

reform & revolution

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Our troops have fought with unmatched valor...
to this long and bloody conflict.
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Trump's Socialist Nightmare

Marxist Journal
of the Reform &
Revolution Caucus of
Democratic Socialists
of America

June 2019
\$5

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#MeToo exposed the pervasiveness of sexual assault and harassment. Ending this culture requires a feminist struggle that is prepared to tackle capitalism—the success of our movement depends on it.



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The Socialist Case for Reparations

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Reparations have become a key topic for debate for 2020 Democratic party candidates. However, framing universal programs that would help black communities as a form of reparations muddies the water. Bernie Sanders and others argue reparations are too divisive. But could the fight for reparations be a part of broader working-class struggles that actually helps unify the working class? Check out the socialist case for reparations.

Can Amazon Be Unionized?

26



An Amazon fulfillment center worker reports on the first steps of workers developing solidarity together with the aim of building warehouse committees and taking collective action across facilities, cities, and even countries. "The confidence we gain, the victories we win, the expectations we raise—those are the union we will build at Amazon."

From the Editors

This Marxist journal is produced by the Reform & Revolution caucus of Democratic Socialists of America. Articles signed by an author do not necessarily reflect the opinion of our caucus, but will hopefully stimulate a lively discussion among socialists in DSA, among union and community activists, and the broader left.

Please email us your thoughts at info@ReformAndRevolution.org. To subscribe to this journal and to donate to support our work, please visit ReformAndRevolution.org

Editorial Board: Anya Mae Lemlich, Harris Liebermann, Ramy Khalil, Stephan Kimmerle and Whitney Kahn

We Have a World to Win

A new hope is developing with the resistance in the US. Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) has become the third largest socialist organization in US history, growing from 6,000 members in 2015 to almost 60,000 in 2019. Bernie Sanders' "political revolution" ignited national conversations about socialism, and he is a leading contender for the Democratic nomination in the 2020 election. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez' inspiring election showed that ordinary people aren't stuck accepting the status quo. Teachers' strikes opened up a new wave of working-class struggle, refusing to confine themselves to the limited imagination of pro-business union leaders.

In Germany, a mass movement is demanding that the housing sector be brought into public ownership, triggering a debate about nationalizing corporations like the car company BMW. In the UK, socialist ideas are on the rise since Jeremy Corbyn became the leader of the Labour Party. Revolutionary movements are reviving the hope of the Arab Spring. In Algeria, an uprising in March ousted President Bouteflika, and less than two weeks later protests in Sudan ousted President al-Bashir. Both revolutions demand an end to the entire regime. In Sudan, protesters call for civilian

rule and continue to occupy military headquarters while the sit-ins spread.

However, the threats to our lives are numerous.

Around the world, right-wing populism gains strength and even power, from Trump here to Bolsonaro in Brazil. Far-right parties are on the rise in Europe. Even neo-Nazi and white nationalist groups have been emboldened in the US. Trump threatens attacks on Iran while US troops remain in Afghanistan and Iraq. Recently re-elected Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu continues violent military aggression in occupied Palestine. In the US, Trump stokes up dangerous racism and sexism. Children and parents are separated at the border and locked up. Police kill 1,000 people a year. Republican politicians attempt to control women's bodies, criminalizing abortion.

Time is running out. The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) gives us eleven years to avert complete climate collapse. The global school strike for climate justice highlights the urgency to act, now. Meanwhile, those hit worst by climate change are working-class and oppressed people.

It is in this context that we launch this magazine.

We feel the urgent need to popularize a Marxist framework to link up all the different struggles to improve the conditions of working-class and oppressed people with the aim of overthrowing capitalism.

A New Caucus

We are a new Marxist caucus in DSA, and producing Reform & Revolution is no small feat. We are entirely self-funded and welcome any contribution you can make. Check us out, subscribe, and donate at ReformAndRevolution.org

The only force powerful enough to do this is a mass movement of the working class, armed with a socialist vision and plan. The global working class is varied and diverse: we are multi-ethnic, multi-gender, differently-abled, and deeply divided along lines of oppression that capitalism exploits. Building a movement strong enough to take down not just right-wing leaders like Trump but the whole economic and social system requires that we come together.

History is our teacher and theory our guide to action. Reform & Revolution aims to contribute to building a force to lead that struggle. We take up Marxist ideas not as dogma, but as a living, breathing science through which to analyze the world and the way forward. This needs lively discussions, exchanges, and debate. That's what we as a caucus of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) want to engage in. We hope this magazine can be a contribution to these debates within DSA, labor, and the left.



Arab Spring re-ignited: Millions of Algerians force out President Bouteflika with street protests since February, demanding deeper change. Sudanese President al-Bashir was brought down by protesters occupying military headquarters.

Photo: OMAR-MALO, Agha, Algiers, March 15, 2019, tinyurl.com/AlgeriaMarch15, Copyright: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/

In Struggle,

Reform  Revolution

First Issue, June 2019 ★ 3

Trump's Socialist Nightmare



By building strong campaigns on issues that really matter to working-class people, Bernie, DSA, and progressive organizations can build a mass movement to drive Trump out.

By Ramy Khalil

was the Campaign Manager for Kshama Sawant in 2013 when she was elected as the first independent socialist to a city council in the US in decades.

“Tonight, we renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country,” declared Donald Trump on February 6, 2019 in his State of the Union Address. Since then we heard Mike Pence and many other Republicans echo the same Neo-McCarthyism.

The more Trump bashes socialism, the more popular it becomes. This billionaire-in-chief, right-wing populist president is one of the best recruiters for the

largest upsurge in the socialist movement in the US in 70 years.

The ascension to prominence of both Sanders’ political revolution against the billionaire class and Trump’s MAGA campaign is no coincidence. It is rooted in tectonic shifts in society.

Capitalism, in particular its neoliberal phase of the last four decades, has led humanity into an economic and ecological disaster. Under neoliberalism, industries have been privatized and deregulated, and corporations have enjoyed fewer taxes and greater profits. This was accomplished through constant waves of attacks on workers’ rights, wages, social services, and unions. This has plunged workers ever deeper into economic insecurity.

To make matters worse, climate change is threatening humanity. Capitalism offers

no solutions—only more alienation, oppression, and poverty.

It is no wonder millions of Americans have had enough. CNBC reported on August 13, 2018 that 57% of Democratic voters now say they support socialism.

Many demands that socialists have been fighting for over decades—workers' rights, free healthcare and education—are arguably now more popular than at any previous time in US history. Millions of ordinary people have rallied to support Medicare for All, climate action, and ending oppression based on race, gender, religion, and nationality.

Hundreds of thousands have actively engaged in resisting Trump. The same cannot be said, however, about the Democratic Party leadership.

It's Mueller Time?

For three years now the Democratic Party establishment has focused on Trump's collusion with Russia and obstruction of justice. The Democratic Party turned its back on social movements that arose with such might and hope, like the Green New Deal and climate justice protests, immigrant rights actions like the airport occupations against the Muslim travel ban, and battles like at Standing Rock.

Despite the 2017 Women's March being the largest single-day protest in US history, the Democratic Party has failed to organize people against the Republicans' assault on women's reproductive rights. In fact, Nancy Pelosi has continually said that Democratic candidates should not be required to be pro-choice. Meanwhile at least seven states have since passed draconian heartbeat bills aiming to challenge Roe vs. Wade in a Supreme Court now stacked in favor of conservatives.

We have no doubt that Trump obstructed justice to hide murky financial connections, including hush money he paid to cover up illicit activity in violation of campaign finance laws.

To drive Trump out, however, a strategy is needed not just to investigate Trump but to galvanize working-class people from different backgrounds to unite and fight to fundamentally transform our country. This means putting Trump on trial for his crimes against women, immigrants, the environment, the LGBTQ community, and all working people.

But what does the Democratic establishment do? They focus on "Russian interference into the 2016 elections." This convenient narrative allowed them to do several things at once:

- /// Reframe the 2016 election away from a revolt against the corporate political establishment and instead toward manipulations by a foreign government;
- /// Delegitimize the leaks from the Democratic National Committee, which first and foremost showed damning evidence that the Democratic Party leadership rigged the primary elections against the Sanders campaign;
- /// Demobilize the mass movements opposing Trump with a message of having faith in the Congressional process and wait for the surely damning Mueller report; and
- /// Hide how much the Democratic Party agrees with many of Trump's proposals like deportations, mass incarceration, and tax cuts for the super-wealthy.

