shutdown dragged on, Trump was losing the argument in the court of public opinion. Over the past two years there was growing support in the Republican base for the wall demand. But the recent midterm election in which Trump's main theme was the "national emergency" allegedly being caused by the immigrant caravan from Central America led to a major defeat for the Republicans.



During the shutdown, Trump and his super-rich cabinet ministers made one tone deaf statement after another showing how out of touch they are with the reality faced by federal workers who were lining up in ever greater numbers at food banks around the country.

Trump's disapproval ratings have reached a record level, up to 58% in one poll, with even many supporters of the wall questioning whether the shutdown was justified. At the same time, the hard right will no doubt scream betrayal at Trump's climbdown; this will deepen the crisis facing Trump.

Seize the Momentum

Trump has suffered a major blow but it is entirely possible that the Democrats will help him out by making a rotten deal, giving him more money for "border security" which Trump can present as a step toward the wall in exchange for removing the threat of deportation for Dreamer youth in the DACA program.

Meanwhile Trump's other difficulties are mounting with increasingly problematic revelations from the Mueller and other investigations. The Democrats will now be able to use their control of the House of Representatives to begin even more investigations of Trump and his associates.

It is significant that the Democratic leadership, including Pelosi, is no longer categorically rejecting the idea of starting impeachment proceedings as they did before. Rather they are saying they will wait to see what Mueller's report says and whether it provides clear evidence of obstruction of justice and "collusion" with Putin.

We are for impeaching Trump for his real crimes. Undoubtedly he is a deeply corrupt

individual with relationships with various unsavory elements including Russian "oligarchs." But for us the key issue is absolutely not Russia nor its interference in the 2016 election which did not fundamentally affect the outcome.

Trump's real crimes include but are not limited to: seeking to exacerbate racial division and giving aid and comfort to white nationalists; seeking to end a woman's right to choose by packing the Supreme Court with hard right ideologues; demonizing immigrants; separating children from parents at the border and confining them indefinitely; and willful environmental destruction on behalf of the billionaires as we face climate catastrophe.

One certainly can't exclude that the Democrats may find themselves forced to go further than they intended against Trump. But the key lesson of the end of the shutdown is that if we want to defeat Trump, fight the agenda of the right and win key gains like Medicare for All or a Green New Deal, we can in no way rely on the Democrats. Defeating the right requires a mass movement of all those targeted by the reactionaries, centered on the enormous social power of the U.S. working class. This is the power which the entire capitalist establishment fears.

This power was also on display in Los Angeles where the six-day teachers' strike ended in a limited but important victory. Likewise there have been important union organizing drives in the airports and other workplaces in the recent period. The inspiring stand of air traffic controllers can give a boost to these organizing drives pointing to further struggles ahead. Trump being pushed back is a real victory: we must seize the momentum and go on the offensive!

Who Runs Our Cities: Big Business or Working People?

Why We Need Socialists in Public Office Now More Than Ever

Kshama Sawant

As we launched my socialist re-election campaign for Seattle City Council last week, we did so in a very different political context than when I was first elected as a Socialist Alternative candidate in 2013. Since then, U.S. politics have entered into a period of growing political and social upheaval in which interest in socialist ideas has rapidly developed.

Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential primary campaign made "socialism" the year's most searched-for word online, and his identification as a democratic socialist inspired millions of young and working-class people to seek an alternative to the pro-capitalist political establishment. More recently, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has pushed excitement in socialist ideas to a new high with her proposals to tax income over \$10 million at 70% and create a Green New Deal to transition the country away from fossil-fuels while creating hundreds of thousands of living-wage jobs.

More registered voters now identify as independents than either Democrats or Republicans. This trend is even stronger among young people with 71% of millennials saying they think the country needs a third major party to represent the interests of ordinary people.

While this dramatic growth in support for socialist policies might seem surprising to some, it is a natural response to the declining living standards facing working-class Americans and the failure of capitalism to offer a future for young people. Nowhere in the country can a person working a full-time minimum wage job afford rent for a 2-bedroom apartment. Nearly half of all Americans would struggle to pay an unexpected \$500 medical bill, and today's college graduates will be paying off student loans well into their 40s. Combine this with the increasingly devastating forest fires and mega-storms wreaking havoc as a result of climate change and the appalling rise of far-right hate groups, and it's not hard to see why ordinary Americans are desperate for meaningful change.

A Broken Political System

Our current social and political system is clearly not working for most people, and polls show bold progressive policies like Medicare for All, Ocasio-Cortez's 70% tax on income over \$10 million, and increasing government spending on affordable housing enjoy enormous support. Yet the political establishment of both the Democratic and Republican parties is doing everything possible to resist these demands. The question now facing American workers and youth is less "what changes are needed" and moreover "what will it take to

achieve them?"

For decades, Socialist Alternative has argued that to win policies that benefit them, working people need a political party that is accountable to their interests rather than those of giant corporations and the super rich. At the end of the day, elected officials whose campaigns and parties are dependent on big business for funding will go to great lengths to stay in their patrons' good graces.

This was clearly on display in Seattle last March. Democratic Mayor Jenny Durkan and the majority-Democratic city council called an emergency meeting to overturn the "Amazon Tax." A modest tax on the top 3% of big businesses, it would have raised \$40 million each year to fund the construction of social housing in the face of one of the worst affordable housing crises in the country. Thousands of ordinary people, along with my office, had fought for it for months. Despite claiming that affordable housing was their number-one priority, the mayor and 7 of the 9 councilmembers caved to threats from Amazon to pull jobs and investment from the city and repealed the tax they had just unanimously passed.

Housing Crisis In Seattle and Nationwide

Almost a year later, the mayor and council have yet to even propose an alternative solution to Seattle's housing crisis, and when my city council brought 11 different options to fund affordable housing last fall, the pro-corporate majority on the council voted against every one of them. Time and time again, these corporate politicians react immediately to the concerns of big business while cycling through a rote list of excuses of why they can't act on the needs of ordinary people.

Seattle, like many other cities, is rapidly becoming a playground for the rich, while working people, small businesses, people of color, and LGBTQ people are being displaced out of the city. The for-profit housing market has clearly failed us. Seattle has been the national leader in number of construction cranes three years running, yet the crisis of affordable housing remains among the worst in the country. Meanwhile, skyrocketing housing costs and weak tenant rights laws have combined to lead to an epidemic of evictions. On average, one person in my district is evicted every other day, with communities of color experiencing the highest rates of eviction.

We need to build tens of thousands of units



Kshama Sawant's reelection launch announcement.

of social housing, paid for by taxing Amazon and big business, to provide a public alternative to the broken private development system. And we need rent control to stop skyrocketing rents.

Who Runs Seattle?

After the shocking repeal of the Amazon Tax last spring, many ordinary Seattlites are asking the question "who runs this city, us or Amazon?"

