

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

ISSUE #58 • NOVEMBER 2019
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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, health care, 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 JOINED SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

My whole life I have loved to learn, so I was excited to head off to college and study environmental science. I learned that our current system of production is fundamentally unsustainable because it requires constant growth. I learned that black people are more likely to live near hazardous waste sites. I learned that collective action is required to address the scale of the problem. Armed with all this knowledge I asked: what is the solution? My professors said "write to your senators!"

So I changed my major to political science. A year later, Trump was elected and I took the train to D.C. to participate in the Women's March. For the first time in my life, I felt the power of a mass march. I was shoulder to shoulder with hundreds of thousands of other people just as pissed off as I was, and we shut down traffic and transit systems. But at the end of the day, the only answer was "vote for Democrats!"

I became so disillusioned I unregistered from the Democratic Party and questioned whether I should vote at all. When I graduated, I couldn't find a decent-paying job, and got hit with the first of many student loan bills. Every time I read about another climate-change-fueled natural disaster destroying the lives of people who barely pollute or another family brutally ripped apart by ICE, rage would rise within me but I felt I had nowhere to direct it.

Then I came to Seattle for a low-paying job in human services. I attended a rally for a Peoples' Budget with Kshama Sawant's city council office and saw ordinary people of varied ages, races, genders, and abilities fighting together – and winning. Nobody said just "write your senators" or "vote for Democrats." Instead, they said let's build a movement; let's fight against this cruel economic system that is destroying our planet and build



Kyra Meko
Seattle, WA

a world where we have democratic control over what and how we produce.

From that moment on, I have been learning the answers to all of my questions. Capitalism requires environmental degradation. Capitalism needs sexism and racism too, because it keeps the working class divided. But even under these horrible conditions, the working class has immense power because we make society run! I am a socialist because I now know that a better world is possible, and the best way to fight for that world is an international movement with my working class siblings. Now when I hear a homeless client at work contemplating suicide and the rage rises up within me, I know that we have doors to knock, billionares to tax, and publicly funded housing to build! Best of all, I know that we have hope. ✦

Fires, Blackouts, Climate Change: Private Utility Enrages Californians

Leo Carson

Hundreds of thousands of Californians are receiving texts to evacuate their homes as fires rapidly rage across the state. Many millions will also be receiving warnings from the private utility company, PG&E, that their electricity will be cut for at least 48 hours as a part of a deliberate blackout to avoid more fires.

PG&E already has blood on its hands. Their continuous neglect in maintaining the infrastructure that tens of millions of people rely on has led to a terrible series of fire tragedies. Despite PG&E's power outages designed to prevent a fire outbreak, they were unable to avert the outbreak of the Kincaid fire in Sonoma County causing the largest mass evacuation in the county's history.

PG&E's poor maintenance, lack of investment, and neglect of the changing climate has been central to the increased threat of fires in California. This private corporation has been cited over and over again for insufficient maintenance of its equipment. A federal judge recently said it plainly: PG&E has been placing shareholder profit over people's safety.

The fiasco of PG&E is just one example of the capitalist system's broader inability to keep up with the basic requirements of making society function. In the face of catastrophic climate change, capitalism is showing that it is unable to take society forward. Infrastructure is falling apart, in spite of the fact that California is the world's eighth-largest economy! The crumbling of its energy provision system illustrates the dead end this economic system is facing.


To make plans to avert the worst consequences of climate change, including California's catastrophic wildfires, we need to begin by taking PG&E into public ownership, democratically run by the utility workers and ratepayers. This should be part of a national Green New Deal as Bernie Sanders has called for with public ownership of renewable energy.


Private enterprise is in the wings ready to sell us face masks for the smoke likely to engulf the Bay Area again and again. This is the profit-based market response to crisis. This economic model has long ceased to represent progress for humanity. We need a democratic plan for society based on the needs of the majority. ✦


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Auto Workers Strike GM

Limited Walk Back of Tier System Won

Steve Edwards

On September 16, 49,000 UAW members walked off the job at all 55 GM manufacturing plants and parts centers in the U.S., in what became the longest national auto strike in half a century. The determination shown by auto-workers on this strike was exemplary. Some remortgaged their homes to make it through the month without pay and picket lines were rock solid throughout. Striking workers constantly spoke of their sense of solidarity in prioritizing ending the use of temporary workers, to hire them on with full benefits and to reduce the number of tiers going forward.

Workers have voted by 57% to approve a contract which, while it contains some gains, is far from fully meeting the key goals expressed by strikers Socialist Alternative has spoken to. Most important, the contract contains a path for temporary workers to become permanent and for everyone below the “legacy” Tier 1 workers to ultimately achieve parity on pay, although not on pensions and other benefits. However, the path for temporary workers is far too long and if it wasn’t for the lack of a clear strategy from the leadership for how to fully win this demand, the contract would have likely been voted



down. An opportunity has been missed to strike the biggest blow yet for working people in the strike wave that began with teachers in West Virginia.

The economic impact of the strike threatened some GM parts suppliers with bankruptcy and 12,000 of their employees were

laid off. GM lost over \$3 billion in revenue, while investor losses run far higher. The strike was overshadowed by the looming probability of a recession, and by the rejection of the Chrysler contract in 2015 by a two to one margin, a loss that the UAW leadership did not wish to repeat.

Strike Driven By Anger

What drove this strike was the pent up fury of workers across the country, but especially in the auto industry, at companies like GM which have continued to hold down wages and attack job security, working conditions and benefits while flaunting massive profits for shareholders.

GM’s decision to withdraw employees’ medical benefits within days of the strike’s beginning caused a massive backlash forcing the company to not only to reinstate them but to agree to freeze medical costs for the life of the contract. This is a major win for auto workers and an indication of the pressure of the movement for free and universal health care.

The strikers clearly had the public on their side. “I’m actually overwhelmed by the support of the community,” said Willie Holmes, President of UAW Local 167 at an axle plant near Grand Rapids. “They have just been stepping up left and right like you would not believe. I mean, every time I blink, here comes another truckload of food. Or just, somebody wants to come in and just donate their time.”

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Chicago Teachers’ Heroic Struggle For “The Schools Our Children Deserve”

Contract Comes Up Short

Chicago Socialist Alternative

The longest Chicago school strike since 1987 was suspended November 1 after 11 days in which the Chicago Teachers’ Union (CTU) with 26,000 members, along with the 7,500 mostly low-paid school workers in SEIU Local 73 stood united, together with hundreds of community supporters in the fight for better schools.

Socialist Alternative offers its congratulations to the thousands of SEIU and CTU members who went on strike for the schools our kids deserve. This is not an easy fight, waged against a powerful corporate establishment and their representatives in the Democratic Party. The union members deserve credit for the bold demands they put forward and their willingness to struggle.

The previous strike in 2012 helped inspire the RedForEd movement by demanding adequate funding for schools in addition to wages and benefits. Therefore, the 2019 strike in Chicago was watched carefully by teachers

and working people all over the country.

Both unions approached the strike with similar goals – to reverse the underfunding of Chicago schools while raising their lowest paid members out of poverty. But the CTU’s initial demands went further, seeking to create “The Schools Our Children Deserve.” While there were victories in this contract, it largely did not live up to the demands from the start of the strike and leaves much still to be fought for.

Sorry State of Underfunded Chicago Schools

In 1995 a state law banned Chicago teachers from striking over class sizes. The following year another law set up privately run charter schools, to be paid for out of the public schools’ budget. Today overcrowded public schools compete with charters for the children of a shrinking working class population, stressed out by the high cost of living and Chicago’s massive social problems. Each year brings more teacher layoffs. 17,000

Chicago Public School (CPS) students are homeless and schools are desperately under-resourced.