What their strategy does not help achieve, however, is getting Trump out of the White House.

How to Drive Trump Out

Trump needs to be driven out, the sooner the better. To make sure Trump does not get reelected and to drive forward his impeachment, socialists and union and community activists need to build a movement beyond the limitations set down by the corporate Democrats.

Since January, the Democratic Party majority in the House could have been used to impeach Trump. Rashida Tlaib is leading the charge in Congress with her impeachment resolution, but there is opposition and hesitancy from the Democratic leadership.

The public pressure on Democrats and Republicans would need to be very strong to get

them to finally act. To pressure the House to impeach Trump and two thirds of the Senate to confirm the impeachment, we would need an uprising of working-class people. Just like how abortion rights were won in the 1970s, and how educator strikes are winning in states across the South, Republican-controlled bodies can be successfully forced to act against their will if confronted with a determined mass movement.

Such intense public pressure will not come from technocratic investigations in Washington DC about either Russian collusion or obstruction of justice. But we can build a mass movement powerful enough to oust the Predator-in-Chief by linking his impeachment to policies that actually address the real needs of working-class communities, such as Medicare for All, the Green New Deal, and ending mass incarceration and deportations.

Instead, the Democratic Party establishment is merely offering a return to the "glory days" of neoliberalism before Trump was elected. For example, in Hillary Clinton's campaign, she argued, "America is already great." But it was these very conditions—unaffordable healthcare and housing, competition over decent jobs, skyrocketing inequality, perpetual war, etc.—that laid the basis for this right-wing populist billionaire to make it into the White House in the first place. Far from a vision inspiring a mass revolt to kick out Trump, business-as-usual politics, epitomized right now in Joe Biden's candidacy, are a recipe for four more years of Trump, and a far-deeper slide into the abyss.

Now is the time to think big. A new generation is looking for socialist ideas and engaging in a political revolution against the billionaire class and everything it stands for. It's time to give Trump the boot and confront the whole billionaire class with their nightmare and the strongest tool we have—a vision for a democratic socialist society.

Business-as-usual politics, epitomized right now in Joe Biden's candidacy, are a recipe for four more years of Trump, and a far-deeper slide into the abyss.

Debate

Socialists, Bernie, and the 2020 Election

The 2020 presidential election campaign has begun. A debate has opened up in the DSA and on the left: What should socialists and progressives do? With the DSA National Political Committee's recent endorsement of Bernie Sanders, how should we relate to him and his campaign? How can we use this election cycle to achieve

real, lasting change for workers and all oppressed people?

We asked activists from different currents within DSA and on the left to give us their views:

Paul Alexander is the Northwest Regional Organizer for DSA Medicare for All and a member of the DSA Bread & Roses caucus. He argues the Bernie campaign is a historic opportunity to spread socialist ideas.

Shamus Cooke is a community organizer for Portland Tenants United and DSA. He is in favor of engaging with the Bernie campaign but also warns about sowing illusions in the Democratic Party.

Sarah Smith ran for Congress in 2018 in the Seattle area and won 32% of the vote against the longstanding corporate Democrat Adam Smith. She urges the left to unite behind Sanders to get a socialist into the White House.

Philip Locker represents the DSA Reform and Revolution caucus in this debate. He argues for concrete and radical demands to link Bernie's campaign to a socialist transformation of society.



Building DSA with an Independent Campaign for Sanders

2020 is our chance to reach tens of millions of voters with a message: If you like Sanders, you'll love Socialism.

Paul Alexander

is the Northwest Regional Organizer for DSA Medicare for All and a member of the Bread & Roses DSA caucus.



The debate within Democratic Socialists of America over whether to support Bernie Sanders' 2020 presidential run came to a decisive conclusion in March, when 76% of the 13,324 members who participated in an advisory online poll voted in favor of endorsement—thus prompting a vote by DSA's National Political Committee to move forward with a "DSA for Bernie" independent expenditure campaign plan. It was the largest decision-making process ever undertaken by the now-55,000 member organization.

The choice of an independent expenditure campaign (which DSA also undertook in 2016) is significant for several reasons. First, it enables DSA to shape its own campaign messaging and make a uniquely socialist case for Sanders.

It also allows DSA to funnel popular excitement for Sanders and his policies back into the organization. The hope is that, in a world where the electoral sphere is the primary means by which working people understand and engage with poli-

tics, a DSA for Bernie campaign will both increase the organization's membership, its ties to working-class institutions like labor unions, and continue the swell in membership that DSA has experienced since 2016.

The use of the Democratic Party ballot line is, of course, fraught with peril. DSA should hold no illusions about whether the Democratic Party is capable of being "realigned," or transformed into an institution capable of advocating for working-class interests (though Sanders himself has made comments to the contrary).

If elected, Sanders may very well be forced to submit to ruling-class concerns about business confidence, particularly in the event of an economic downturn. The big ticket items on his policy agenda—Medicare for All, a Green New Deal—will face intense opposition from both parties and are unlikely to come to fruition. No president, not even Sanders, is single-handedly capable of rolling back a half-decade of the erosion of working-class institutions.

Despite all this, Sanders still represents the greatest opportunity for socialists in over half a century to bring our politics in front of working-class people. In the event of procedural shenanigans by the DNC, millions are likely to

become further disillusioned with "politics as usual." And assuming he takes office, the division between Sanders and the rest of the party is likely to become even more heightened.

It's lamentable that the state of class consciousness in America and the decimation of the labor movement forces socialists to assume a position that, although a breath of fresh air, is also defensive. But the prospect of a mass working party in America is at best years, if not decades away. One need only examine the history of the US Labor Party of the 1990s, which came and went in a climate far friendlier than our present one, to recognize this. To beat back neoliberalism and win even the gains associated with mere social de-

mocracy, DSA needs to be an organization not of thousands, but hundreds of thousands.

DSA members stand to gain nothing by opting out of electoral politics, or wishing somehow that Sanders wasn't our best hope for continuing our ascendancy. (He is.) In the same way that DSA has coalesced the energy around Sanders' 2016 campaign to reignite popular demands for social-democratic

reforms, it has an unprecedented role to play in the upcoming election, reaching tens of millions of voters with a simple message: if you like Sanders, you'll love socialism.

Sanders still represents the greatest opportunity for socialists in over half a century to bring our politics in front of working-class people.

Engaging with Bernie without Fostering Illusions

Now that DSA has endorsed Bernie, should its Marxist members engage or abstain? Analyzing the risks and rewards should happen before deciding.

Shamus Cooke

is a Chief Steward for Service Employees International Union local 503, and he is a community organizer for Portland Tenants United and DSA.



If Bernie becomes President—an increasingly real possibility—what should we expect? The recent victory of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) in Mexico, whose victory was itself a reflection of capitalist crisis, may provide a useful example.

The nearer AMLO came to winning the Presidency the more rightward he drifted—hoping to make himself digestible to the Mexican ruling class. Like Bernie, AMLO is a nationalist who's accepted the capitalist state apparatus—with all its built-in limitations—as the place to implement his nationalistic reform policies.

AMLO's election, however, raised hopes in the Mexican working class, who started a massive strike wave that's already changing labor relations. The earth shook when AMLO won, but as President he'll work to prevent aftershocks, mitigat-

ing the initiative of the workers instead of unleashing it.

Bernie wants to add democratic-socialist characteristics to the U.S. capitalist project, similar to the New Deal-influenced society he was raised in. When the next recession fully manifests, some Left Democrats will use Bernie's strategy to stabilize markets, in effect stabilizing capitalism. Most billionaires hate Bernie like the capitalists who hated FDR, who saved the system that generated their wealth.

As revolutionaries our goal is to usher in socialist relations to answer capitalist crises, not raise illusions about New Deal reformist politics—a risk we face by uncritically engaging with the Bernie campaign. Bernie represents a complicated contradiction, but the resolution of this contradiction is intended to save capitalism, not produce socialism.

Joining Bernie's campaign purely to recruit to DSA seems pragmatic, but it's easy to overstate the potential. People will join DSA by default, as they did after Trump was elected, since we are the only visible game in town. The low hanging fruit will fall from the tree without a shake.

We should also expect to have little impact over pushing Bernie to the Left.