Over the last six years as a city councilmember, I've seen firsthand the corrosive effects of corporate power and lobbyists in the back rooms of city hall. That's why my campaign is not for sale. As always, I don't take a dime from corporations, CEOs, lobbyists, or big developers. My campaign is fueled entirely by grassroots donations. Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, myself, and many others have shown this is possible. Accepting corporate donations is a clear sign to the business establishment that you intend to use your office to forward their interests - and they will expect results.

Not accepting corporate money is only one way elected officials can use their campaigns and offices to empower ordinary people. Equally important is using your platform to help build the strength of grassroots movements fighting for progressive change.

Over the years, my office has worked with activists and workers to build broad grassroots campaigns and win major victories around the \$15 minimum wage, public housing, blocking a \$160 million police bunker, tenants' rights, among many, many others.

Our annual People's Budget events aimed at bringing the needs and voices of ordinary people into the city's budget-making process has brought thousands to city hall for the first time, and has succeeded each year in winning funding for vital issues ignored by the corporate and political establishment.

Instead of holding closed-door meetings with CEOs and lobbyists, I use my office to organize rallies, marches, protests, and community meetings, so that my office can be genuinely accessible and base itself on the power of working people. Because of this, I have earned the reputation of being "the only city councilmember who will listen to you," and my office receives far more calls and emails from constituents than any other city councilmember - including from residents of districts other than my own. We will continue to fight relentlessly for the urgent needs of Seattle residents, but we must also urgently work to elect more socialists and working class representatives to city hall.

Socialist Politics Needed

As a socialist, it's crucial to use the public profile of elected office to fight alongside workers and their unions. I've walked on the picket line with striking fast food workers, ATU transit workers, Teamster school bus drivers, and Seattle Education Association teachers, and used my office to advance their struggles in every way possible. I was proud to have John Frazier, President of WFSE Local 3488 at Harborview Medical Center stand with

continued on p. 10

LA Teachers Defeat Privatizers

Chris Carroll

After a six day strike, United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) on Tuesday, January 22, ratified a new contract with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). This was the biggest and most important strike yet in the nationwide teachers' revolt that began in West Virginia last March and spread to a series of other states. The teachers' revolt is encouraging workers in other industries to stand up and can be the beginning of rebuilding a fighting labor movement in this country.

The Los Angeles teachers picket lines were solid and well-attended throughout the strike and were joined by working-class parents and students who supported the strike overwhelmingly. The union held mass, exuberant rallies on an almost daily basis. The new agreement received the support of 81% of union members. It secured several tangible gains for the teachers: an increase in support staff (nurses, counselors, and librarians) with various phase-ins of up to three years; less standardized testing; a 6% raise; a reduction in class sizes; and the elimination of the hated "Section 1.5" which the district had previously used to declare an emergency and disregard all class size caps.

This is a victory for teachers and the broader working class. A UTLA loss would have been a victory for the discredited education "reformers" and their plan to privatize and dismantle public education not only in Los Angeles but across the country.

The UTLA strike has now placed ending the corporate privatization of the schools firmly on the agenda of the Los Angeles working class. A call to tax the rich to fully fund education and for a statewide moratorium on further charter schools must be taken up by the unions. They must build on the momentum of this historic strike and continue mobilizing the parents and students toward more decisive victories.

Some teachers and parents will ask: Could the union have won more? Some may even feel let down at the scope of the victory, which was not decisive, based on the energy that went into the strike. This is understandable and it is possible more could have been won. But there was also the real consideration for the union that a prolonged strike risked reducing the magnificent level of support from parents.

The first battle was won. But the well-funded forces behind the drive to destroy public education through privatization and starving it of resources will not give up easily. Winning this fight will require escalating statewide and national action. This fight can now also be connected to the housing

struggle and the fight for single-payer health care in California.

Taking the Fight Forward

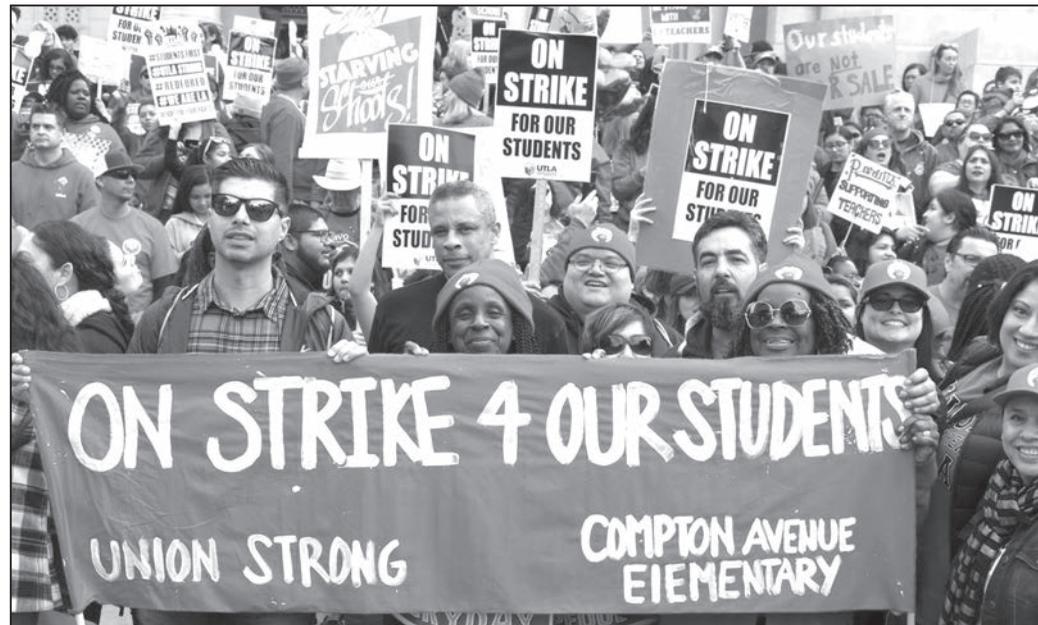
The agreement puts LAUSD and the mayor's office on record to "jointly advocate for increased county and state funding [for education]." However, we know that lobbying will not be enough to fund LA and California public education. To win fully-funded public education and stop the privatization and charterization, a California-wide movement is needed. Teachers and their unions should organize for a statewide one-day teachers strike that could be called as part of a national day of action for funding public schools.

In this struggle, more per-pupil funding and a cap on new charters were not contractual issues, but by pushing for them UTLA has shown how public sector unions can build massive public support by placing community demands at the center of their fight.

The Politics of Funding

The California Democratic Party has enjoyed a super-majority at the state and Los Angeles County levels for years. It is the Democrats themselves who have overseen and implemented the starvation and privatization of public schools. It is not credible to expect them to suddenly reverse course and deliver proper funding for public schools. Both in California and nationally, the leadership of the Democratic Party is beholden to the interests of the corporations and Wall Street, not to the interests of working people. To fight for quality public education, Medicare for All, and other working-class interests, working people need a party of our own that has no ties to the billionaires.