The union’s 2019 contract demands challenged the 1995 law by calling for the hiring of 2,000 teachers to bring class sizes down to a reasonable standard. The union also demanded that the district hire 3,000 non-teaching staff: social workers, nurses, counselors, special education assistants, and librarians, costing \$880 million over a three year contract.

Newly-elected Mayor Lori Lightfoot’s counter-proposal offered raises of less than 3% a year stretched out over five years, with no staff increases, for a total of only \$300



million.

The unions prepared to strike together on October 17. Both unions’ members approved the strike by margins of over 95%.

But as the date approached, the teachers’ union missed a golden opportunity to build community support by publicizing its demand for the creation of 5,000 jobs.

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Socialists Defeat Amazon's Bid to Buy Seattle's Elections

Seattle Socialist Alternative

Despite big business and Amazon going all-in behind corporate candidates in all seven city council races, Seattle voters rejected Jeff Bezos's bid to flip the council to the right. In Seattle's most-watched, most expensive, and most polarized council race in decades, Socialist Alternative's Kshama Sawant has won re-election.

After election night returns showed Seattle's socialist City Councilmember behind by 8 points, with 46% to Egan Orion's 54%, the corporate media and big business sounded triumphalist. But 60% of late arriving ballots counted in the following days swung toward Kshama Sawant. By Friday evening's count Sawant had crested 3.6 percentage points over Orion with a lead of 1,515 votes, with that number likely to rise a bit further in the days ahead.

Socialist Alternative's record-breaking get-out-the-vote operation played a central role in this dramatic shift. The high turnout was driven also by the movement base and support Sawant has built over the past six years, through which working people have won historic victories like Seattle's groundbreaking \$15 minimum wage and landmark renter's rights laws.

A growing wave of outrage also swept Seattle in the final weeks of the election after already unprecedented corporate PAC spending was compounded by Amazon's \$1 million "money bomb" dropped on Seattle on October 14. This brought Amazon's total contribution to \$1.5 million, and overall corporate PAC spending to \$4.1 million - approaching five times the previous record!

But following Amazon's money bomb, a number of major national political figures like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren also

weighed in against Jeff Bezos, followed by a wave of national media attention. Yet while the massive spending by Amazon backfired with many voters, the \$1.5 million also bought a torrent of ads, mailers, and paid canvassers, all of which swayed other votes in the direction of Sawant's corporate-backed opponent. Campaign volunteers repeatedly encountered the talking points trumpeted through these richly-funded attacks in the final weeks.

Crucial to overcoming those lies and attacks was the thousands of conversations on the doors and at street corners by Socialist Alternative members and volunteers.

Who Runs Our City?

Warning that Bezos's \$1.5 million gamble to defeat Sawant and other progressives may have backfired, Seattle Times columnist Danny Westneat said: "[the election] could well be a referendum on Amazon and corporate power" (10/23/19).

Socialist Alternative had foreseen the potential for an Amazon-led corporate offensive from day one. In January, Sawant stated: "What's at stake this year is who runs Seattle - Amazon and big business, or working people."

The corporate media, with the Seattle Times at the forefront, waged a relentless corporate propaganda offensive to blame Sawant and other so-called "left ideologues" for the failed "performance of the City Council" in addressing Seattle's housing affordability and homelessness crisis — the



top concern for voters. In reality, Seattle's affordability crisis is part of the global failure of capitalism, which treats housing as a commodity to enrich billionaire speculators, rather than as a basic human right. Working people are right to be angry at the inaction of city, state, and federal authorities to address the crisis. But blame for this falls squarely on a political establishment that is complicit with corporate power, not on activists and political leaders like Kshama Sawant calling for bold solutions like rent control and taxing big business to massively expand quality social housing.

Amazon executives' chosen opponent for Kshama was Egan Orion, a fully corporate candidate who posed as a "progressive" to win votes, but whose campaign was fueled by a tsunami of corporate cash. This included both massive PAC funding as well as direct donations from a who's who of big business leaders, including top Amazon executives,

real estate lobbyists, and rich Republicans.

A Socialist Program

From the beginning of the election campaign, Sawant led the charge for rent control in Seattle. The demand for universal rent control in Seattle, without corporate loopholes, energized working people around the district and city, and Kshama's council office rapidly gathered 13,000 petition signatures.

In spite of the defeat of the Amazon Tax repeal the prior year, from the beginning of our campaign we demanded the restoration of the tax as well a swath of other taxes on big business and the rich - instead of taxing ordinary working people, homeowners and small businesses. While Kshama's opponent under pressure said he supported "progressive taxation" in the abstract, he rejected the

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On the Ground with Vote Sawant

Rebecca Green

Re-electing Kshama Sawant was a battle. Standing up to big business over the last six years to win a \$15 minimum wage, victories for renters, millions in funding for affordable housing, and much more, put a target on Kshama's back. Just as had been done before, winning our seat was going to take building a movement in Seattle.

We knew we had to reach tens of thousands of voters in the district, raise hundreds of thousands of dollars, mobilize hundreds of volunteers, and fight an endless onslaught of attacks from big business and the corporate establishment.

With this political objective in mind, we set up a robust campaign apparatus supported by Seattle Socialist Alternative.

Union members, college and high school students, retirees, and working people across Seattle discussed the campaign weekly in regular Socialist Alternative meetings, and set targets for the number of canvassing shifts each member would complete. In our meetings members also discussed tactics and slogans that were proving effective for fundraising and winning votes on the doors and raised key political points to strengthen our overall strategy.

A small team of dedicated staff was hired by the campaign to work full time, and was organized into a number of teams

to coordinate our efforts: the campaign leadership team, the finance team, the social media team, and the field team.

These teams worked in concert with one another, constantly sharing lessons about what was working, what wasn't, and how we could improve our efforts. A critical component of the campaign's success was our centralized leadership that was tasked with developing our political program and campaign strategy which started with an analysis of the broader political terrain we're operating within.

Over the course of the campaign with our army of volunteers and Socialist Alternative members, we completed more than 4,000 hours of canvassing, knocked on 225,000 doors, spent 1,389 hours phone

banking, and assessed the support level of over 23,000 people in the district.

The not-at-all-secret weapon behind our success in Seattle is our revolutionary, Marxist party, Socialist Alternative. Our party has robust internal democracy, acts as a decisive unit, and seeks to bring together any and all movements against inequality or oppression.

Working people across the country should look to this election as an example of what we will continue to come up against as the fight against the billionaire class continues, and what it will take to win. We urge you to join Socialist Alternative and build a historic movement against inequality, violence, and oppression. ✪

Read the full version of this article at SocialistAlternative.org

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Amazon Tax — a bottomline requirement of his corporate backers — but in so doing revealed his corporate political loyalties.

Sawant's campaign also boldly fought for a Green New Deal for working people to make Seattle 100% renewable energy based by 2030, including massive expansion of public transit — making it fully electric and free. The campaign also tied the fight to avoid climate catastrophe to the need to take the big energy corporations into democratic public ownership and retooling them for clean energy.

Debate on Seattle's Left

Once again, Seattle has shown that socialists and working people can take on the most powerful corporate titans and win. This victory should give confidence to movements everywhere.

Yet it would be a major mistake to imagine that similar victories can be won purely through determination and struggle. The role of Marxist perspectives, program, and organization was essential in Seattle and will be vital to defeating the concentrated power of the capitalist class everywhere.

Socialist Alternative members provided the backbone of this campaign. Their energy, self-sacrifice, and political skills successfully built perhaps the most powerful grassroots election campaign in Seattle history.

Our ability to build left unity with other forces was important to our victory over Bezos.

At the start of the election campaign, a de-facto alliance between big business, key labor leaders, and most liberal political figures had coalesced to try and defeat Sawant and block the election of Democratic Socialists of America candidate Shaun Scott in District 4.