Electoral campaigns are top-down cheer-leading operations, not discussion forums for new ideas.

As socialism's popularity grows, we can expect a wave of 'socialist' careerists adopting reformist programs. We must insist that working-class people rely on their own organizations, and not over-rely on unreliable people, intent on sheep-dogging us back into fixing an unfixable capitalist project.

For those DSA members engaging with Bernie's campaign—and there are many—we shouldn't abstain. We should argue concrete ways to maintain DSA's independence, insisting that canvassing be used to promote DSA organizing projects/meetings. Canvassing should focus on working-class neighborhoods where

DSA hasn't build a base. Done strategically, canvassing for Bernie can be used to build a stronger, independent DSA.

The near-term goal must be building an independent political party. But ultimately, political independence cannot be accomplished

via Bernie or the next left-populist Democrat. His campaign may cause a political crisis that DSA could benefit from, and we should expect more such crises ahead, but without political independence future opportunities will be lost.

The near-term goal must be building an independent political party.

The Unglamorous Work of the Progressive Left

This election is about how we get to the vision where power of working-class people is realized.

Sarah Smith

ran for Congress in 2018 and won 32% of the vote against longstanding corporate



Democrat Adam Smith in the Seattle area. She was endorsed by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and DSA.

As the field of 2020 Democratic presidential candidates grows, democratic socialists and progressives are left asking themselves one important question: Who do we support in 2020?

Normally, I am a firm believer in casting your vote for a presidential candidate independent of their relative obscurity or viability. But if we as progressives want any hope of effecting change in 2020, we need to do something our community is historically bad at doing—overcoming our bias, doubts, and criticisms of each other and uniting behind a single candidate for the presidency of the United States. As progressives, we share a vision where the power of working-class people is realized. We see a way to guarantee prosperous lives for every person in America: a roof over every head, food in every cabinet, educa-

tion for all, healthcare for all, and a living wage in every paycheck. This is the future we want—one of equity, stability, and the expansion of our freedoms. This election is about how we get there. A pitfall of the progressive left is our tendency to divide into camps and argue over what is the best way to make an impact—rather than actually trying.

Arguing alone isn't enough to change the lives of everyday working people. While we argue amongst ourselves, the corporate worker-exploitation machine marches forward, and the workers, women, and disenfranchised suffer. We must present a unified front on the left in 2020. There is no time nor energy to fight amongst ourselves. Our homeless comrades, our sick comrades, and our marginalized comrades are in immediate and desperate need. The 2020 election is our chance to keep that message front and center.

There is no shortage of candidates that we could choose to support in 2020 to lead the front. I have admiration for Tulsi Gabbard, Elizabeth Warren, and Steven Yang. But in a field of almost two dozen primary can-

didates, and growing, we must be prudent and intentional. It was Senator Sanders that kicked off the progressive revolution in the mainstream world. He was instrumental in clearing the cobwebs from the concept of Socialism, and his popularity far surpasses the roster of progressive candidates. While I am not one to say that we must only support the most viable candidate, I believe Senator Sanders is our chance to get the future that workers in the United States need so badly. Sanders is currently polling stronger than most the other candidates. Sen. Sanders is our viable voice, our bridge to a world where the balance tips in favor of the proletariat and against the corporate welfare state.

There is still time. We can undo the damage wrought by the Trump administration and bring Democratic Socialism to the White House. There are lots of reasons to criticize Bernie, and he's by no means a perfect candidate. But if we are truly committed to protecting the rights of the disenfranchised and ensuring a future for all, then the time for our collective and vocal support of Senator Sanders' bid for the Presidency is now.

This is a hard truth—we fight over minutiae and let people suffer as a result.

To overcome this struggle, we have to embrace it, identify what's important to our cause, and move through it. 2020 is the cycle where, for the sake of our country and our working-class brethren, we can overcome this pitfall through a unified front of socialist and progressive strength. Again, there is no time nor energy to fight amongst ourselves. Our homeless comrades, our sick comrades, and our marginalized comrades

are in immediate and desperate need. The 2020 presidential election is our chance to bring this to the forefront of the discussion again.

A pitfall of the progressive left is our tendency to divide into camps and argue over what is the best way to make an impact... rather than actually trying.

Philip Locker

was the Political Director of the campaigns to elect Kshama Sawant, the first independent socialist on the Seattle city council in 100 years. He is contributing to the debate on behalf of Reform & Revolution.



With DSA's decision to launch an independent campaign for Bernie, we have a vehicle to support Bernie that takes a critical and independent socialist position. Not only will this help elect the first socialist president of the US, but if DSA is bold in the politics it puts forward, it can become a qualitatively larger force. We can create the beginnings of a new socialist party of 150,000 members with deep roots in the multi-ethnic working class.

As the 2020 Presidential Primary document adopted by the DSA National Political Committee says "we are not rubber-stamping Sanders, but instead [we] have high demands on him politically, and [we] will push Sanders towards our positions as much as possible."

This needs to be concretized with a specific set of policies. Reform & Revolution argues for DSA to put forward the demands below to popularize them among Bernie's base and pressure Bernie to adopt these demands.

Some dismiss the ability of DSA or others on the left to have an impact on Bernie. Yet the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the demands of Black Lives Matter activists on Bernie specifically, played a key role in pushing Bernie to adopt a far better anti-racist program in 2015 than he initially started with. Another example is how Bernie responded to former staffers speaking out against harassment and pay inequity in his 2016 campaign. Sanders developed a comprehensive sexual harassment policy, and negotiated a union contract that in-

A Bold Socialist Message to Build DSA

Trump puts socialism in the spotlight — our DSA campaign for Bernie should, too.

cludes anti-discrimination protection, pay equity, and grievance processes for harassment.

a) An Anti-Imperialist Foreign Policy: Bring the Troops Home and End the US Wars and Occupations

Too often Bernie puts forward merely a left-wing version of a liberal foreign policy. Socialists should argue instead for an anti-imperialist foreign policy that stands in solidarity with workers and oppressed people around the world. We should call for bringing home all US troops from abroad, ending US military aid to right-wing regimes (such as Guaidó in Venezuela, Bolsonaro in Brazil, the Saudi monarchy, and the Israeli right-wing regime, etc.), and slashing the US military budget.

b) A Bold Feminist Campaign

Our campaign should link the fight against sexism to an anti-capitalist vision that works to build a socialist feminist wing of the newly emerging feminist movement. DSA should highlight its opposition to sexual harassment and assault, as well as the new wave of attacks on abortion rights, and demand that all reproductive healthcare (including abortion and contraception) be free as part of Medicare for All, along with free childcare and an end to the gender pay gap. We should agitate for mass protests to defend abortion rights, and call on Bernie to actively do so as well.

c) Bring the Giant Energy Companies into Public Ownership as Part of the Green New Deal

While supporting the Green New Deal, DSA should work to popularize the socialist case that it is time to end the tyranny of the giant fossil fuel corporations.

Democratic public ownership is the only realistic way to fundamentally overcome the undemocratic power these corporations exercise over the political and economic system.

d) For a Democratic Internet - Take Amazon, Facebook, and Google into Public Ownership

Elizabeth Warren's call for breaking up Amazon, Facebook and Google provides another opportunity for DSA to better define its distinctly socialist politics. While Warren's proposal would no doubt represent an improvement from the current situation, we should argue for running these giant internet platforms democratically as 21st century open source public utilities rather than breaking them up into smaller profit-driven companies.

e) A Socialist Vision for a Fundamental Transformation of Society

When Bernie explains his view of socialism, he calls for a major expansion of social welfare programs but does not link this to a transformation of society that puts an end to capitalism itself. Our campaign could go further than this.

Trump and the Republicans will be putting socialism on trial throughout the presidential campaign. This is a huge opportunity for the DSA campaign for Bernie to proudly argue the case for replacing the chaotic capitalist system with a new socialist society. This would be based on collective ownership of the key productive resources, rational planning of the economy, and real democracy in our workplaces, schools, and communities. This would lay the basis for a new egalitarian society which can uproot racism, sexism, and all forms of oppression.

Socialist Uprising in the Democratic Party?

The Bernie grassroots revolt is the potential outline of a new party being built within the shell of the old Democratic Party.