The LA teachers' strike shows that workers have enormous power in the economy and on the streets. We can collectively build massive public pressure through strikes, mass demonstrations, and direct actions to win education funding. With Oakland teachers about to strike, workers have another chance to bring coordinated pressure to bear upon not only Oakland Unified School District, but also the state government in Sacramento. Preparations should be made for a one-day statewide teacher walkout alongside a national day of action for public education. Denver and Virginia teachers, both on the path to a strike, could join the action. A one-day wildcat strike such as this would shake the political establishment from Sacramento to Washington, D.C.



Teacher Revolt Spreads to Oakland

Rob Rooke
Oakland Parent

When the Oakland Unified School District announced that they would be closing 24 out of Oakland's 87 schools at the same time as the teachers began preparing for a strike in February, they essentially declared war on the people of Oakland. And the parents, teachers, and wider community are preparing a massive fightback in response.

On Saturday January 11, several thousand people marched on City Hall, in a sea of red banners demanding the schools our kids deserve. Rank-and-file teachers organized a second wildcat sick-out strike on Friday, January 18, closing most of Oakland's high schools. Only five teachers of the 122 staff at Skyline High showed up to work. Inspired by closing down the school board office that day, rank and file teachers from 14 schools united with parents, staff, and students in shutting down the School District Board meeting on Wednesday January 23.

School Closures

When School Board leaders left voice-mails for parents of the East Oakland elementary school Roots Academy informing them, right before the holidays, that their school was being closed, they must've figured the sucker punch was going to demoralize Roots families. Instead, they are mad as hell, and mobilized to join hundreds of community members to shut down business as usual at the January 23rd Board meeting.

At the same time, teachers across the city are in strike preparation mode, organizing themselves into school site

committees and committees to encourage parents to join them. At a number of schools, students are organizing to discuss walkouts next week to show their solidarity with the teachers.

One teacher, on a recent job action, wore their Starbucks barista apron, explaining that their job as a teacher is so poorly paid that they need another job, adding that they often grade papers on the weekend while on break at Starbucks.

The perpetrators of this misery and destruction are the seven members of the School Board of the Oakland Unified School District. They all get heavy financial backing from pro-privatization non-profits for their election campaigns, yet none of them openly campaign for closing schools or impoverishing our teachers. Their strategy is to destabilize the teaching and parent communities by driving them out of public education, and widening the doors to privately-run charter schools.

In the last week of January, teachers are likely to vote in favor, by a wide margin, for a February strike. The buildup to a full-on confrontation between the District and the people of Oakland is in full swing.

Across Oakland, signs in support of teachers are going up in windows. Community members and teachers are beginning to forge unity. Oakland may not be as big as Los Angeles, but our teachers' strike will certainly pack the same heat and momentum!

For a \$15k immediate hike for young teachers;
No school closures and a charter school moratorium;
A California billionaire tax now.

The State of Black America Today

The article below is of a longer analysis we will be producing on the state of black America and the fight for black liberation today.

Eljeer Hawkins

This August marks the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first 20 enslaved Africans classified as indentured servants to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619. The transatlantic slave trade, chattel slavery, and Jim/Jane Crow after the Civil War were vital in the development and emergence of the United States as an economic and political power in the world. As author Joe William Trotter, Jr. correctly states in his book, *Workers on Arrival: Black Labor in the Making of America*:

“Brought here through the African slave trade specifically for their labor. African Americans produced wealth not only through their labor power and toil without pay but also as ‘commodities’ bought and sold for profit in the capitalist marketplace. They were the most exploited and unequal component of the emerging modern capitalist labor force.”

The black working class and poor have historically waged intense social struggles and

built grassroots movements against institutional racism, economic exploitation, political disenfranchisement, and social alienation. Through fighting for economic, political and racial justice, they sought to be fully recognized as human beings with the right to live a dignified life.

Today, the black working class and poor face a deep crisis. Yes, the “whites only” signs of segregation and alienation do not occupy public facilities; ten years ago the U.S. populace voted for and elected the first black president; and there are more highly successful and visible black people in places of power and influence than ever before in the institutions of U.S. capitalism. However, the vast majority of the Black working class, poor, and youth face a different reality under the crisis-ridden, racist capitalist system.

Five Years Since Ferguson

The killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown Jr. on August 9, 2014 by white law enforcement officer Darren Wilson set the small suburban town of Ferguson, Missouri ablaze with mass rage against an all-white political establishment, militarized law enforcement, and an

indifferent racist court system that has preyed upon Ferguson’s black working class, poor, and youth for decades. The social explosion and activism around Brown’s death put Barack Obama and the ruling elite on the defensive as the Madison Avenue marketing mantra of “post-racial” America was thrown into the waste bin of history. Nine months later, an hour’s drive from the White House, the death of Freddie Gray while in law enforcement custody led to a social upheaval reminiscent of the 1960s, 70s, as well as the 1992 Los Angeles uprising.

What followed was the crystallization of Black Lives Matter (BLM) – a new social expression against law enforcement violence in communities of color and a rejection of the traditional black political leaders like Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson. The existence of BLM and mass protest in the U.S. and globally led to a number of limited reforms being passed, like body cameras on law enforcement officers, demilitarized law enforcement, and scathing reports from the federal government on various law enforcement departments. This in turn led to federal oversight of those departments with the worst record of racism and endemic violence in communities of color.

It was the power of organizing and protest that led to the rare conviction of Jason Van Dyke, the Chicago law enforcement officer who killed 17-year-old Laquan McDonald in October 2014 with 16 shots. The cover-up of Laquan’s killing was a conspiracy that went to the very top of Chicago’s political establishment. The Jason Van Dyke conviction was a shining victory for the movement. However, the recent sentencing decision to give Van Dyke a mere two to six years for second-degree murder, avoiding possible harsher sentencing of over 20 years for aggravated battery charges, coupled with the recent acquittal of three other cops involved in the cover-up, underlines the criminality of the system and how black lives don’t matter under capitalism.

The Obama administration and ruling elite were unable and unwilling to address the root causes of the revolts in Ferguson and



Baltimore, or the countless law enforcement killings around the nation. Neoliberal capitalism has meant the decimation of decent jobs, affordable healthcare, education, and housing, as social inequality grows ever worse. This hits the black working class and poor hardest. On top of that, the two years of Donald Trump’s presidency has emboldened hard-right white nationalists to come out into the open in the U.S.

Black America by the Numbers

The Urban League recently published a major study on *The State of Black America*. As one summary explains, “To put a number on it, African-Americans are at 72.5 percent – less than three-fourths – when it comes to achieving equality with white Americans, according to the study, which addressed economics, health, education, civic engagement and social justice.” (U.S. News And World Report, May 4, 2018).

The lack of wealth in the black community is a generational question that encompasses the effects of institutional racism over many decades and the more recent devastation of the economic crisis of 2007-08 that wiped away an estimated 71 to 92 billion dollars from black households. Black unemployment stands at a record low under 6%, but this does not reflect those that have given up looking for work. Trump has attempted to take credit for this, but black unemployment still remains higher than white unemployment figures and the bulk of the new jobs have been low-paid.