After an avalanche of corporate cash against her, years of relentless attacks in the corporate media, no endorsements from her fellow city councilmembers or other prominent Democratic Party politicians, and a section of labor leaders backing one of Sawant's opponents, Sawant received just 37% in the primary election. While this result put her more than 15 points ahead of Egan Orion, she was portrayed as a long shot for the general election by the corporate media. Our perspective was that in order to win the general election it would be crucial to expose the corporate character of Orion's campaign, and to build left unity against Amazon's attempt to buy City Hall.

The Fight for Unity Against Amazon

In spite of the considerable working class support for Sawant, if she and Socialist Alternative had adopted the approach of most liberal and labor leaders to try and avoid a direct confrontation with Amazon, it's likely Jeff Bezos' strategy would have succeeded. Even in Seattle, where the local Democratic Party organizations have shifted leftward under the impact of Sanders and other left challengers, this hasn't resulted in strong working class fighters running for city

council in most races.

In fact, most elections across the U.S. don't feature bold working-class challenges, given the corporate domination of the two-party system. Socialist Alternative based our electoral strategy on confidence that, if offered a fighting lead, working class and young people in Seattle were capable of defeating Amazon and big business. This included the need to use working-class pressure from below to push progressive and labor leaders off the sidelines and into a united fight with us against Seattle's corporate establishment.

The dynamic unleashed after the primary election confirmed our strategy. Candidates backed by Amazon and big business moved on to the general election in all seven council races, facing off against more progressive candidates. With the looming threat of the Chamber of Commerce engineering a wholesale takeover of City Hall, our call for maximum unity against big business rapidly gained traction among grassroots activists, exerting pressure on bigger political players.

More endorsements for Sawant, as well as Shaun Scott, began rolling in from progressive leaders and groups who had sat on the sidelines in the primary. The scandalous effort of conservative labor leaders to win the Labor Council's endorsement for Egan Orion was defeated when over 300 union members signed an open letter in protest. A joint event promoting a Green New Deal for Seattle was organized with Sawant, Morales, and Scott speaking, in an important display of left unity.

In a major defeat for the business-backed Democratic establishment who have long-dominated city politics, local Democratic Party groups endorsed both Kshama Sawant and Shaun Scott in September. Sawant is the first independent socialist ever endorsed by Seattle's Democrats, and this endorsement was made despite her very public calls for left Democrats, labor, and social movements to join together to build a new party for working people. This victory was the product of an energetic grassroots effort, including local Democratic Party groups passing resolutions condemning corporate PAC spending.

All this laid the basis for our re-election campaign to become the central driving force behind a unified response when Amazon dropped their \$1 million money bomb on October 14. Alongside the local Democratic Party groups, we organized a press conference two days later outside of Amazon headquarters, followed by a rally called by Amazon workers a week later.

Our united front strategy to mobilize working class anger to pull together a broader opposition to the attempted corporate takeover helped deal the final blow to Bezos.

The role of Socialist Alternative, with our clear analysis, strategy, and class struggle approach, was central to the success of this historic campaign.

As the wave of socialist election campaigns across the country continues to expand, the rich lessons of how we defeated Jeff Bezos in his hometown can help serious organizers develop winning strategies for the struggles of working people everywhere. ☘

The Current Case for Independent Politics

Joshua Koritz

"The halls of congress are no joke," said Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in her speech endorsing Bernie Sanders for president. "It is no joke to stand up to corporate power and established interests... behind closed doors your arm is twisted, the vise of political pressure gets put on you, and every trick in the book, psychological and otherwise is used to get us to abandon the working class."

These pressures are not about left or right, Democrat or Republican, but what is best for corporate America which the establishments of both parties defend. AOC is simply revealing how alien working-class interests in the halls of power are.

Of course, pro-working-class policies - like Medicare for All, a Green New Deal, and forgiving student debt - are a direct attack against the profits of big business.

Only a strategy that acknowledges the sum total of these pressures can hope to lead systemic change. Socialist Alternative, and Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant see elected positions as a platform for organizing working people to fight in their own interests.

The Lessons of Seattle's Tax Amazon Struggle

On May 14, 2018, following months of mobilization by housing and homeless activists, the Seattle City Council passed the Amazon Tax which taxed the biggest 3% of corporations in Seattle in order to raise \$48 million to build affordable housing. Within a month, Amazon worked behind the scenes, with help from Mayor Jenny Durkan, to strongarm 7 out of 9 councilmembers to repeal the tax. This is a real example of the pressures AOC describes in Congress on the local level.

Kshama Sawant, in her six years as councilmember, has successfully resisted these pressures. One aspect to this is by being outside the Democratic Party. By being independent, she does not have to work within a party where the pro-business pressures have another angle to press. But even importantly is having Socialist Alternative behind her. By focusing on mobilizing working people to win reforms, and stressing that it is movements that win gains, Kshama makes herself accountable to movements and working people.

We precisely need a broader party to support the efforts of elected left representatives and to build the mass movement that will defeat the right. Today, the conditions exist for the formation of a new party to the left of the Democrats. With the formation of Our Revolution, Justice Democrats, DSA, AOC's election and Bernie Sanders' 2020 campaign, not only is the general infrastructure there, but also the political authority to truly challenge the two-party system from the left. Further, with the beginnings

of a new labor upsurge, working people are searching for new tools with which to fight the bosses. Union and working class involvement will be key to the success or failure of any such new party.

Limitations of the Democratic Party

There are many examples of the limitations of working within the Democratic Party. One need look no further than Bernie Sanders' presidential run in 2016. The campaign took on a movement character outside the bounds of the formal campaign based on the popularity of demands like Medicare for All and taxing the rich. The Democratic Party establishment shut this down using every trick in their book.

However, millions of working people still see the Democratic Party as the only vehicle to oppose right-wing and corporate agendas. Even if Bernie, AOC, and Kshama joined forces to help start a new party, many activists and working-class people would remain within the Democratic Party. This points to the need to have tactics that can unite the forces for progressive change across party lines with the ultimate goal of winning these activists over to the project of building a new party.

How a New Left Party Could Form

Since 2016, polls have regularly shown that a large number of Americans want a new party. Yet much of the effort to the left of the Democratic Party is still focused on either reforming the Democrats or using their banner. To start the process of building a viable new party for working people, a lead needs to be given. Right now, Bernie's campaign showed that it has the potential to be that force. If Bernie announced the beginnings of a new party with regional conferences coming out of his campaign and supported by Our Revolution and DSA, a real momentum would be given to a new party. Such a party could start with already established elected representatives like Bernie, AOC, and Kshama.

The forces that could create a new party that rejects corporate cash already exist. However, by rejecting big business money, a different strategy is needed to compete with parties and candidates who take it. Working people can't out-fundraise big business, but we can mobilize many more people with a movement-building approach, seeing elected positions as platforms for amplifying and starting struggles.

Socialist Alternative advocates for such a party to be open to all trends in the workers' movement and be federated in allowing different regions progress as working people gain confidence and strength at different rates in different areas. We would enthusiastically build such a party. ☘

Bernie Sets the Stage For 2020 Election

Tom Crean

A few weeks ago Bernie Sanders was being written off by the corporate media. He had a mild heart attack and there was a constant drumbeat about how he was “too old” and how Elizabeth Warren had surged past him among progressive voters. Then Sanders came back to deliver his strongest debate performance to date in Ohio. Following that his campaign received a huge boost with the endorsement of Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, three congresswomen of color who have stood up to both Trump and the Democratic establishment.

More broadly the race for the Democratic nomination has become a lot more fluid. Joe Biden’s campaign has begun to slowly sink. As one commentator put it, “his support is a mile wide and an inch deep.” Elizabeth Warren has certainly gained support, including from some who supported Sanders last time. She and Sanders are portrayed as the two leading progressives in the race.