Editorial Contribution by *Reform and Revolution*

In the debate about whether DSA should endorse Bernie Sanders, Dan La Botz, a long-standing, committed socialist activist, stresses that: “Sanders 2020 poses the question of political subordination to a capitalist party or political independence.” He also writes that Bernie’s campaign “threatens to lead DSA deep into the Democratic Party,” a party whose “role in American society—as the lesser of two evils—is to periodically reform the political and economic system just enough so that it can incorporate and absorb those who begin to turn away from capitalism.”

The Democratic Party is a capitalist party fundamentally hostile to the interests of working people and the left. For working people to articulate a program based on their interests and to take power to re-organize society, workers must have their own political party which is 100% accountable to them.

On this point, we are in full agreement with Dan. However, how do we engage with and assist people who want to fight for a fundamental change, but unlike Dan and us, believe that the Democratic Party can be used to pursue our interests?

A Living Contradiction

The contradiction of the political moment we are in is captured by the fact that we are seeing a historic upsurge in support for socialism, yet it is being expressed inside the Democratic Party, a party as hostile to socialism at its core as the Republican Party. This peculiar historical twist is a result of the lack of a mass left political party in the US that could give voice to the growing opposition to big business and the desire for political representation for the 99%. Under these conditions this progressive sentiment is expressed through Sanders and the new wave of left Democrats like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC). This is a step forward given the concrete conditions of the US, although the politics of Sanders, AOC, and the other new left Democrats have populist and reformist limitations.

There is not yet a clear conscious understanding among Sanders’ base, including even its left wing, about the fundamentally capitalist character of the Democratic Party and the need to build a distinctly working-class party. At this stage there is a deep anger at the establishment politicians who dominate the Democratic Party, combined with hopes that the Democratic Party can be transformed into a progressive populist party.

We Base Ourselves on Reality, Not Schemas

This process, where this new socialist sentiment is finding expression through the Democratic Party, may not match the schema of how many Marxists expected events to unfold, nor how we believe they “should” unfold. But nevertheless it is how events are unfolding!

For socialists to stand aside from this real process and counterpose to it general Marxist truths would be a serious mistake. Marxist theory is a guide to action to change the world, not a dogma that we demand the world conforms to.

Marx spelled out this method: “We do not confront the world in a doctrinaire way with a new principle: Here is the truth, kneel down before it!... We do not say to the world: Cease your struggles, they are foolish; we will give you the true slogan of struggle. We merely show the world what it is really fighting for, and consciousness is something that it has to acquire, even if it does not want to.”

It is in this spirit that socialists should approach the Sanders campaign.

Our task is to join the real struggle that is developing in the Bernie campaign, which is activating the actual left wing of the US working class. We also need to spread support for socialist politics by drawing on the concrete experiences of the Bernie campaign to put forward the policies that we believe will be required to win—the building of a mass political party that is 100% on the side of the working class that will carry out a fundamental restructuring of society.

Such a mass consciousness can only develop out of the actual experiences of millions fighting to elect Sanders and seeing for themselves how the Democratic Party and the capitalist class keep sabotaging our political revolution.

This stems from the objective reality that there is a fundamental contradiction running through the Democratic Party today.

The Sanders campaign will highlight the question again and again: In whose interests will the conflict in the Democratic party be resolved—the left wing giving voice to the working class, or the establishment wing representing the billionaire class?

There are big dangers that come with Sanders running within the Democratic Party. One is Sanders being defeated in the primaries and then using his authority to provide a left prop for the establishment Democratic candidate. Another major danger is that the huge energy gathered around Bernie dissipates after the electoral campaign is over. But this underlines all the more the importance of DSA fighting for Sanders volunteers to get organized independently.

Building a Mass Organization

As Sanders consistently raises, the only way he will be able to overcome the obstacles that the Democratic establishment will throw in his way is if millions of working people get actively involved and fight. To win the election, Sanders will need an unprecedented grassroots uprising to reach voters and respond to the corporate media’s propaganda.

Our DSA campaign can champion the idea that these millions of Sanders volunteers should come together in their own organization with democratic membership structures. An active member-run organization

of Sanders volunteers, funded by its own members, would revolutionize Bernie’s campaign. It could have chapters in every part of the country meeting monthly to discuss events and work out their views in response to the constant distortion and smears by the capitalist media.

Each chapter could actively campaign in their communities, organize door-knocking, and help build related social movements. DSA chapters can host community meetings and occupy the offices of politicians who oppose Sanders’ bold policies like Medicare for All and a credit card interest cap. Socialists can build Labor for Bernie and take on union leaders who cover up for Wall Street Dem-

ocrats. All of this is possible without having to wait for the official Sanders campaign to show up in each state as the primary election date nears.

A mass organization of this character should not be limited to just volunteering for Bernie in this one election cycle. With a longer term vision, it could use the platform of the election to systematically build up its membership to be able to continue fighting on different fronts long after this race—building real power from below.

If Bernie is elected president, he will only be able to carry out his program on the basis of a massive movement of working people to overcome the all-out opposition of the ruling class. We will need genuine left-wing representatives in Congress and state and local offices to also fight for a political revolution against the billionaire class. Otherwise Bernie would be isolated, facing constant sabotage from Congress and the ruling class.

Of course, genuine left-wing representatives will not be handed to us by the establishment of the Democratic Party.

Instead, the millions who are getting involved in Sanders’ campaign are the force that can achieve this. But

to realize this potential and not allow it to slip away, we need to be organized in a mass membership organization throughout the country and run candidates from within our own ranks who are accountable to the working class.

Unfortunately this is not the current conception of the Sanders campaign. Although Our Revolution has a longer term vision, it currently lacks the necessary structures for activists to join and fully take democratic ownership of the organization.

But our DSA campaign can raise

An active member-run organization of Sanders volunteers, funded by its own members, would revolutionize Bernie’s campaign.

this idea and build support for it. We should campaign for Bernie to form such an organization, or call on Our Revolution to develop real membership and democratic structures so it could play such a role.

Build DSA into a Mass Socialist Party

If Sanders and Our Revolution are unwilling to take this step, we can offer DSA as an organization.

ization for all those activists who agree that there needs to be a democratic membership organization of the left. There will be the space for DSA to grow into a small mass party of around 150,000 members in this coming battle. However, if Sanders and Our Revolution were to adopt this approach, they could build a significantly larger organization than DSA.

What is this, if not the de facto beginning of a new political party independent from big business? It is true that such a new party would be built on the terrain of the Democratic Party—a party of US capitalism. But that is where the fight is unfolding and where millions of workers and young people are gathering and looking for a political alternative to corporate politics.

DSA can play a critical role in making sure that, out of this battle, the socialist movement emerges strengthened, and that the idea of independent working-class politics is

What is this, if not the de facto beginning of a new political party independent from big business?

popularized among Sanders' left-wing base. With this approach DSA can double or triple in size. This would represent a qualitative change in the size and weight of DSA that would, in essence, mark the beginnings of a mass socialist party.

A socialist force of this size could have a substantial impact within social struggles. It would allow the new socialist movement

to have a common framework to work together in, share lessons of different struggles, and test out different ideas. Such a socialist party would still be far from the mass working-class force needed to decisively challenge the power of the capitalist class

both in terms of its size and program. Nonetheless, by providing an arena for discussion and debate, a new socialist party would play a critical role for the movement to collectively learn and politically develop at a faster pace.

We are living in incredibly exciting, powerful times. Many things that seem far away are much closer than they appear, but only if we make use of these opportunities. DSA does not have control over whether people get activated through elections or mass movements in the streets. We don't yet have control over whether Bernie runs as a Democrat or an independent. But we can have an impact on the development of the left wing of the Sanders campaign. To fully seize this opportunity, however, will require DSA to develop a conscious understanding of the opening that exists, and the political confidence to take the lead in building a socialist party that can influence US politics.

From #MeToo to Revolutionary Change

#MeToo exposed the pervasiveness of sexual assault and harassment. Ending this culture requires a feminist struggle that's prepared to tackle capitalism — and the success of our socialist movement depends on it.

Anya Mae Lemlich is a hotel worker and a socialist feminist activist in DSA.

In December 2017, two months after sexual assault allegations against Harvey Weinstein burst open the floodgates of women's anger, TIME Magazine named a hotel housekeeper as a "Silence Breaker" in their Person of the Year issue. Amidst the Hollywood actresses who came forward about Weinstein and the coining of the term #MeToo by activist Tarana Burke, Juana Melara described her experiences cleaning hotel rooms of powerful men.