The first two years of Trump’s presidency were defined by national budget proposals that would underfund critical social and public services like Housing and Urban Development and Food Stamps that the working class and poor, particularly the black working class and poor, benefit from. This takes place at a

*Instead we m
mass, multi-race
class movement
prisoners’ rights
reforms to law e
and the prison s*





time where income inequality and poverty are on the rise and wealth is concentrated in so few hands. Trump's thirty-day partial government shutdown has had unconscionable consequences for 800,000 federal workers. For black federal workers who make up 18% of the federal workforce it is a loss of both pay and economic sustainability.

Mass Incarceration and Trump

U.S. capitalism has the diabolical honor of being the nation which warehouses the most human beings in prisons – 2.1 million in all. This is more than in China at the present time. In the recent period BLM, prisoners' rights activists, striking prisoners, and their families have fought back against mass incarceration and its effects on communities of color.

The struggle against the prison system began a discussion and debate among the political establishment and both political parties of big business about the costs and effects of the prison system on states' budgets, as well as its overall purpose. Mass incarceration has been an essential weapon in the toolbox of U.S. capitalism

since the end of the global economic crisis of the mid-1970s. It is a form of social control, warehousing, and storage of surplus labor that was idle in society. Its origin and that of the "war on drugs" also lie in the perceived revolutionary threat of black working-class youth during the height of the black freedom movement. It grew rapidly during the Clinton administration which pursued a relentless neoliberal agenda.

The First Step Act signed by Trump in late December was a meaningful but limited reform for those that have organized for prison reform for years. As scholar Dan Berger points out, "The act makes it easier for some federal prisoners to seek early release, widens federal judicial discretion in some low-level

sentencing issues and limits some mandatory minimum sentences in federal cases" (Truthout, 1/2/19).

The effect on mass incarceration overall will be limited as it only affects federal prisoners who account for 10% of the prison population. 90% are in state or local prisons. The total prison population has gone down from 2.3 million to 2.1 million, a modest decrease that began in 2008. The First Step Act is an important step forward in strengthening the opposition to mass incarceration, but we must oppose dubious attempts to redesign the prison system, like e-incarceration usage of high-tech surveillance methods and house arrest.

Instead we must build a mass, multi-racial, working-class movement that fights for prisoners' rights and radical reforms to law enforcement and the prison system. We must defend the recent referendum which restored voting rights to 1.5 million ex-prisoners in Florida which the right-wing Republican Governor, Ron DeSantis, and Republican state lawmakers are seeking to undermine. We must also demand no jail time for non-violent offenses, the repealing of all state level three strike rules and minimum sentencing laws, and the release of all elderly prisoners who no longer pose a threat to the community. The movement against mass incarceration must also continue to demand access to jobs, education, and housing for ex-prisoners that would greatly assist in lowering the recidivism rate among ex-prisoners, building an alternative to crime and prisons.

The Black Vote Today

The struggle for democratic and voting rights of the descendants of enslaved Africans has been, and remains, a constant struggle for the black working class and poor. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was a major victory. But this gain has been under relentless attack, especially from the right. From the constitutional crisis of the 2000 Presidential election to the 2018 midterm elections and the

scandals surrounding the gubernatorial races in Georgia and Florida, it is clear how the black franchise is being targeted.

The seeds of the current escalation of voter suppression are rooted in the gutting of the Voting Rights Act. In 2013 the Supreme Court struck down clause 4 of the act, which required states with a known history of racism and voter suppression to receive permission from the federal courts before changing their voting laws. The decision by the Supreme Court reinforced various forms of voter suppression, including voter purging, voter-ID laws, and changing polling locations, already well underway in a number of states by the Republicans. The Democrats have done little to oppose this, despite rhetorically speaking for voting rights. On top of this, gerrymandering has been used to reduce the impact of the black vote and the urban vote generally.

Since the passage of the Voting Rights Act, there have been thousands of black elected officials on a city, state, and national level. The newly-inaugurated 116th Congress has a record number of women and people of color. Some of the newly-elected representatives articulate a progressive agenda which reflects the shift to the left among young people of color but they will now be put to the test. Will they stand up to the leadership of the corporate Democratic Party or capitulate to it like most black politicians did in the past?

Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacy Abrams and Florida gubernatorial candidate Andrew Gillum both stood out for advocating progressive policies that were different from the Democratic political establishment leadership, particularly Gillum. However, as the general election neared, Gillum began to tone down his program points, like calling for a \$15 minimum wage and Medicare for All.

Both their races were too close to call on election night and the Georgia election was particularly affected by voter suppression. As the recounts began they came under mounting pressure from the Democratic Party leadership to wind things down and accept defeat because of the damage that a prolonged fight could cause to the legitimacy of the system. Gillum conceded to the right-wing, Trump supporting Republican nominee Ron DeSantis, and Abrams to Republican Brian Kemp. Kemp was Georgia's secretary of state, who in 2017 purged 100,000 voters from the rolls because they did not vote in the previous election. Stacy Abrams filed a federal lawsuit against the state of Georgia's election officials, seeking reforms to Georgia's election system. While Abrams deserves credit for holding out and pushing back, defeating voter suppression and other attacks on democratic rights is going to require a much more sustained struggle.

In order to defend the black vote, it is vital to build a consistent mass movement rooted in grassroots organizing and protest that

organizes on a daily basis in between election cycles. If a new political party of the working class and poor is to be born, it will have to highlight the defense of voting rights as part of challenging the corporate parties.

After BLM Which Way Forward?

The election victory of Donald Trump opened up a new political paradigm of an open racist, sexist, xenophobic and authoritarian presidency. The various leading voices of BLM, despite their criticisms of Hillary Clinton, would have understandably seen a Clinton victory as a more favorable chance to expand on the limited law enforcement reforms passed in 24 states following the events of Ferguson and Baltimore. Instead, Trump's White House not only has emboldened the forces of hate and reaction, but his first attorney general Jeff Sessions clearly aimed to criminalize BLM and dissent generally, as well as unleashing ICE in immigrant communities.

But more broadly, the black population felt the victory of Trump in a visceral way as a major setback. Black Lives Matter still remains a life-affirming rallying cry to those seeking racial justice. However, as an organized force providing radical leadership, a bold program, and organizational cohesion in this period of crisis, BLM is unfortunately absent. However, even before Trump's ascendancy, BLM was unable to sink deep roots in the black working class and this led the movement to an impasse as there was no clear way forward.

Trump's victory in 2016 was a serious setback, but the situation is beginning to change. The fact that jobs, though badly paid, are still plentiful is helping to give workers, like the McDonalds workers who went on strike against sexual harassment last year, confidence to fight. Also the defeat of the Republicans in the midterms, while it does not immediately solve any of the problems facing working people, is giving them confidence to stand up and fight back, as can be seen in the Los Angeles teachers' strike.

In the last 50 years since the end of the radical civil rights movement and the black power era, black politics has been dominated by insider negotiation, incremental payoffs, and corporate power under racism and capitalism.