In reality Warren, a self-described “capitalist to her bones,” is far more acceptable to the ruling class than Sanders. However, for most of the elite, even her proposals for “accountable capitalism” go way too far. A race

in which the two frontrunners are Sanders and Warren is a nightmare for the Democratic establishment and there is increased angst among the “donor class” about whether someone else – Michelle Obama, Michael Bloomberg, even Hillary Clinton! – could enter the race to save the day for the corporate wing of the party.

Sanders Moves Further Left

It is undeniable that Sanders is running a more radical, working class centered campaign this time compared to 2016. This reflects how millions of young people and workers have been radicalized in a period of profound political polarization. Since 2016, we have seen the beginnings of a mass women’s movement sparked by MeToo; mass protests by young people against gun violence and more recently against climate change; and, of course, the most significant strike wave in decades. We have also seen wider interest in socialist ideas than ever before with the Democratic Socialists of America growing to 60,000 in the wake of Sanders’ campaign.

In recent speeches, including his campaign relaunch in Queens on October 19, Sanders has spoken about how his presidency would

usher in a “government of the working class” and that he would be the “organizer in chief.” He doesn’t just say that he wants to tax the rich; he says “billionaires should not exist.” He has attended workers’ rallies and picket lines around the country and has encouraged his volunteer base to do the same.

Sanders’ platform has also evolved. He continues correctly to focus on Medicare for All and has forcefully and effectively answered the attacks of corporate “moderates” and “centrists” in the Democratic debates, labelling them “Republican talking points.” He continues to demand a \$15 federal minimum wage and tuition free public college but he now also calls for raising teacher salaries around the country to a minimum of \$60,000 a year and to cancel student debt. His program for racial justice and democratic rights continues to get stronger.

Addressing the existential threat posed by climate change, Sanders has followed AOC’s lead in arguing for a bold Green New Deal to begin a rapid transition away from fossil fuels. While correctly arguing for massive public investment in a green retooling of the economy which would create millions of jobs, Bernie and AOC do not clearly point to the necessity of taking the energy industry itself into public ownership but Sanders points in this direction by calling to “end greed in our energy system.”

Unless this is done, big oil will use its massive clout to obstruct all other measures that may be taken. Sanders has also called for bringing all utilities into public ownership which is very relevant with the exposure of the criminal role of California’s private PG&E utility and its aged equipment in starting devastating wildfires.

Perhaps most importantly, Sanders has put forward bold proposals to roll back anti-union laws and dramatically strengthen the hand of working people organizing against the corporate elite in their workplaces. This includes guaranteeing the right of public sector workers to organize and bargain collectively, giving federal workers the right to strike, enacting “card check” organizing, banning the permanent replacement of striking workers, and legalizing sympathy strikes. Of course, on this and every other demand he puts forward, Sanders stresses that the only way they will be achieved is through a mass movement.

Sanders vs Warren

As the race has evolved, many have been swayed by the argument that Warren is a younger and potentially more effective representative of progressive demands, like Medicare for All, that she and Sanders both espouse. This “pragmatic” line of argument concludes that Warren is more “electable” while Sanders is simply too “extreme.”

In fact all the evidence points to Sanders being the candidate in the Democratic field who would be the most likely to defeat the reactionary bigot in the White House. The corporate Democrats are unable to inspire people that they will deliver meaningful change when they don’t even make bold promises as these would scare off their corporate donors. Hillary Clinton ran against Trump as a “threat to the Republic” while saying essentially nothing credible about rampant inequality and systemic racism nor convincingly explaining how she would not be simply a tool of Wall Street in office. Biden 2020 risks being a pathetic repeat of Clinton 2016.

In 2008, Barack Obama’s campaign enormously raised the expectations of black people, young people and working people generally after eight years of George Bush and the disastrous war in Iraq. The Democrats controlled both Houses of Congress. Obama took office as the world economy was threatening to go over the cliff but he and the political establishment focused on bailing out the banks to the tune of trillions of dollars while millions lost their jobs and their homes. The Democrats holding full control in Washington did almost nothing to help working people. This helped to lay the basis for the emergence of the Tea Party on the right and ultimately Trump.

Of course, Warren would excite people more than Biden and certainly she makes more concrete progressive proposals than Obama, but a real problem is that she’s not addressing the sections of the population that Sanders is talking about who have been historically alienated from politics. She’s not trying to inspire working people with the idea of building a mass movement for change. Instead she says “I’ve got a plan for that” and offers no credible path for how she will achieve her platform besides her own ability to use the power of reason to persuade the establishment.

Sanders’ emphasis on the role of building a mass movement is not new but he has underlined and elaborated it in this campaign. He explains that as president if he faced obstruction from the establishment he would mobilize working people in their states to bring them under immediate and relentless pressure. Sanders gives Kentucky’s Mitch McConnell as an example, explaining that ordinary people in



Limitations and Contradictions

As Marxists we also see a number of limitations in Sanders' politics. He seeks to reform capitalism and remove its worst features. He points to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as the historic antecedent for his brand of "democratic socialism." But Roosevelt was very clear that he was trying to save capitalism from the threat of revolution during the Great Depression, not replace it. Sanders also points to Denmark as a model. Denmark does indeed still have an extensive welfare state with very impressive social benefits for working people. These were the product of the post World War II economic boom, a powerful labor movement and powerful workers parties.

The truth is that the conditions today are very different than they were after the post-war expansion where social gains were made in Denmark and elsewhere. After the sharp crisis of the mid-70s, capitalist governments turned to neo-liberal policies including privatization of areas of the public sector, loosening regulation on the financial sector and international trade deals done at the expense of workers and the environment. The goal was to restore profits for the corporations by clawing back the gains made by working people in the previous historical period. Today we are dealing with an increasingly parasitic system where the banks and the global financial casino dominate. We already see growing conflict, including over trade, between capitalist powers in the Middle East and the Far East which are pushing the world economy to the brink of another major crisis.

Achieving and maintaining gains for working people will be far harder, not to say impossible, in this environment. This is precisely why tweaking capitalism will be insufficient and we need complete system change. Right now what is essential is to mobilize the forces to challenge the capitalist elite's control of politics and the economy. This requires a fighting labor movement which Sanders supports but also a new political party representing the interests of working people and the poor. Sanders' committed base of working people and young people is objectively the base for this new party.

When Sanders declared his first run for president in 2015, he asked whether he should stand as an independent or as a Democrat. Obviously the Democratic primary gave him a big platform but it came with serious limitations. In 2016, Sanders' campaign was undemocratically blocked by the Clinton-dominated Democratic National Committee. This time, Sanders again faces a corporate media blackout and the establishment is prepared to use every dirty trick to block him if it looks like he could win.

Sanders talks about transforming the Democrats into a "workers party" but today – despite a rhetorical shift to the left by many presidential candidates – it remains firmly controlled by corporate interests. For this to change, the party would need to completely renounce corporate money, adopt a platform like Bernie's and make their elected representatives accountable to democratic structures controlled by the party's membership. The corporate politicians will split the party before being subjected to this. It would be more viable for the Sanders and AOC to launch a new party than to try to force the establishment to cede to such demands.

Heading Towards 2020

As in 2016, the deck is stacked against Sanders in the Democratic Party despite the fact that he is clearly the best candidate to beat Trump. Four years ago, the establishment bet everything on Clinton, a terrible corporate candidate. To have any chance he will have to go on the offensive not just against Biden but also Warren to clearly bring out the differences between them.

If Sanders and his million volunteers manage to overcome all the obstacles in the primary, he will need a mass membership organization – in effect a party within a party – behind him to push back against the sabotage of the Democratic establishment in the general election.