"I was scrubbing the bathtub on my knees. And I suddenly felt like, you know, something you feel when somebody's watching you. And I turned. And there he was inside that room, in front of the bathroom door, just looking at me. And it scared me," she told NPR (December 21, 2017). The man exposed himself to her; she managed to lock him out of the room and had to wait 20 minutes for help (The Guardian, August 3, 2018).

A chilling part of Melara's story is its ubiquitousness—Melara says "seven out of ten [of her co-workers], they have some kind of experience like that"—and its familiarity.

Women understand well what Melara means by that "feeling of someone watching you." We can taste her fear, we know that feeling of paralysis, of clenching. We spend our lives whispering these ubiquitous and familiar stories to each other, or we keep them deeply hidden, not realizing how ubiquitous and familiar they are.

We needed to shout. And once the floodgates opened, conversation was impossible to contain. Conversation quickly spread to gender violence in low-wage industries, like Melara's, where much of the workforce are women of color and immigrants. California farmworkers were some of the first to stand in solidarity with the women of Hollywood, and conversation around gender violence in the restaurant industry sparked. Soon, we were talking about sexism in all aspects of our lives.

The story of comedian Aziz Ansari in particular forced us to grapple with what constitutes sexual harassment. For many of us, the story was familiar: a man pressuring a woman into a sexual encounter, putting his own desires over respecting another person's boundaries. After Ansari's story broke, I found myself sharing one of my own deeply

hidden stories, about someone who had violated my boundaries—perhaps unknowingly, but it doesn't matter—and left me shattered at 15. In the process of sharing I began to understand that each of our stories matter, and what we experience as uncomfortable, violent or traumatic takes many forms. Many of them look nothing like the kind of harassment and assault we have been conditioned to believe are the only ones.

Because of the story's familiarity, it was blasted for taking #MeToo too far. Op-eds in the New York Times and The Atlantic labeled it as just "bad sex" and "unpleasant moments." It was blasted because it exposes behavior

We were finally talking—no, shouting—about all of it.

that many people in our lives have probably engaged in, and that's why it's scary. It makes clear that this is a cultural problem; rather than blaming Ansari as an individual,

our blame is with a society that does not care to teach people how to interact with each other in situations of intimacy.

Ansari is only one individual within a global culture in which women are not asked, not listened to, not believed, not respected, vio-

Illustration by Val Ross



FROM THE INTERNET,
TO THE STREETS!

AFFORDABLE
HOUSING
NOW!

24 HOUR,
FREE,
COMMUNITY
RUN
CHILD-
CARE

ME
TOO

lently assaulted, and seen as objects. Across the world, from Argentina to Ethiopia to France, #MeToo described a world where women's bodies are not entirely ours, still seen by many men—however unconsciously—as theirs for the taking. We were finally talking—no, shouting—about all of it.

This sort of consciousness-raising is important because it can pave the way for mass action. While #MeToo started with elite women in Hollywood, soon McDonald's workers were striking and Google employees were walking out to protest harassment. It also raises our expectations of what is possible. #MeToo succeeded in ousting a handful of rich and famous men from their public positions of power, and ushered in a new era in which taking down an abusive boss or politician is actually possible.

From Anita Hill to Christine Blasey Ford

In 2018, Christine Blasey Ford's testimony against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh electrified the country. People were paying attention. I had never shared that many knowing looks or conversations with strangers about politics. The day that

Juana Melara's union, *Unite Here*, was one of the few unions who took up #MeToo. In Seattle, the hospitality union fought for and passed a city law that not only mandated that all housekeepers carry panic buttons, but also lowered the workload for housekeepers, and mandated that hotel workers, including part-time employees, receive access to high-quality, affordable healthcare.

Kavanaugh was confirmed, the women in my life held each other.

Because we lived in a post #MeToo world, some of us thought that 2018 would be different than 1991, when Anita Hill brought charges of sexual harassment against Clarence Thomas. The climate was unmistakably different. Hill's hearings were

notoriously mishandled by the all-white, all-male Senate Judiciary Committee, and she sat through pointed attacks. In 2018, Brett Kavanaugh seemed to innately understand the sea-change he was witnessing—and he lashed out against it, yelling, spit-flying, eyes furious.

Yet the outcome is not that different: another sexual assaulter now sits on a court that holds unbelievable power over women's lives in the US. Despite #MeToo and the historic women's marches, Trump—the perfect embodiment of patriarchal culture—is still in office. And recently, presidential candidate Joe Biden—the man who chaired the committee who grilled Anita Hill, who participated in their demeaning questioning, and refused to call three witnesses—was hit with his own allegations.

Politician Lucy Flores came forward to describe how Joe Biden inappropriately touched her. A second woman, Amy Lappos, told the Hartford Courant how Biden “put his hand around my neck and pulled me in to rub noses with me.” Photos of Biden touching women—who are clearly uncomfortable—have roamed the internet for years. Yet corporate politicians continue to defend Biden, attempting to draw a line between Biden's “affectionate behavior” and “real” sexual harassment.

Normalizing Biden's behavior, however, undermines an important lesson of #MeToo: that every unwanted touch, no matter how small, is part of the same sexist culture—one that so many of us participate in. Weinstein's abuse, Ansari's pressuring, and Biden's unwanted kiss exist as cultural practices under one patriarchal umbrella; they are all pillars in a world of male dominance. But male dominance is cultural, and sexual violence is taught, not biological—which means we can end it.

The Roots of Women's Oppression

To end gender violence, we need to know what creates and sustains it. Our daily experiences are continuously produced, or conditioned by, material conditions. Material conditions refer to how we as human beings in a given society both produce what we need to live and reproduce ourselves as people. What kind of work is done? Who does it?

Capitalism could not exist without “social reproduction,” especially of its most crucial asset, labor. Yet it obscures, treats as irrelevant, devalues and dismisses this sort of work.

Under capitalism, at the jobs most of us go to each day, owners of the companies exploit the working class to extract surplus value (or, as they would call it, profit). This is the heart of capitalism. The working class is the key to capitalists' profit, and thus the key to how this system can be overthrown.

The working class is a socio-economic group of workers, families, elders, and the unemployed who rely directly or indirectly on incomes from wage labor — or, as Tithi Bhattacharya puts it, “everyone in the producing class who has in their lifetime participated in the totality of reproduction of society.”

But wage labor requires that there be workers to exploit, and these workers must be somehow “reproduced.” That is, they must be fed, clothed, housed, and generally able to continue working (being exploited, as we would call it), and so must their children, and so on.

Capitalism could not exist without “social reproduction,” especially of its most crucial asset, labor. Yet it obscures, treats as irrelevant, devalues and dismisses this sort of work.

The labor required to reproduce the working class is borne disproportionately by women under capitalism. While men and women certainly took on different roles throughout history, this division of labor changed as capitalism overthrew previous ways of organizing society. In 16th and 17th century Europe, for example, the new

economic system forced working-class men into waged work and initially excluded working-class women. Women were pushed into the reproductive work of the newly established nuclear family, just as this work became controlled and seen as inferior, unimportant, and invisible. This is a process that has continued to happen around the world through so-called “globalization.” And since the nuclear family remains an important place of social reproduction, capitalists have a vested interest in propping up compulsory heterosexuality and gender binaries, pillars of the family structure.

Women, and initially children, were also used as an additional reservoir of extra workers, used when needed by the capitalists and pushed back when unemployment was rising. As a marginal workforce, women were—and still are—paid much less than men and treated as second-class workers, even as the reproductive work of the nuclear family still fell to them. And when more women started entering the waged workforce, it was no wonder that so-called “caring” jobs—those to do with the reproduction of the labor force, like teaching, cleaning, or nursing—fell to them.

Capitalism and the

Gender violence is one way that capitalism ensures we're kept in line.

ruling class benefit spectacularly from this division of labor. The costs of reproducing the labor force—raising children, feeding families, clothing families, caring for the elderly and the sick, and emotionally tending to ourselves and others—are still offloaded onto women instead of the capitalists themselves. And of course, like our entire class, we're exploited in our second job, waged work, where we're not compensated for the value we create. Our bodies are used for the capitalists' profit, whether we're cleaning hotel rooms at our “real” job or raising future housekeepers at home.