Today, we have witnessed the re-emergence of radical and socialist ideas in an embryonic stage of development. The concepts of social struggle, organizing, and solidarity are being reformed in the hellfire of capitalism's unquenchable thirst for profits, power, and prestige. For the black working class, poor, and youth there is a rich history of struggle, movement building, and socialist ideas in the U.S. and internationally that this generation can learn valuable lessons from as we struggle to eradicate institutional racism and capitalism, which depend on and feed each other.

Marxism and the Fight for Black Freedom, Vol. 1

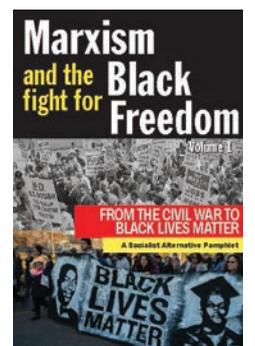
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This pamphlet by Socialist Alternative looks at the role of Marxist ideas and socialist organizations in the black freedom movement from a critical perspective. It outlines a materialist view of the origins and development of racist ideology and structural racism. Finally it explains the Marxist view of the tasks confronting the movement today.

Check out the pamphlet at www.socialistalternative.org



Ocasio-Cortez Exposes the Rot of Corporate Politics

Mass Action and New Party Needed Next

Patrick Ayers

Since being elected to Congress, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the 29 year-old former Bronx bartender and self-described democratic socialist, has been a breath of fresh air for millions of working-class people.

Her first action in D.C., after winning her November election, was to join an occupation by young environmental activists inside Nancy Pelosi's office. Shortly afterward, she tweeted her disgust at being forced to listen to lectures of CEOs at an orientation for new members of the House.

AOC, as she is nicknamed, exposed the problem of unpaid interns in Washington, pushed back at sexist and racist abuse from Republicans, and built a following of 2.4 million people and counting on Twitter. On 60 Minutes in January, she floated the idea of a 70% marginal tax rate for the rich to the horror of the corporate establishment. Her first speech in Congress became C-SPAN's most-watched online clip ever!

Building on Bernie's 2016 campaign, AOC has given confidence to workers and young people to fight for Medicare for All, a green jobs program, free college, and more. Her massive support points to the potential for powerful movements in the period ahead, particularly as capitalism goes further into crisis.

AOC's first several weeks have also revealed obstacles that stand in the way, especially from inside the Democratic Party itself. This

was most clearly demonstrated after Bernie Sanders called on Democrats in the House to oppose Nancy Pelosi's "pay-go" rule that requires any spending increases passed by the new Congress also be accompanied by corresponding cuts. The only Democrats to vote against it were AOC, Ro Khanna, and Tulsi Gabbard.

The Intercept (1/4/19) explained this showed an important "paradox" facing AOC: "Her high-profile platform allows her to shape the national conversation, but the same energy that fueled her rise can be met with a very different reaction inside the walls of the Capitol."

In other words, AOC's ability to win supporters for progressive change is far greater outside the halls of Congress than inside, where the influence of big business dominates. Already, corporate Democrats, have told *Politico* (1/11/19) that they are unhappy with AOC, particularly with her promise to support insurgent primary campaigns similar to her own in the future. An effort described as "part carrot, part stick," is underway to reign her in.

The biggest danger for AOC is not that she alienates corporate Democrats, but that she fails to use her position to help build a much larger fight of working people. The only way to overcome the "paradox" and win far-reaching change is to rely on organized mass movements outside Congress.

From this perspective, AOC has made



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez speaks at the Women's March in New York in January 2019.

some mistakes. Most importantly, she voted for Pelosi as House Speaker. In the end, this got AOC nothing – the special committee she hoped to get for a Green New Deal was ultimately killed by Pelosi.

Overcoming Obstacles

It's not by persuading pro-corporate politicians that we win change. Historically, change has been won when mass movements of working people, such as the wave of industrial strikes in the '30s and '40s and the civil rights movement have posed a serious threat to the capitalist status quo.

We need representatives who use their elected positions as a platform to assist working people to organize and actively fight back in a really big way.

We would encourage AOC to not just see her role as that of a "weathervane," only able to point in the right direction if working people themselves are the "wind." Instead

she is in a unique position to lead from the front and point in the needed direction – like a compass.

At the moment AOC aims to transform the Democrats, but the campaign against her shows this party is not a reliable tool for working people. It is in fact dominated by big business. The establishment will not let their party be taken over and transformed so easily. To defeat the entrenched corporate leadership of the Democratic Party, it will take a huge confrontation against them and a new party representing the interests of working people.

AOC has shown the potential to unite millions of working class people around important fighting demands that would make a huge difference in the lives of many if won. Winning these and other demands will require a mass movement centered on the social power of the working class and pointing toward ending capitalism itself.

Socialists in Action at 2019 Women's Marches

Eva Metz

With the national Women's March organization embroiled in controversy and its leadership seemingly lethargic following the midterm elections, this year's women's marches were significantly smaller than the past two years. Still, hundreds of thousands came out across the country – in some cases braving rain, snowstorms, or temperatures below zero to protest against Trump's right-wing offensive and to continue building a women's movement.

Despite the smaller numbers at women's marches this year, the women's movement is still developing and notably moving into workplace struggle – from the McDonald's strikes against sexual harassment, to the international Google walkouts, to the #Red-For-Ed teachers' strikes, which have been predominantly led by women. Teachers in Los Angeles, for example, while in the middle of a critical strike joined the 30,000-strong crowd at the Women's March this

year in L.A.! 10,000 came out to the Women's March in Oakland, where an upcoming teachers' strike is likely. Socialist Alternative members on the ground reported that "everyone we talked to was fully supporting the teachers."

In Seattle, Socialist Alternative Councilmember Kshama Sawant spoke at the march for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. She highlighted the epidemic of violence that indigenous women face under capitalism, and that Seattle – a supposedly liberal city – ranks worst in the nation for violence against native women. A major contributing factor is the lack of affordable housing in the city, as indigenous people and women in general are too often forced to choose between violent domestic relationships and violence on the streets.

Those who came out to marches were outraged at the dangerous racism embodied by Trump's campaign for a border wall, the Supreme Court appointment of sexual predator Brett Kavanaugh, attacks on reproductive rights, and the government shutdown,

which has left hundreds of thousands of federal workers without pay for weeks. Across the country, there was an openness to the ideas and demands of socialist feminism, and an energy to build the women's movement by linking it with the struggles for affordable housing, free health care, universal childcare, and a living wage.

In some cities, including Philadelphia, New York, and Seattle, splits in the Women's March organizations resulted in multiple demonstrations, which was frustrating and confusing to the many young women looking to build a unified movement. The official Women's March organizations cancelled protests in other cities, such as Chicago, Portland, and Cincinnati, generally citing a lack of resources. The Women's March Chicago, for instance, shamefully cancelled the march this year claiming that their resources had been exhausted building the "Blue Wave" with a "March to the Polls" in October. In effect, this cancellation could serve to demobilize the growing women's movement.