But if he is blocked in the primary, we can't accept, as in 2016, that this is the end. At that time, Sanders endorsed Clinton, rather than continuing his race as an independent which we urged him to do. This time Sanders should call a national conference of his supporters to discuss the way forward including whether to keep running. This conference could be the beginning of a new party of working people. On one level, the forces of the "new left" seem completely subsumed into the Democratic Party at the moment. But the rise of Sanders in 2016, followed by AOC and other "democratic socialists" in 2018, points to sharp contradictions which will not be containable for much longer. A failure to beat Trump in 2020 would immediately bring the Democrats into deep crisis. But if they win, the energized base of the party will put the elected officials under intense pressure to deliver on demands like higher taxes on the rich and Medicare for All that the establishment will resist. At this point Sanders campaign is serving to rally the forces which want real change in the interests of working people and know that this will take

a fierce struggle against corporate interests. We are fighting for a Sanders victory while discussing the next vital steps including laying the basis for a new party based on the interests of working people. 🗳️

Kentucky agree with much of the content of his working class platform.

It is also not true that Warren and Sanders have exactly the same platform. Sanders goes further than Warren in pointing towards real solutions on a whole range of questions. Warren imposes means testing, for example, on tuition free college rather than calling for higher education as a universal right. While it sounds fair to say "the well off should pay something," the history of means tested benefits is that over time the group required to pay will grow and the benefit will be degraded.

Follow the Money

It is no accident that Sanders' donations come overwhelmingly from working class people. The biggest group of individual donors to his campaign by occupation are teachers; the most common employers of donors are Walmart, Starbucks and Amazon; and he has more nurses and Uber and Lyft drivers donating to him than any other Democratic candidate.

Sanders of course has refused to accept any money from big business and the super-rich. Warren, on the other hand, while refusing this money during the primary took it during her Senate race last year and used \$10.4 million left over from that race to launch her presidential campaign.

A group of big money Democratic Wall Street donors recently stated that if Warren were the nominee they would either support Trump or sit out the general election. On the other hand, the corporate "centrist" Third Way think tank indicated several months ago that Warren could be an acceptable choice.

But while sections of the ruling class could reconcile themselves to a Warren candidacy they are dead set against Sanders. If he were to be the Democratic nominee, sections of the party's establishment would actively sabotage his campaign. The ruling class collectively would prefer four more years of an unstable Trump to a Sanders presidency. The reason is simple. While Warren could be persuaded to water down proposals or be checked by Congress, a Sanders victory would inspire working people to fight back on a level not seen since the 1970s.

It is very clear that millions are looking for a way to increase the share of wealth going to the majority and radically decrease the share going to the billionaires. What worries the ruling class above all else is an awakened working class that begins to rebuild the labor movement and looks to assert its latent political power. This is exactly why we support Bernie Sanders.



Hong Kong Protests Intensify

Ranson Thomas

After 200 days, the protests in Hong Kong show no signs of letting up. They began in March over a proposed bill which would have allowed the extradition of prisoners from Hong Kong to mainland China. The repeal was won in September due to the mass protests. Since then the protests have expanded in character rather than abating, reaching over a million demonstrators in some cases (in a city of 7.4 million). The demands have expanded to include greater democratic freedoms, ending police brutality and greater accountability for the police, and the ouster of Carrie Lam – the Beijing-appointed Chief Executive of Hong Kong. These protests represent the largest political crisis for China since the Tiananmen Square revolt in 1989. Beijing's biggest fear is of the protests spreading to mainland China and threatening the undemocratic rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

While economic demands have not been at the forefront of the protests, rents and housing prices in Hong Kong are some of the highest in the world and wages have been stagnating despite high employment. Wealth inequality is rampant – between 2016 and 2017 the five richest individuals in Hong Kong made over \$23 billion on dividends alone, none of which was ever taxed! Some of the largest protests have occurred in working class areas where millions live in cramped quarters, unable to attain anything close to the wealth on display in the glittering financial districts.

Recently the protests have taken on an important international character, with U.S. companies who seek to continue to do business with China submitting to political pressure to clamp down on the use of media and

technologies which have been used to signal boost the protests. The Chinese government has threatened to ban products from the mainland or cut commercial agreements with companies who appear to be aiding the protests in any way.

Apple removed an app from their platform which protesters were using to map protests and avoid police, who have used excessive force against demonstrators. Google has also been accused of removing content which was sympathetic to the protests which has sparked an internal debate amongst Google employees about the ethics of such an action. Blizzard, developer of the video game Hearthstone, faced criticism when a professional Hearthstone player named Blitzchung expressed support for the protesters after winning a tournament and the company responded by banning Blitzchung from future tournaments and withholding his prize money.

Besides U.S. tech companies, the NBA has also found its way to the center of controversy. Daryl Morey, the general manager of the Houston Rockets, made a tweet voicing support for the Hong Kong protesters which was quickly deleted amid condemnation from Chinese authorities and NBA commissioner Adam Silver. NBA superstar LeBron James weighed in on the issue, taking a tepid stance which basically supported the NBA's actions against Morey and encouraged others in the NBA not to comment on the situation. This sparked some protesters in Hong Kong to begin burning LeBron jerseys and voicing support for Morey.

Mostly because of the long-standing economic and political rivalry between the U.S. and China, there is widespread bipartisan support for the Hong Kong protests



Protesters in Hong Kong with umbrellas to protect from tear gas.

among U.S. politicians. Some protesters hope the U.S. government might support their efforts by pressuring Beijing to give in to their demands. However it has recently been alleged that in June President Trump offered Chinese Prime Minister Xi Jinping his silence on the protests in exchange for favorable consideration during trade negotiations. This shows the true face of U.S. capitalism, coupled with the actions by many U.S. mega corporations to aid China's repression of the protests. They could care less about the people of Hong Kong and will only seek to use their movement as a pawn in a wider power struggle.

The U.S. and Europe often portray China as a communist boogeyman, but in reality the massive inequality and political repression that characterize the regime in Beijing has nothing to do with the basic principles

of socialism or communism. The repression in China is based on preserving an economic system that protects the private profits of corporations and billionaires and is an extremely authoritarian variant of capitalism.

In truth neither the U.S. system nor the CCP's "communism" hold the answer for the aspirations of the protestors. A fundamental reworking of China's system is needed – a revolution that puts the democratic decision making of workers at the fore – something the current "princelings" will fight until their last breaths. Right now there are mass movements breaking out from Hong Kong to Haiti, from Chile to Catalonia. A truly free, democratic, and socialist Hong Kong can only be won by linking up the protest movement in Hong Kong with strikes and protests by the working class throughout the whole of China and those occurring around the world. ☘

Chaos in Middle East Amid Global Power Shifts

George Brown

Since his election, Donald Trump's foreign policy in the Middle East has grown increasingly erratic. Last year, Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Iran nuclear deal negotiated under Obama. In June of this year, the conflict with Iran nearly escalated into open military conflict after the U.S. alleged that Iran was behind the bombing of Saudi oil fields. Then in September, Trump dumped his National Security Advisor John Bolton, one of the chief architects behind his hawkish foreign policy. In October, Trump withdrew troops from Rojava, the Kurdish region in Northeastern Syria, and allowed Turkish and allied forces to enter.

But the wider crisis of U.S. imperialism in the Middle East has deeper roots which go far beyond Trump. The overreach of the Bush Doctrine (America as the world's police), the

effects of the global economic crisis, and the increased imperialist role of China and Russia have resulted in a decline in the U.S.'s ability to dictate economic and military policy in the region. This crisis predates Trump and will continue after him.