The reason this sort of oppression works so well is because men do have power over women. Men benefit through material advantages, a feeling of superiority and access to women's bodies, and control over women at home, to make up for the control that most men lack as workers. Yet the power that working-class men have over women does not hold up to the power that the capitalists have over all of us. Working-class men are also harmed by patriarchal culture, even as they benefit. They are forced into a gender binary that represses their full emotional selves, and forced into accepting lower wages, since paying women less—some far less than others—brings all wages down.

This is strategic: capitalism uses sexism to divide us. It also instrumentalizes gender violence to keep us down as workers, and has done so throughout history. It was no wonder that #MeToo started in the workplace, that abusive men were abusive bosses, and that many stories of workplace harassment and assault featured men in positions of power coercing their female workers, many of whom have intersecting identities—immigrants, women of color, differently abled people—that make them even more vulnerable. As Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, an organization of California farmworkers, wrote to the

women of Hollywood in one of the first shows of solidarity: “even though we work in very different environments, we share a common experience of being preyed upon by individuals who have the power to hire, fire, blacklist and otherwise threaten our economic, physical and emotional security.” As long as people wield these positions of power over others, gender violence is not going anywhere. It is baked into capitalism and class society.

The material benefits from offloading social reproduction to women and the huge impact of a divide and rule policy — this is the root of our oppression as women. And we continue to be exploited in this way through a system of control in which violence and harassment play a central role. Gender violence is one way that capitalism ensures we're kept in line.

Taking Back Control

Nothing short of revolution—of putting control over our bodies and production back into our own hands—will change this. Carceral responses that aim to lock up individuals, or solutions that focus solely on electing more women to political office, will not end gender violence. We need a feminist movement that understands the full task ahead of us, and knows that the power to overthrow our current system lies with the working class.

When asked what would make things better, housekeeper Juana Melara responded, “It could help us a lot if more hotels have unions because the workloads are less where the workplace has unions. The workload is a big part of this because you always in such a rush trying to finish your job and do a good job that you don't pay attention to what goes around.” Unions can help protect workers from assault from customers, co-workers, and bosses as workers claim more and more control over their workplace and working conditions.

Unions, just like other working-class or left organizations, are not automatically free from patriarchal culture. We need to demand that these organizations fight against this internally. Our organizations need to educate all members and understand how women and people of color are differentially impacted by capitalism. We need to

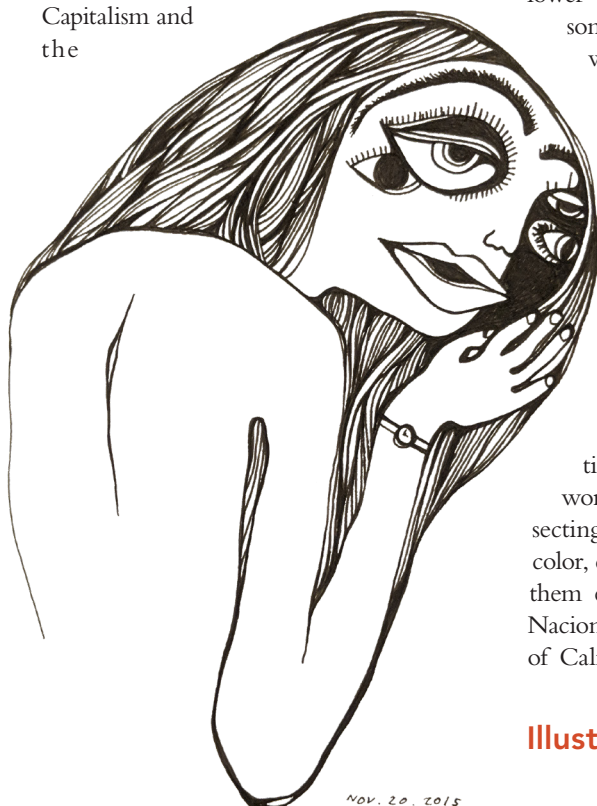


Illustration by Mina Kolb-Sage

Into the Streets

The first Women's March was the biggest expression of the resistance to Trump and the sexism pervasive in society. According to political scientists from the Universities of Connecticut and Denver, it was the biggest single-day protest in U.S. history. But many of the individual marches were politically dominated by liberal forces tied to the Democratic party that has been unable or unwilling to channel women's visceral anger into tangible change that would have a direct impact on women's lives. Since then, the corporate media has waged a fierce campaign to discredit the Women's Marches.

But these marches opened something up in people that can't just be contained again. Socialists, organized in DSA, should contribute to organizing the next women's marches, to point the way forward with clear demands.

DSA, other socialist groups, unions, and other left groups should join together to organize the 2020 marches. Our marches must be inclusive of all people. The corporate media made up a scandal of anti-semitism, splitting the movement at the exact moment that we all needed each other most. The Women's March can be a safe place for Jewish people facing an onslaught of anti-semitism, and of Muslim people who have faced the brunt of racist and xenophobic attacks for decades, escalating with Trump in office. The majority of all women, trans, and nonbinary people, and a huge proportion of men want to march together: to close the gender and race wage gaps, for free and universal childcare, to end sexual harassment, and for full reproductive justice. The establishment has failed us; it's time for the revolutionary and progressive left to lead the way.

create processes of investigating sexual assault and harassment that do not diminish or re-traumatize survivors, but that take a restorative approach. We also need to educate, push back against, and in some cases simply stop men who believe they can get away with using the position of power capitalism offers them.

But these organizations also need to fight outwardly; they need to build a movement around legal, cultural, and economic demands that address gender violence and oppression. Most unions did not take up the #MeToo movement and mobilize workers.

This was not just a betrayal, it was a missed opportunity—unions could have waged a nationwide campaign against sexual harassment. The McDonald's strike and Google walkout could have been multiplied across the world.

They still can be. As socialists, we have a

key role to play in ensuring that our leftist and working-class organizations take up the fight against gender violence. Many demands to protect people from sexual violence are demands that will raise conditions for the entire working class, like affordable housing, which can protect people from getting stuck in abusive situations. Medicare for all, free contraception, and mandatory sex education in schools benefit the working class as a whole, not just women.

But many unions and socialists make the mistake of needing to fight united as a class by minimizing our demands to only narrow economic issues that affect all workers, in order not "to divide the working class between men and women."

In reality, leaving aside so-called "social" issues such as sexual harassment accepts the divisions that the ruling class uses against us. Only by taking up all aspects of working-class people's lives will we be able to achieve unity in struggle. Besides, drawing a line between "economic" and "social" or "cultural" issues misses that our social and cultural world is shaped by the dominant economic sphere of wage labor—within the totality of capitalism, we cannot separate them from each other.

So we must fight as fiercely to end workplace harassment as we do for affordable housing. We must fight to create independent methods of investigating sexual assault that centers survivors' needs, on college campuses as well as in workplaces. These investigations should be restorative instead of punitive; we should aim to repair harm and rebuild trust on survivor's terms. We should ban mandatory arbitration for harassment allegations, and go further by taking the investigative process into our own hands. We could set up independent bodies for our workplaces, schools, and communities, completely run by organized workers.

As we fight for all this, we must re-imagine how we can organize ourselves and our communities. Fighting for free abortion on demand and 24-hour, free, community-run childcare, while immediately necessary, also helps us do this.

In the 1970s, abortion speak outs and grassroots activism were powerful enough to force the conservative Supreme Court to pass Roe v. Wade.

We have many tools to do the seemingly impossible. In the 1970s, abortion speak-outs and grassroots activism were powerful enough to force the conservative Supreme Court, under President Nixon, to pass Roe v. Wade. This followed a period of global revolt, including the civil rights movement, the Black Panthers, the general strike in France of 1968, and anti-colonial movements. We can learn from all of these movements as we re-build one today.

We can build a working-class movement that understands that ending patriarchal culture is nothing less than a revolutionary task, but that fights at every step to get there. We can build a movement that holds everyone accountable, but allows us room to grow. We can build a movement that seriously examines how and why capitalism treats us differently, and the trauma and pain it has inflicted on our bodies for centuries. And as we do, we must continue the consciousness-raising project that #MeToo started—continue to shout, every day, about the violence of the society we live in. Only then can we begin the healing process of building a working-class, multi-ethnic, and multi-gender revolutionary force.