But now is not the time to let up. As Socialist Alternative members from Pittsburgh reported: "Younger demonstrators, service workers, and women of color were especially responsive to the idea that collective resistance was necessary, beyond voting – the main theme of the local Women's March for the past three years." New organizations stepped in to fill the void in some cities, with Socialist Alternative playing a leading role in the organization of women's marches and speakouts in Portland, Cincinnati, and Grand Rapids.

Socialist Alternative members in Chicago found that "many agreed that a new leadership was needed to continue to build the women's movement." As International Women's Day approaches, it's time to build a fighting movement that unites the struggles of women – explicitly including women of color and trans women – with the broader struggles of the working class in mass actions aimed at winning a better life for all working people.

Eyewitness Account of India's General Strike!

Read more on international news at SocialistWorld.net, website of the Committee for a Workers International.



Kshama Sawant

On January 8 and 9 in this new year, the working class of India participated in a massive nationwide general strike. With an estimated 160 to 200 million workers participating, this was likely the largest general strike ever in international history.

The strike action was the result of a united call to action by all of India's trade union confederations, except for the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh associated with the ruling BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party).

The actions in Bengaluru, where I was personally able to attend alongside New Socialist Alternative (CWI-India), were reportedly the largest and the most successful in the nation.

The general strike occurred in the context of brutal poverty and economic inequality that has landed like lashings on the backs of over one-billion working people in the country. With the so-called economic liberalization and privatization since the 1980s, successive capitalist governments in India have worked hand in hand with multinational corporations and a homegrown billionaire class to consolidate untold wealth at the top. Large sections of the population lack sufficient food, basic healthcare, and jobs.

Coming on top of three decades of IMF-dictated policies, the BJP government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have carried out further systematic attacks on the Indian working class, with attempts to weaken existing labor laws. In a serious blow to the living standards of hundreds of millions of workers,

last year the government decided to completely dismantle the hard-fought defined benefit pension, which had for decades been the retirement lifeline for public employees. This is a serious blow to the living standards of hundreds of millions of public employees.

There is also anger among working people at the spike in violence against lower caste people (Dalits) and Muslims under the BJP regime, which has had an orientation toward Hindu fundamentalism and can trace its ideological roots to the right-wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

"Modi Out" was the sharp and predominant mood among workers at the strike rallies. Anger against Modi peaked in the wake of the disastrous "demonetisation" project in 2016. The demonetisation was intended as a populist measure of "purging" the so-called "black money" of the millionaires and billionaires from the economy. This completely backfired and left the country in chaos. Over 100 working people lost their lives either in endless bank lines waiting desperately to exchange demonetized notes or because demonetised notes were not accepted in hospitals, even in emergency situations.

The January strike was extremely important for the trade union movement, but the timing also reveals some of the weaknesses of the trade union leadership. As our sister organization in India, New Socialist Alternative, has pointed out, the ten to twelve-week period after demonetisation was a critical moment for organizing what could have been an earth-shattering general strike due to the



Bengaluru rally during India's general strike against Modi government's policies.

potential for uniting a broad base of working people.

Prominent in the strike rallies in Bengaluru were thousands of women garment workers. We were also struck by how workers from varied religious and caste backgrounds stood and marched united. It was very clear that the workers were open and eager to hear a serious political analysis of the situation and proposals for next steps for the labor movement. It is unfortunate that the trade union leaders did not use the rallies as an opportunity to point the way forward toward the need to continue to get organized with follow-up

actions, and the need for independent political organizations for working people. The speakers instead continually beat the drum for voting against Modi and the BJP in the upcoming elections, which unfortunately implies that working people should vote for the Congress party, which has its own long track record of betrayal of the working class.

I was interviewed by local television media at the rallies, and I was able to make the point about the need to build an independent working class socialist political force, and it was clear there was huge openness to our ideas among many young workers there.

Workers Fight Hungarian "Slave Law"

George Martin Fell Brown

Last year, Hungary's authoritarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, seemed unstoppable. His right-wing Fidesz party won last April's general election in a landslide, winning two-thirds of the seats in parliament. But since the end of December, people have been taking to the streets on a scale unseen since the crisis that first brought Orbán to power in 2010. For the first time since the collapse of Stalinism, a general strike is being posed as a serious possibility in Hungary.

The protests are directed against new anti-worker legislation. The legislation, dubbed the "slave law," allows employers to force their employees to work as much as 400 hours overtime per year. Payment for this overtime work can be delayed by as long as three years, without any need to adjust the delayed payments for inflation. Normally legislation this extreme would require extensive parliamentary debate and consultation with

the trade unions. But the Fidesz government made use of legal loopholes to ram the legislation through in a single day.

The Far-Right in Power

Orbán came to power in 2010 following mass disillusionment with the way the neo-liberal government of the Hungarian Socialist Party handled the 2008 financial crisis. Without an organized working-class opposition to the Socialist Party, Orbán and Fidesz were able to fill the vacuum with appeals to right-wing Hungarian nationalism, thinly veiled anti-Semitism, and scapegoating of refugees. This was accompanied by superficially left-wing measures to increase taxes on multinational corporations and to re-nationalize some privatized services. Measures intended to prop up Hungarian capitalism at the expense of its competitors.

In power, Orbán has cracked down on democratic rights. The constitution was rewritten to give more power to the Fidesz

party. These powers were used to increase government control over the media, the universities, and the judiciaries. In 2017 student protests broke out over the government shutting down the Central European University. The state-run media justified this by promoting anti-Semitic conspiracy theories about George Soros, a founder of CEU. The conspiracy theories have continued during the current protests with the media calling the working-class protesters "the servants of Soros."

What's significant about the protests against the "slave law," besides their scale, is the prominence of the working class and trade unions in heading the protests. The trade unions were silent for most of Orbán's attacks, impeded by anti-union legislation and conservative leaderships. But now, the protests are bringing out meatpackers, miners, teachers, metal workers, and many other sectors of the workforce. Unions are threatening to hold a general strike unless Orbán scraps the legislation. Although this

hasn't materialized yet, "warning strikes" such as a strike of 4,000 Audi workers in Western Hungary have taken place.

A strike movement that can effectively counter the government is implicit in the situation, with the potential to bring down the Orbán government. But this poses the question of what comes next. The mainstream opposition parties, such as the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Christian Democratic People's Party, have been trying to curry favor with the demonstrators. But they harken back to the pro-EU, pro-austerity governments that were discredited during the 2008 financial crisis. These parties are so discredited that the neo-fascist Jobbik party was able to emerge as the biggest opposition party in April's elections. Ultimately, it will need a strong workers' party, armed with a socialist and internationalist program rooted in mass struggle and in the unions, to fight to come to power and to provide a better life for workers and youth.

New Recession on the Horizon

The Economics of Increased Profits and Poverty

Tony Wilsdon

The recent extreme ups and downs in the stock markets and the slowing down of the Chinese economy are further straining an economy that most commentators now expect to dive into a new economic recession. Whether this dive will occur this year or next is a matter of debate even between experts at the same business publications.