Crisis of U.S. Imperialism

Trump's "America First" isolationist policy is part of the wider growth of nationalism around the world. Amid a global economic contraction, it is in large part a reaction to the view which exists among ordinary people, a section of the military, and a smaller section of the establishment that the U.S. has gained little from the massive expenditure of economic and military resources in the Middle East. Trump defended the withdrawal of troops from Syria as part of his promise to get the U.S. out of the "endless wars" it has

been embroiled in since the Bush administration. However, the withdrawal of troops from Syria was quickly followed by new deployments of troops to Saudi Arabia to defend that country's oil infrastructure after it was crippled by drone strikes in September. Troops were also recently sent back into Syria to defend oil fields there from a potentially resurgent ISIS! The result is a net increase of U.S. troops in the region.

In reality, U.S. capitalism cannot afford to withdraw from the Middle East due to ongoing economic and military interests in the region. This was demonstrated by Trump's attempts to reinforce the U.S.'s relationship with key oil-supplier Saudi Arabia, which have entailed not only new troops but oil and weapons deals, as well as Trump publicly defending the Saudi government over its role in the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. In Israel, Trump reversed decades

of precedent by recognizing Jerusalem as the capital, recognizing the annexation of the Golan Heights, and pledging a formal military alliance with the country.

Despite these measures of support, questions remain about the ability of the U.S. to provide effective protection for its Middle East allies in today's world. The declining U.S. influence in the region has been accompanied by a frantic scramble by Russia and China, as well as regional powers, like Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, to try to fill the vacuum. Vladimir Putin has long leaned on Iran and Syria as bases of support to counter U.S. imperialism. But he recently did a tour of the Middle East where he visited Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, traditional U.S. allies and competitors to Russia, in the oil market and is trying to negotiate a

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Ecuador: Workers and Indigenous Uprising Beats Government and IMF

No to a New Austerity Paquetazo!

Tony Gong
Socialist Alternative, USA

On the first day of October, President of Ecuador Lenin Moreno ended the country's fuel subsidies as part of an economic restructuring deal from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Less than two weeks later, Moreno was forced to restore subsidies after tremendous protests from trade unions, indigenous groups, and students forced him to flee the capital! Across the entire country labor unions went on strike and indigenous protesters shut down oil production, demonstrating the power of working and indigenous masses and showing the way forward for further resistance to the IMF's neoliberal program.

Moreno: New Cuts and Privatization

Moreno won election in 2017 on a rather timid left reformist platform of increased public spending. Once elected, Moreno veered sharply to the right. His twin focuses for the Ecuadorian economy come out of a neoliberal playbook: pay off foreign debt and attract foreign private investors! He forgave a portion of the \$4.3 billion in taxes owed by private companies and in February 2019 started privatizing state enterprises.

At the same time, Moreno signed a \$10 billion loan with the IMF and World Bank. As part of this loan package, Moreno signed off on six measures and thirteen labor reforms, which include tax breaks for corporations, halving state workers' vacation days and reducing their wages by 20%, and the infamous end of fuel subsidies. The government would only save \$1.3 billion from cutting fuel subsidies, yet overlooks \$4.3 billion in corporate back taxes! Moreno is attacking the living conditions of working people and the poor in

order to pay for new corporate subsidies.

Mass Resistance to the Paquetazo

When fuel subsidies ended, overnight the price of gasoline and diesel shot up over 30% affecting mass transit, shipping, and commuting and causing ripple effects on the rest of the economy. The day after the IMF package was announced, the country's largest indigenous organization CONAIE, the central trade union organization FUT, and other groups jointly announced national protests against the paquetazo (package).

What followed was two general strikes and an indigenous people's occupation of Quito and other cities. The mighty power of the working class was on display as the whole country shut down. Moreno declared a state of emergency for 60 days but was forced to concede an increase in fares and a provision of credits to compensate for higher fuel costs.

By October 8, the government had lost control over the capital, with protestors briefly occupying the National Assembly. Moreno announced a curfew and fled to the city of Guayaquil.

In Quito, Guayaquil, and other cities, riot police battled protestors with weapons, armored vehicles, and tear gas, ultimately wounding over 1,300 protestors and killing eight.

On October 13, Moreno finally relented. He restored fuel subsidies and promised to negotiate on the pending economic reforms. Indigenous groups demobilized their supporters and many returned to their homes far from the cities.

Reject the Rest of the Paquetazo!

The fuel subsidies may be restored but



Enraged anti-government demonstrator gather during clashes with the police as they protest against President Lenin Moreno and his economic policies, in Quito, Ecuador, Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2019.

the rest of the paquetazo is still on the table. There is a danger that leading organizers feel the battle is won and do not use the movement's advantage to defeat the entire package.

Moreno is buying time. The movement should plan another round of protests, this time for coordinated and, if necessary, prolonged struggle. The resistance to the package was weakened by labor leaders and indigenous groups both reaching a "separate peace" with Moreno during the protest, and by the separate talks they are engaging in now.

The working class must aim the strike straight at the main forces behind the package, the corporations – domestic and foreign – that seek to plunder Ecuador's resources. Workers and indigenous groups must combine their demands and fight as a unified force.

Which Way Forward for Ecuador?

With all of the current major parties united

in defense of the package, the movement urgently needs its own party to offer a political alternative. While former President Correa has shown sympathy with the protests, his record in power of bending to the interests of capitalism and imperialism shows the need for a new political force prepared to struggle to the end.

In order to end these attacks on living conditions, eliminate poverty, provide adequate housing and health care for all, and raise living standards, Ecuador needs genuine socialism where the economy is planned by ordinary people for use rather than profit. This must become the program of the class movement underway, to be implemented by a workers and indigenous people's government. On a global scale, the uprisings in Chile, Haiti, and Puerto Rico, the thousands protesting in Argentina, etc, all point to a possible future where a socialist Ecuador does not stand alone but as part of a voluntary socialist federation across Latin America, able to end the exploitative economic patterns of neocolonialism and fight for international socialism. ✪

Chaos in Middle East *continued from p. 4*

new trade deal with Israel and Egypt.

Russia's intervention in the Middle East has been very public, trying to present itself as a guarantor of peace, similar to the image the U.S. presented under Bill Clinton. Chinese imperialism has been quieter, but has made its economic presence felt, becoming the largest trading partner for eleven countries across the Middle East and North Africa. However, Russian and Chinese imperialism are no more qualified than U.S. imperialism to bring stability or democracy to the Middle East.

Defending Democracy?

During the "War on Terror" under former

president George W. Bush, military intervention was justified under the guise of "defeating terrorism" as well as laying the basis for new "democracies". Most ordinary people in the region understood very well that the U.S., which had defended anti-communist dictatorships in the region for decades, was first and foremost intent on controlling the region's oil supplies as well as on its own prestige. Obama initially talked about democracy (in Iran for example) before defending the Egyptian military during the mass uprising of the "Arab Spring."

Trump doesn't bother pretending to care about "defending democracy," an excuse which is wearing thin as grassroots pro-democracy movements continue to develop

across the Middle East. These movements stand in stark contrast to the chaos that has resulted from years of U.S. imperialist intervention. Trump's betrayal of the Kurdish fighters in Rojava, Syria further reinforces that U.S. imperialism can't be counted on as a legitimate ally for these movements.

Unlike any of the imperialist countries competing for influence in the region, the working class in the Middle East has the power to unify across sectarian divisions and establish genuine democracy. This was seen in Iran's 2009 "Green Revolution," the 2011 "Arab Spring" movements across the Middle East and North Africa, the 2013 Gezi Park struggle in Turkey, and the ongoing general strike movement in Iran. The October 21st

general strike in Lebanon, a country long suffering from institutionalized sectarian divisions imposed by French imperialism, has seen the working class unite against the corrupt government of Saad Hariri. New workers' struggles have broken out in Iraq and Egypt.