The Socialist Case for Reparations

For a Struggle that Brings Together Demands for Racial, Social, and Economic Justice

Whitney Kahn and Stephan Kimmerle are activists in Seattle DSA.

It would be an impossible task to attempt a summary of the injustices heaped upon the descendants of slavery in the US. The history of the US is one of racial violence and discrimination—as well as resistance to oppression. From slavery to Jim Crow to mass incarceration, black people in the US have created vast amounts of wealth, hoarded by the ruling class, while black people's livelihoods have been stolen from them through generations. Today, the difference in wealth between black families and white families is about ten-fold, and the gap is widening, (Washington Post, 3/14/19). Police brutality, prison labor, and low quality and limited access to jobs and housing are just some of the current egregious examples of a racist system that capitalism continues to rely on.

The Black Lives Matter movement shattered the conservative narrative that the US is a “post-racial” society in which color blind, non-discriminatory policies are all that is needed. On the left, however, there is a line of thought that argues that pro-active racially targeted investments are divisive and, instead, we should just focus on universal policies such as single-payer healthcare, free higher education, and a major investment in social housing since

these will disproportionately benefit people of color. While these are necessary steps to address systemic racism, on their own they are insufficient.

Democratic Candidates Support “Reparations”

Reparations are generally understood as either the US government making a financial payment to individual descendants of slaves or the US government paying for social programs specifically for the black community. For example, the Movement for Black Lives platform calls for reparations in the form of free higher education for all black people.

Since the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, the 2014 Ta-Nehisi Coates article “The Case for Reparations,” and the online movement #ADOS (American Descendants of Slavery), reparations have become a key topic for debate for 2020 Democratic party candidates. As P.R. Lockhart writes in Vox on March 11, “some candidates have muddied the waters by framing universal programs that would help black communities as a form of reparations — which they aren’t.” Kamala Harris describes ‘reparations’ as tax rebates that would disproportionately support people of color. Cory Booker puts forward baby bonds linked to the income or wealth of the parents to overcome the racial wealth gap. More candidates are now supporting HR40, the “Commission to Study and

40 Acres and a Mule

“... so far as the Negroes were concerned, their demand for a reasonable part of the land on which they had worked for a quarter of a millennium was absolutely justified, and to give them anything less than this was an economic farce.”

W.E.B. DuBois, Black Reconstruction

After the Civil War, the only way to give newly freed black slaves land was by dividing up the big plantations. General Sherman's Special Order #15 gave 400,000 acres of land to black soldiers. But it was overturned by President Andrew Johnson who sided with the ex-slave owners, effectively giving them reparations instead of the freed slaves.

“Against any plan of this sort was the settled determination of the planter South to keep the bulk of Negroes as landless laborers and the deep repugnance on the part of Northerners to confiscating individual property,” says DuBois. The capitalist class in the north only conceded ending the system of people as property as a wartime measure. They drew a hard line at violating the land-property rights of the southern aristocracy because they were afraid the snowball would roll their way. “It was not then race and culture that was calling out from the South,” writes DuBois about the counter-revolution against Reconstruction and reparations for slavery following the Civil War. “It was property and privilege shrieking to its kind, and property and privilege recognized the voice of its own.” In the end, the northern capitalists preferred the regime of white supremacist terror by the KKK to the right to democracy and land for black workers.

Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act” which Ta-Nehisi Coates, writing for *The Atlantic*, argued for in “The Case for Reparations” in 2014. However, Wall Street backed candidates do not commit to supporting any proposals from the commission. In this way, they hope to pander to an increasingly progressive voter base in the Democratic primaries

while concretely committing to as little as possible.

Like other candidates, Bernie Sanders points toward general programs that would benefit people of color more than others. He proposes the boldest set of these universal programs (for example Medicare for all, a Green New Deal, free higher education,

and ending predatory interest rates). Unlike the other candidates, however, he is honest by not pretending that these programs are the same thing as reparations. Sanders’ hesitation to embrace the demand for reparations appears to be based on a calculation that, since it is currently unpopular with the general US public, it would be seized upon by Trump and the right wing to win over sections of white workers. Of course, Trump will seize on anything to divide working people, but what Sanders misses is how the demand for reparations can be used to overcome the divide that currently exists in the working class.

It’s true that if we limit reparations to regressive taxes and accept the scarcity of resources that the corporate elite offers us, the demand for reparations can be a tool to divide working people in a struggle around limited resources. But it is racism, not the fight against racism, which has fundamentally divided the working class. If we aim our struggle at the wealth hoarded by exploitative corporations, the struggle for reparations could be part of the basis for uniting the working class in a fight for our collective liberation.

Uniting the Working Class

A 2016 Marist poll found that a majority (58%) of black respondents favored reparations as “money to African-Americans who are descendants of slaves;” most white respondents (81%) were opposed.

Donald Trump, Republicans, and right-wing media outlets are already trying to whip poor white people up against any step in favor of people of color. Democratic Party politicians and CNN will oppose reparations on the basis that they are unpopular among white people, and it is the hopelessly racist, ‘deplorable,’ poor, white working class who are to blame.

However, this does not mean we should skirt around issues that divide the working class and focus only on ‘class issues’ that unite us all. Ignoring some oppressions while fighting others is, in reality, not a unifying approach. Take the educators strikes for example. Hundreds of thousands of educators around the country are fighting, striking, and winning. A key to their success was that they took on the fight for racial equity. In the 2015 Seattle strike, for

Lenin’s Revolutionary Approach to Fighting Oppression

African Americans are not oppressed based on their nationality with forced integration, but rather based on their race with forced segregation. Nonetheless, Lenin’s approach to oppressed nationalities provides a useful parallel framework.

Lenin argued that a revolutionary socialist party in a country which oppressed other nations had to put forward the right of self-determination for all nations, including the right to form a new, separate nation-state.

The aim was not to divide, but to allow the working class to unite on a basis of voluntary cooperation and solidarity. As he wrote in *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* in 1916, “Socialist Parties which fail to prove by all their activities now, as well as during the revolution and after its victory, that they will free the enslaved nations and establish relations with them on the basis of a free union, and a free union is a lying phrase without right to secession—such parties would be committing treachery to socialism.”

Lenin was aware that from a historical point of view, the creation and oppression of national groups has its roots in capitalism. Lenin was an internationalist who was clear that the fate of workers’ liberation would only be solved through spreading the socialist revolution internationally. He understood that the way to establish the strongest unity of workers and oppressed people could only be won through a determined struggle against oppression in every form.

Not all Russian workers agreed. All kinds of Great Russian prejudice were

used to divide the working class. Lenin would not give into such sentiments and fought to educate Russian workers on the need to fight all forms of oppression.

Lenin did not argue that class oppression would be primary and therefore the rights of national minorities would be of secondary concern. He argued that class oppression needed to be permanently abolished to end the constant need to divide people along different lines of oppression under capitalism. Lenin argued that the working class was the only class in modern society which was capable of consistently championing the interests of the oppressed.

This meant the working class must struggle to win the leadership of national liberation movements away from pro-capitalist forces, and waging a struggle against national oppression with its own independent working-class methods of struggle. It also meant promoting an internationalist, revolutionary socialist and working-class outlook. For this to happen the working class and its organizations have to become the unequivocal champions of defending national rights themselves. This approach does not reduce other struggles to secondary struggles, but acknowledges that to win any fundamental change the interconnection or, in more modern words, the intersectionality of struggles had to be understood.

This method allows socialists to put the aspirations and demands of oppressed people front and center in alignment with the needs of the struggle of the working class internationally.

instance, it was essential that they included demands for racial justice coordinators and adequate recess time for predominantly black schools where it was being cut. The same goes for the recent Los Angeles strike that fought for free legal services for families facing deportation. Armed with demands like these, there was no way for the school district representatives to divide the community against the educators' strike.

The corporate elite maintains its power over the majority of society on the basis of 'divide-and-rule,' and racism has been arguably the most powerful and successful tool they've found to divide the US working class. Workers only gain real power when workers of different backgrounds band together in large numbers.

There is no shortcut around the issue of confronting the distorted 'race consciousness' of some white workers who are conditioned to see themselves as part of a constructed "white race" rather than part of the exploited working class. Socialists have a key role to play in helping these workers see that they have far more to win from a joint anti-racist fight than one that ignores or reinforces racial divisions, and far more in common with their black counterparts than they do with white billionaires.