Murray Gunn, chief of global research at Elliott Wave International, stated: "We think the major economies are on the cusp of turning into the worst recessions we have seen in 10 years. Should the [U.S.] economy start to shrink, and our analysis suggests that it will, the high nominal levels of debt will instantly become a very big issue."

Many experts point to the massive \$247 trillion global debt as the main cause for the upcoming deep recession. On top of that, add Trump's trade war and the slowing down of the Chinese economy, the main engine of world growth in recent decades.

While the super-rich have got fabulously richer in the last ten years, the majority of U.S. workers are poorer than before this so-called economic recovery staggered out of the deep 2008 recession.

Seventy-eight percent of Americans say they're living paycheck to paycheck, according to a 2017 report by employment website CareerBuilder. The Global Wealth Databook 2018 report by investment bank Credit Suisse stated that 34 million American adults are among the world's poorest 10%.

Common Dreams observes that this



Poverty and homelessness are growing in capitalist America.

inequality "goes beyond dollars to the 'deaths of despair' caused by the stresses of inferior health care coverage, stagnating incomes, and out-of-control inequality."

Most working people know they are only one or two paychecks away from catastrophe. This is the reality of capitalism at the beginning of 2019.

A Crisis Made Worse by Capitalist Policies

The inequality and poverty of 2019 is first and foremost a product of the underlying

crisis of capitalism, its inability to show a way forward to develop the world economy in a balanced way, and its increasingly parasitic nature. Since the 1970s, "neoliberal" policies have assisted the capitalists in their one-sided war on working people. These devastating policies, supported by both Democrats and Republicans, included: big tax cuts for the super rich; deregulation of industries like banking and transportation; privatization of public services; attacks on labor unions; and dismantling essential social programs.

Despite clear evidence of the resulting massive increase in inequality, these policies

haven't ended. Both Democrats and Republicans court big corporations and the rich, who demand in return that their interests are protected. And yet this massive political collusion in transferring wealth to the ruling elite is not considered fraud.

Figures like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have opposed these policies and pointed to important reforms. But we need to go further. Working people need their own political party to fight for their interests and ultimately to end the rule of capital altogether.

The hardest toll has been faced by those in lowest paid jobs, particularly black and Latino workers and women workers. It has been estimated that neoliberal policies cost the bottom 90% of wage earners \$1.53 trillion in income in 2015 alone, or \$10,800 for every American household (*Washington Post*, 12/17/18).

As wages have stagnated or fallen and rents have risen, profits have soared, benefiting the same CEOs and the wealthy. The top 1% has nearly tripled their post-tax income. The richest 0.001%, the ruling class, realized income gains at an astonishing rate of over 600% percent (*Chicago Tribune*, 12/15/17).

The end result has been a hollowing out of the economy. The major corporate CEOs have made quicker and larger profits by diverting the wealth created from our work into more speculative activities. These activities fail to put money back in to the U.S. economy, leaving working people hung out to dry.

Read the full version of this article at SocialistAlternative.org

Sawant Reelection Launched

continued from p. 4

me at our launch event, where he said: "We need someone who's going to stand for working people, poor people, the voiceless. I've watched Kshama stand with us every single time when there was injustice. We cannot let corporations silence voices like Kshama."

While most working people in Seattle and across the country are struggling, we know that particular parts of the working class bear a disproportionate burden thanks to discrimination, harassment, and a systemic de-prioritization of their needs. Empowering oppressed communities requires far more than lip-service during campaign season – it requires unambiguously fighting against racism, sexism, homophobia, police brutality, and all forms of discrimination while standing up against a political establishment determined to cut public services.

Women, people of color, immigrants,

indigenous people, LGBTQ people, and people with disabilities are disproportionately likely to lack safe housing, health care, and living-wage jobs. We urgently need change this to ensure all people have the ability to meet their basic needs. It's a matter of life and death for millions.

None of this will happen if we continue to allow public policy to be shaped by corporate politicians who accept the logic of capitalism – that big business must be appeased, and that progressive change must be cautious and incremental. We need socialist policies based on the needs of the working class and oppressed communities.

Conclusion

While Seattle has its own features, it is

equally subject to the dominant national and global political and economic trends. The gap between rich and poor is growing, the middle class is shrinking, corporations are growing in size and influence, and ordinary working people completely lack genuine political representation.

We need to build broad, united mass movements around bold demands that reject the logic of compromise with the ruling class. These movements need their own candidates and representatives who reject corporate money and actively join in the struggles of ordinary people for a better life and different kind of society.

The growing support for socialist ideas and willingness to participate in strikes and protests shows the huge potential to win bigger gains in the coming years, provided our movements are not deflected and demobilized by a political establishment determined

to maintain the status quo.

In my six years in office, I have shown which side I am on and how a fighting strategy can win historic gains. The fact that the political and business establishment will stop at nothing to unseat me proves the effectiveness of this approach.

The impact of our movements has been felt nationally – this was shown when we made Seattle the first to pass a \$15 minimum wage, and now the Tax Amazon movement is spreading to California, New York City, and beyond. In the era of Trump, we urgently need more examples of how working-class political leadership can work alongside social movements and prove where the real power in society lies – not in the back rooms of city hall or the bank accounts of CEOs, but in the millions of ordinary people who do the work that makes our society run.

Dick Cheney: War Hawk, Corporate Politician and Putting Profits Before People Since 1969

Movie Review: *VICE*

Genevieve Morse

The release of the recent movie *VICE* is an attempt at capturing the real inner workings of the White House during the George W. Bush Administration. That administration was one of the most secretive, deceptive, and manipulative the United States has ever seen. While the movie focuses on Vice President Dick Cheney, it is about more than just one man. It's about the ruthlessness of a section of the American political elite in protecting and fighting for the endless profits of big business at the expense of people's lives all over the world. Contrary to the mixed reviews of this film, all people upset at the state of the world and the power that President Trump today holds should watch it!

As the movie progresses, the pattern becomes very clear. You start to realize that the massive cons perpetrated by Cheney and others in Washington to start the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the prison of Guantanamo Bay, the Patriot Act – all of it helped set the

stage for a new era in U.S. politics that brings us to now.

Today Trump fills his cabinet with billionaires and rips up environmental and other regulations that check profits while pretending to defend the working class. Cheney practically wrote the book on how to use government as the tool of the most rapacious and parasitic sections of the ruling class – oil companies, military contractors and the banks – without any democratic oversight by pushing for greater and greater concentration of power in the executive branch.

During the movie, as each member of the Bush administration showed up, it was like being haunted by the most awful people you forgot you hated. I had forgotten the arrogance and total lack of empathy that existed with these people. Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Scooter Libby, and Anthony Scalia just to name a few. They would justify and rationalize all their actions as long as it was “for the good of America.” In Cheney's view it wasn't about what would be good for working people, or the poor but what would make the most profits for American corporations and CEO's without a speck of concern for those it would hurt.