The potential for international working-class solidarity is stronger than ever. There are mass movements breaking out from Hong Kong to Haiti, from Chile to Catalonia. Through building of independent working-class organization we can defeat the dictatorships and institutionalized sectarian divisions throughout the Middle East. And we can end the whole capitalist system which serves as the basis for the "endless wars." ✪

Supreme Court Threatens LGBTQ Workers

Grace Fors

LGBTQ activists rallied outside the U.S. Supreme Court on Tuesday, October 8 while the Court heard a trio of landmark cases on LGBTQ discrimination, *Altitude Express Inc. v. Zarda*, *Bostock v. Clayton County*, and *Harris Funeral Homes v. EEOC*.

All three cases involve employees fired from their jobs for being gay or transgender. The Court will decide whether existing U.S. anti-discrimination laws apply to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Dangers for LGBTQ Workers

If the conservative Court rules in favor of the employers, there will be far reaching implications for all workers. A loss for the plaintiffs will be disastrous and a blatant handover of power to the bosses. While the cases themselves deal with employment, Supreme Court decisions affect courts across the country. This precedent could effectively give the green light to intensified discrimination in housing, health care, education, and credit.

Only 22 states outlaw firing employees for being gay, and only 21 states for being transgender. In other words, in over half the country, LGBTQ people currently have no protections at work. Meanwhile the other half, with millions of people, could lose their legal protections as a result of the new ruling. The effects would be devastating, especially given the fact that in the U.S. workers lose their health insurance when they are fired.

The stakes are higher for trans and nonbinary workers who would find it harder to find stable employment and face an increasingly stressful and dangerous workplace. In the 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey, one-quarter of trans workers reported they had lost a job due to gender-based discrimination, and a stunning 90% reported harassment and mistreatment at work. The LGBTQ working class, who are disproportionately low-income and housing insecure, could now be burdened with the additional stress of having to look, act, and speak feminine or masculine enough or potentially be fired.

Corporations happily exploit changed social attitudes to rake in millions on Pride marketing, while on a broader scale paying their workers poverty wages, denying benefits, and fighting tooth and nail to avoid paying their fair share in taxes.

More Power to the Bosses

The impact of these decisions will absolutely extend to all workers whether or not

they are LGBTQ. To decide against the employees would significantly weaken the 30-year-old rule against gender stereotyping, upending the entire legal basis for banning sex discrimination at work. All workers regardless of sexuality and gender will be less secure in their jobs if they can be fired for failing to conform to their boss' gender stereotypes. Women in particular are already unfairly burdened by dress codes in school and the workplace, and individual choices like wearing pants instead of skirts or having a short hairstyle could be held against them if the Court rules against the plaintiffs.

These cases arise in the context of an onslaught of anti-worker decisions that make the union-busting role of the courts increasingly clear. Last year *Janus v. AFSCME* outlawed fair share agreements in public sector unions, serving a monumental defeat to the labor movement. *Epic Systems v. Lewis* ruled that employer contracts can bar their workers from collective arbitration. Now, the upcoming decisions could pave the way for bosses to single out workers for their identities and further engage in divide-and-conquer tactics.

Labor Must Fight Back

Unions need to urgently take up this fight against workplace discrimination. Whether queer or straight, trans or cisgender, no worker should have their gender presentation, dress and behavior unnecessarily policed by their boss. Statements of support and solidarity rallies from unions could help send a clear message that the labor movement supports trans workers' right to transition and the right of all LGBTQ workers to be out of the closet.

We are up against an unelected body of justices wielding enormous power over our lives and punching down on the most marginalized. In recent years activists have seen the courts let off killer cops, indict peaceful protestors, and continually raise threats against *Roe v. Wade* and reproductive rights. The capitalist legal system is not designed



to protect working people and the oppressed.

The fight for *Roe v. Wade* and marriage equality show that the courts, even when overwhelmingly conservative, can be pressured by a strong mass movement. Court decisions are not just a product of stale analysis of legal texts, but the outcome of a living political struggle. While not etched in stone, decisions can take years and even decades to be revisited. These crucial cases are a litmus test of our movement's ability to organize sustained mass campaigns to fight off attacks.

The Struggle for LGBTQ Liberation

The LGBTQ community is facing a series of uphill battles against relentless assaults from the Trump administration and the right. Trans people have been in the crosshairs of hate mongering to pass "bathroom bills" at the state level for years.

On the other hand, there has been a revolution in social attitudes toward sexuality and gender, especially among youth. More than 90% of Americans believe gay and lesbian workers should have equal rights in job opportunities, according to a 2019 Gallup poll. More than half, rather than wanting to weaken existing laws, believe new civil rights laws are needed to reduce discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

transgender people.

Trump-appointed Supreme Court justice Neil Gorsuch expressed fear that ruling in favor of the LGBTQ plaintiffs would cause a "massive social upheaval." Indeed, if this majority were to mobilize, it would create an unstoppable force that could lay the groundwork not only to defend the basic legal rights of the LGBTQ working class, but also to win important victories that can push the struggle forward.

Crucial tasks for this movement will be fighting for inclusive Medicare for All with full coverage for HIV prevention, hormone replacement therapy, and surgery; affordable housing for the 40% of homeless youth who are LGBTQ; and a federal \$15 an hour minimum wage to raise the living standards of all low-wage workers. These accomplishments would be only the first major steps toward eradicating homophobia and transphobia once and for all.

The struggle for socialism is inextricably tied to LGBTQ liberation and the fight against oppression. A system built on the ability of the wealthiest minority to grow wealthier while the rest of us fight to survive is not a viable means for delivering real, material equality. We call for an end to this exploitative system and a total reorganization of society on a socialist basis, in which basic needs are met and no individual is denied a living because of their identity. 🌐

Auto Workers Strike GM

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The Contract

Past concessions mean that there are today eight categories of employees in GM factories, including hundreds employed by the notoriously anti-union labor agency Aramark, doing both janitorial and skilled trades work such as carpenters and electricians.

At least 7% of GM workers are currently “permatemps” making around \$15 an hour with very limited benefits. These workers can be fired for as little as two minor work rule infractions so have no job security. They accrue no vacations or seniority, are only allowed three unpaid days off per year with advance approval and can be made to work seven-day weeks. They can be fired for not turning up for work in a family emergency and they can remain temporary for years. A disproportionate number of these workers are women.

The Complicated Influence of UAW National Leadership

UAW leadership – while dealing with a growing corruption scandal and having called no comparable strikes in many years- launched this national action abruptly, with no pre-strike rallies or training exercises. There was no national campaign to bring the struggle to other sections of the working class.

Far more could have been won. But this would have required a leadership worthy of the courage and self sacrifice shown by the rank and file.

The UAW missed a gigantic opportunity to highlight the things that many workers already generally understand, which is that good union wages raise pay standards for all workers, and also to press the auto industry to invest in good jobs building green technology.

Media reports and our own discussions on the picket line have underlined that the vote

to accept the contract was largely based in a sense of inevitability. This sense came from the union leaders’ passivity and failure to develop the campaigns they could have launched.

But older workers also conveyed the sense that a younger generation will have to take up where they left off and they are justly proud of a win that in principle will allow temps to graduate to full time status. In the coming months, these younger workers will have to defend those gains and the local leaders who stepped up to keep this strike going will look to develop an effective, combative union going forward. The UAW has a fighting history and still retains democratic structures which will allow these workers to begin to forge a new fighting leadership for their union. A fighting union with more victories under its belt would be far more attractive to workers in the unorganized foreign-label factories, making disasters like the recent VW and Nissan votes less likely to be repeated. ☺

Chicago Teachers Strike for “the Schools Our Students Deserve”

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Instead, the leadership chose to emphasize candidate Lightfoot’s campaign promises to fix Chicago’s schools, using the slogan “Mayor Lightfoot, keep your promises! Put it in writing!” – meaning, in a contract which the Union could legally enforce.