In Bush II's presidency, the neo-conservatives were hell bent on restructuring the Middle East in the interest of maintaining control of oil reserves and reasserting U.S. power on the global stage. This took the form of the Iraq War, justified by conscious lies made enforced by Bush and Cheney.

9/11: Tragedy or Opportunity?

The September 11, 2001 attacks sent shock waves through the U.S. In the movie Cheney was depicted as calm and collected as the towers came crashing down. *VICE* explains that he immediately saw the opportunity of a lifetime, where everyone else saw a crisis.

While the process of concentration of power

in the Executive Branch has been ongoing for decades Cheney and Bush seized the opportunity that 9/11 presented to pass the PATRIOT Act, drastically curtail civil liberties and start a war for oil, all of this supported by Democratic votes.

Where the Hell Was the Democratic Party?

What was only slightly touched on was the role the Democratic Party during that time. At one point when the movie flashed over to an image of Obama, one person in the theater where I saw the film cheered while everyone else was still sitting in silent scorn. Most Congressional Democrats including Hilary Clinton (depicted in the movie) agreed to war funding and the attacks on civil liberties. At the end of the day, the Democratic establishment also serves the interests of corporate America, including their endless wars.

The Democratic Party, despite at times trying to depict itself as an antiwar party, has only served to demobilize, discredit, and dismantle antiwar movements. While President Obama wound up the war in Iraq (before starting another one), by the end of his administration, “The U.S. dropped an average of 72 bombs every day – the equivalent of three an hour.” During the Bush years, the Democratic Party signed off to continue funding the war efforts and at the same time offered zero ways out of it.

He Got Away with It

VICE is a reminder of the savage impact Cheney and the entire Bush administration had on our political system, civil rights, and the world. By nature, capitalism then gives out medals, rewards, and lots of cash for people like him. The real drawback to seeing *VICE* is that it leaves you feeling as though justice is never going to prevail, evil old white dudes will forever run the show, and what can we do about this.

One spot of hope not mentioned by the movie was that the downfall of Cheney and Rumsfeld's power came due to the mission in Iraq not going to plan as well as the massive pressure exerted by the antiwar movement. In 2019, many more people are seeing the need to fight not just against Trump but all those like him. Working people are getting tired of those in power that put profits before people. If you want to know what a real weapon of mass destruction looks like go and see *VICE*. If you want to know more about how to fight back, take the next step and check out Socialist Alternative.



**SOCIALIST
ALTERNATIVE**

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE
ISSN 2638-3349

EDITOR: Tom Crean

EDITORIAL BOARD:

George Brown, Eljeer Hawkins,
Joshua Koritz, Keely Mullen,
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✉ Editors@SocialistAlternative.org

NATIONAL

1027 Grand St, Studio B2
Brooklyn, NY 11211

info@SocialistAlternative.org
facebook.com/SocialistAlternativeUSA
Twitter: @SocialistAlt
(347) 457-6069

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CANADA (604) 738-1653

contact@socialistalternative.ca
www.socialistalternative.ca

MEXICO izquierda.revolucionaria.mx@gmail.com
www.izquierdarevolucionariamx.net

QUÉBEC info@AlternativeSocialiste.org
www.AlternativeSocialiste.org

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

ISSUE #50 • FEBRUARY 2019
SUGGESTED DONATION \$2

MEDICARE FOR ALL THE TIME IS NOW!

Toya Chester

IBEW Local 103 (personal capacity)

How did we get to a point where choosing a job depended on which offered the best health care plan? This is the reality for many people living in the U.S. today. As a nation we spend twice as much per capita on health insurance as any other developed country at 17% of our GDP. Despite this massive spending, the life expectancy in the U.S. is under 79 years while in the UK, Canada, and Australia it is around 81 years! The key difference? Those countries have universal healthcare and we do not.

Workers in the U.S. are spending on average 10% of their income on health care and most people have less than \$1,000 in savings. Given this reality, something like a medical emergency could put most people in huge amounts of debt. There is really no need for health care costs to be the thing that drains a family's life savings. On top of that,

what we pay for insurance often feels like money in the trash when we actually want to use the benefits supposedly covered by our insurance. Outrageous co-pays and deductibles force people to choose whether or not they can even afford to take a trip to the hospital or pharmacy.

Gone are the days when a good job meant good health care along with it. The skyrocketing costs of health care are being forced on working people – but why are costs going up? At every stage, private profits nudge up costs. So when a pharmaceutical company raises prices to increase its profit margin, the health insurance company increases what it charges, as do the pharmacies – each trying to get a little bit more profit out of the deal. And we are forced to pay for it all.

Majority for Single Payer

Yet the majority of people in the U.S. support Medicare for All, which would mean free access to health care, a right that should be granted to every human being. 70% of recently polled Americans support the idea according to the Reuters-Ipsos survey. Even 52% of Republicans are for it! Universal access to health care is not new by any means, but

Bernie Sanders's energetic 2016 presidential campaign really popularized the idea. To this, Hillary Clinton responded that Medicare for All would "never come to pass."

Winning free health care is not a pipe dream like establishment politicians make it out to be. How would it be paid for? First of all, we should tax the rich. But Medicare for All also means eliminating the insurance companies and this would significantly reduce overall administrative costs. One study estimated that a Medicare for All single payer system would reduce administrative costs by \$375 billion! But we should go further than this and take the profit motive out the healthcare system completely by bringing the huge pharmaceutical companies and hospital chains into public ownership and democratic control. This is how we ensure that life-saving procedures and medicine can be available to everyone and won't be given or denied based on what will make the most money for health care tycoons.

Both Democrats and Republicans get huge campaign donations from big pharma and insurance companies. It's great that some Democrats are now rejecting corporate money, including money from big pharma, but that's not enough. There needs to be a massive campaign to force Nancy Pelosi and the new Democratic majority in the House of Representatives to follow the lead of Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and pass a Medicare for All bill this year. At state level, especially in key Democratic-run states like California and New York, we need mass

campaigns to force them to pass single payer, Medicare for All at the state level.

A Plan to Win

In order to win Medicare for All and other vital changes, we can't rely on the Democrats. Unions have a key role to play. My union IBEW Local 103 in Boston took an important step. We felt that the politicians in the State House did not have the workers interest at heart and pulled our campaign money out of their coffers. But that leaves open the question, who would we support? Rather than waiting to see what candidate is put up by either the Democrats or Republicans – we should run our own candidates! Candidates that are not millionaires but regular people that make regular wages so they understand what regular people go through. If the unions supported and funded their campaigns and built structures to hold their candidates accountable, they would be beholden to them and not to the big corporations that support the corrupt politicians we see in Congress today. To pull this off, we need a new political party for working people that we build ourselves.

We need a real transformation of our health care in the United States. We need to tax the rich and corporations to fund Medicare for All and we need to take the huge medical corporations into public ownership so that decisions about health care are made democratically and not in the interests of profit. We need to hit the streets and build a movement for Medicare For All!