But Lightfoot never promised to hire enough teachers to lower class sizes. The slogan “Put it in writing,” was catchy and taken up by the rank and file as a demand for Lightfoot to bargain in good faith, but the CTU leadership was using the language to signal their willingness to compromise on the demand for 5,000 new jobs. The union’s slogan “for a nurse and a librarian in every school” was inspiring, as were the revelations that school clerks become de facto counselors on homelessness. But the demand for 5,000 new jobs was never raised in public. Further, instead of clearly campaigning for new taxes on the rich and corporations as it has done in the past, the union’s public messaging was that “the city has the money.”

The Strike Rocks Chicago

The strikers were heroic, with daily picket lines at every one of Chicago’s 517 public schools and downtown demonstrations. A downtown rally on the fifth working day of the strike, planned with community groups to coincide with the Mayor’s first annual budget speech, saw over 30,000 marching in the morning rush-hour.

But other aspects were less well organized. For example, the daily demonstrations were announced to members on the morning picket lines, giving them little time to plan ahead. Neither union had a strike fund, and members had not been told to expect a long strike. With the city establishment behind her, Lightfoot refused to budge beyond relatively minor concessions, insisting “There is no money, period.”

After eight days of striking, CTU leadership told a members’ conference call that they had given up on the main demand for smaller class sizes, and would agree to a five year contract “if the terms were right.” The same weekend, SEIU Local 73 settled, winning up to 40% wage increases over five years for some positions and an agreement allowing them to respect the teachers’ picket lines.

Strikers still kept up the pressure, despite bleak weather and the concessionary talk of the leadership. But on October 28, the Union’s House of Delegates (HoD) was called to vote on a Tentative Agreement (TA) following a divided vote of 70-30 on the bargaining team. The HoD voted by 364-242 to suspend the strike if the Mayor agreed to make-up days later in the year. School resumed on November 1.

The Tentative Agreement (TA)

The TA contains some concrete victories.

These include a groundbreaking commitment to hire specialized staff to help students experiencing homelessness, in addition to 209 additional social workers, 250 nurses, and 280 Special Ed case managers, phased in over five years.

On class sizes, the union won \$35 million a year to provide some relief to teachers and students dealing with already overcrowded classrooms. But the Board’s class size standard remains unchanged.

Meanwhile, teachers and staff will be legally barred from striking again until 2024. Lori Lightfoot and CPS, backed by the billionaire education “reformers” will take these five years to regroup and find a thousand ways to chip away any gains that were made. Based on many discussions at the picket lines, Socialist Alternative called for a “No” vote on this tentative agreement.

This contract does not come close to meeting the demands of the thousands of teachers who went out on strike and the community that supported them – a transformation to create the schools our children deserve. Thousands of new hires are needed and require funding in the hundreds of millions, which would mean new taxes on big business. The hard-fought strike proves that workers are willing to fight, but as the five years drag out and more promises are broken, bolder demands and more militant tactics will be needed. ☺

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE
ISSN 2638-3349

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SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

ISSUE #58 • NOVEMBER 2019
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Trump Faces Impeachment

Broaden the Fight Against Trump's Agenda

Keely Mullen

Tens of millions of people are looking to get Donald Trump out of office. In his nearly three years in office, he has doled out tax cuts for the richest Americans, systematically stoked racial divisions, ripped up climate regulations as a gift to big energy corporations, and nominated a serial predator to the Supreme Court.

Throughout his term, the Democrats have sat on their hands as Trump has savagely attacked the interests of working-class Americans. They have not, up until this point, even seriously considered how to boot him from office.

A renewed discussion on impeachment has emerged after years of pleading from ordinary people, yet the impeachment proceedings do not take up any of Trump's real crimes detailed above. Instead, the focus is on Trump's shady dealings with Ukraine. These allegations are far more substantive than the Russian investigation, which were a political circus.

Polls show that a majority think the impeachment investigation should continue. Even more striking is that 49% now say that Trump should be impeached and removed from office. However, it is questionable whether this will be enough to convince a solid majority of the population that Trump should be removed from office.

What Are the Allegations?

A whistleblower sounded the alarm when Donald Trump threatened to withhold military aid from Ukraine until they investigated

Joe Biden and his son Hunter. As vice president, Biden allegedly called for the firing of a Ukrainian prosecutor who was investigating Burisma Holdings, a Ukrainian gas company with Hunter Biden on the board. Trump was clearly attempting to muscle a foreign government for political advantage at home. We also oppose Trump's authoritarian tendencies and his attempt to turn the state apparatus into an extension of his reactionary political operation.

The impeachment investigation has seen a number of career diplomats and "national security" officials prepared to come forward, defying the White House's attempt to stonewall and not cooperate with Congress. This has been described as the "revenge of the deep state."

The Democratic leadership genuinely sees Trump as a threat to the interests and credibility of U.S. imperialism which they unequivocally defend. Socialists are opponents of the role of the U.S. military and diplomatic apparatus around the world which has consistently and brutally defended corporate interests, whichever party is in office.

Democrats' Narrow Approach

It is one thing to win the votes in the House to impeach Trump — which if accomplished would represent a real blow to his administration — but it is another thing entirely to remove him from office and defeat his reactionary agenda.

If Trump is impeached by the House, the Senate will hold a trial on whether to remove him from office. This will require a two-thirds vote on a body where the Republicans hold a

majority. At the moment, barring catastrophic further revelations or a fundamentally different approach by the Democrats, there is basically no chance of the Senate voting to remove him.

An alternative approach, one which rouses public pressure, is ready-made for the Democrats. While they focus exclusively on his shady dealings with Ukraine, there are countless "impeachable offenses" for which there's already public outcry. The Democrats should expand the articles of impeachment to include Trump's real crimes and mobilize working people into the streets to demand an end to this reactionary regime.

However, the Democrats are not prepared to go in this direction because they are opposed to building a movement that would go beyond removing Trump to actually trying to defeat the agenda of the right.

2020 and the Establishment

The timing of the Democratic establishment launching the impeachment inquiry must be seen in the context of the presidential elections where they do not have a reliable and steady representative in the running as they did in 2016 with Hillary Clinton. Biden, their preferred candidate, is prone to frequent gaffes and his campaign appears weakened.

If the Democrats succeed in impeaching Trump, which at this point seems likely, it will give the party's establishment more authority going into the general election. However, even if Trump is impeached on this basis there's nothing precluding him from still running for re-election.

For tens of millions of Americans the ultimate goal is not Trump's impeachment, or even Trump's removal from office. Rather they are demanding serious change to substantially improve their quality of life through universal health care, free college, high quality affordable housing, and a comprehensive plan to halt the worst effects of climate change. Trump is a massive obstacle in the path of winning these victories, and defeating him is a necessary step in the process of building a mass movement for socialist change.

Bernie Sanders and AOC agree that defeating Trump has to be part of a wider movement of working-class people against inequality, racism, and sexism. But this points to building a new party based on the interests of working people. They will find themselves in near constant conflict with the leadership of the Democratic Party in this project.

If the Democrats widened their approach to impeachment to include his reactionary right-wing and anti-worker agenda they would be far better positioned to defeat Trump long term. This is precisely what Bernie and AOC should be fighting for. This approach could bring onboard the young people who marched in the hundreds of thousands against climate change, the workers going on strike across the country against corporate greed (like the GM workers who concluded their strike at the end of October). There are millions of people who could be drawn into action if there was a real opportunity to get rid of Trump and Trumpism and replace it with an inspiring left-wing alternative. 🗳️