Building a Majoritarian Coalition

In an article in The Guardian from March 28, Bhaskar Sunkara, editor of Jacobin, writes, "money for reparations will come from government expenditure, of which around half is funded by income tax. Could we be in a situation where we're asking, say, a black Jamaican descendent of slaves, or a poor Latino immigrant, to help fund a program that they can't benefit from?" Bhaskar asks rhetorically: "Is this really the basis that we can build a majoritarian coalition?"

Sunkara is right about the need to build a "majoritarian coalition" that is willing to unite and fight. He also puts forward the "need to defend Affirmative Action from right-wing attack," and "a wider cultural reckoning with slavery," including the establishment of Juneteenth as a national holiday to celebrate emancipation. Where he misses the mark is with what is, in our view, a short-sighted approach of how to



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Martin Luther King Jr at Selma

"If it may be said of the slavery era that the white man took the world and gave the Negro Jesus, then it may be said of the Reconstruction era that the southern aristocracy took the world and gave the poor white man Jim Crow. He gave him Jim Crow. And when his wrinkled stomach cried out for the food that his empty pockets could not provide, he ate Jim Crow, a psychological bird that told him that no matter how bad off he was, at least he was a white man, better than the black man. And he ate Jim Crow. And when his undernourished children cried out for the necessities that his low wages could not provide, he showed them the Jim Crow signs on the buses and in the stores, on the streets and in the public buildings. And his children, too, learned to feed upon Jim Crow, their last outpost of psychological oblivion."

build a "majoritarian coalition." Reparations should absolutely come from billionaires and large corporations, not from other poor and working people, but that is no argument against reparations.

As with all issues that impact an oppressed section of society, the only chance to win reparations is to build a broad coalition fighting for it that goes beyond those who would be direct beneficiaries. To successfully win reparations, we propose to link it together with a socialist program that can deliver an improved standard of living for all sections of the working class, like Medicare for All, Tuition-Free College, and the Green New Deal.

We must make absolutely clear that the fight for reparations is part of a wider struggle for both racial and economic justice, within a working-class movement that aims to end capitalism. This does not mean we should delay the demand for justice for black people to a future time. It means

forging a working-class front that will fight together to win improvements for black people now, with the common goal of going beyond reparations. The struggle does not end when we successfully extract this or that concession from the ruling class. To the contrary, any concession will show that if we fight together, we can win.

Our Contribution Towards a Framework for Reparations

1. The billionaires and huge corporations were and are the beneficiaries of slavery, oppression, and imperialism. They have to pay—not poor people, no matter what race or ethnicity.
2. A huge redistribution of wealth should include universal programs for a Green New Deal, Medicare for All, free higher education, and an end to student debt. These are programs that disproportionately

ly benefit people of color, women, Native Americans, and LGBTQ people. However, it's not enough to leave it at these "side effects" benefitting oppressed groups disproportionately.

3. On top of those programs, significant measures are needed to focus on communities of color to overcome historic and present discrimination. Socialists should join in demanding that HR40 pass, which creates an official commission to study and produce recommendations for reparations. It should be a commission representing working-class black communities, in particular, based on civil rights, community, and labor groups coming together on local and national levels. Reparations should be offered not just to descendants of slavery, but all that have suffered the long-term effects of slavery and aborted reconstruction, Jim Crow segregation and all its impacts over decades, genocide and land theft from indigenous communities, mass incarceration, and institutional racism today. Communities themselves need to develop a plan to discuss and implement such steps

through popular assemblies. To avoid looting the coffers of any reparation plan, these programs must be controlled by the communities themselves.

4. While advocating for these programs, we support black communities' rights to democratically decide what kind of reparations they want, up to and including individual cash payments. Although cash payments do nothing to alter the power structure of capitalism, we fully support all efforts to bridge the economic divides between differentiated layers of the working class as long as they are paid by the large corporations and the super-rich.

5. Demands for reparations have also got to address how black people continue to be oppressed and exploited today. This would mean taking up demands such as abolishing the system of mass incarceration, starting by ending prison labor with a \$15/hour back-pay for time worked and immediately giving all inmates the right to vote. In addition, when the banks in the Great Recession foreclosed on the homes of millions of families, even when admit-

ting fraud, they stole half of black families' wealth. These banks should be required to give back the homes they took, or give a cash value equivalent. In addition, we must fight to end all forms of racial profiling by police and government agencies, demilitarize the police and law enforcement, and abolish the racist death penalty.

Black Lives Matter activists, civil rights organizations, unions, DSA, etc. should develop an actionable plan that centers what communities of color themselves identify to be the most pressing needs. These groups need to make the demand for reparations an integral part of a broader program to address the huge gap of inequality and oppression in the US. Most importantly, we must organize a joint fight for it.

Socialists should fight for reparations as part of a revolutionary agenda to unite all working and oppressed people in the struggle for a future world where production is guided by our needs, rather than corporate greed, and where slavery in all its forms is finally abolished.

Wall Street Steals Black Wealth Through the Ages

Wall Street speculators stealing black wealth in this way started almost the moment that black labor began to be paid. In 1865 the 'Freed-man's Bank' was established, with government backing, as an institution where black workers could deposit wages. Within four years, the law was changed to allow the bank to invest deposits in mortgage-backed securities. This scam went belly up just as it did in 2008, and the depositors only got back a fraction of their deposits when the bank became insolvent and closed in 1874.

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) red-lined black neighborhoods as 'high risk' to make it virtually impossible for black families to get a legitimate mortgage. In this time of legal segregation, predatory real estate speculators swooped in and offered secondary mortgages to black families for inflated prices which had loopholes that made them almost impossible to pay off. This resulted in black families 'buying' their homes, paying for months or years, getting evicted, losing everything, and the owner selling to a new family to start the cycle all over again. As the US Commission on Civil Rights acknowledged in 1973 in the wake of the Civil Rights & Black Power movements, "Government and pri-

vate industry came together to create a system of residential segregation." Despite this acknowledgment, the theft didn't stop there.

The 2008 crash was a version of this racket on a massive scale which opened up a whole new wave of mass displacements and stolen wealth. These bankers, preying on the myth that institutional racism and red-lining was a thing of the past, knowingly lied to their customers about the terms of the loans to get people to take out more. This practice was called "reverse red-lining" since the same neighborhoods that were once starved of credit were now being targeted. According to a 2013 report, black families had half their wealth stolen by Wall Street. As Ta-Nahisi Coates writes, "Black home buyers—even after controlling for factors like creditworthiness—were still more likely than white home buyers to be steered toward subprime loans... When subprime lenders went looking for prey, they found black people waiting like ducks in a pen... Plunder in the past made plunder in the present efficient." Yet just as happened after the Civil War, reparations, in this case in the form of bank bailouts, went to the criminals rather than to those who had the fruits of their labor stolen from them.

Fossil Fuel Power

Fighting for a Green New Deal means taking on corporate power — and raising the demand for democratic public ownership.

Meg Strader and Harris Liebermann are DSA activists in Seattle.

“I don’t want your hope [...] I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is,” said Greta Thornburg in a speech at

the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in January 2019. Thornburg’s “Fridays for Future” movement has spurred millions of students around the world to go on one-day strikes from school to demand concrete, urgent action on climate change.

The insistent tone of the protesters reflects the dire urgency of the crisis we are in. Many scientists have concluded

What is the Green New Deal?

On February 7, 2019, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) and Senator Edward Markey put forward a Green New Deal (GND) resolution that proposes a wide-sweeping national, social, industrial and economic mobilization to battle the climate crisis while simultaneously addressing current social injustices in the US. It includes a massive investment program for:

- /// A 10-year plan to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.
- /// Move the U.S. to 100% clean and renewable energy
- /// Ensure a “just transition” for all communities and workers, with economic security for those currently employed in the fossil fuel industries, and with particular protection for people of color, indigenous people, and poor people
- /// Create millions of family-supporting, union jobs
- /// Implement major reforms to provide people with universal, high quality health care, paid family and medical leave and vacations, retirement security, guaranteed and affordable housing, food security for every person in the US



Ocasio-Cortez was elected last year as a Democrat in New York in an uprising against a long-standing Democratic Party leader in their primaries, with bold demands like Medicare for All, climate justice, and the abolition of the ICE deportation force.

Photo: Senate Democrats, tinyurl.com/AOC-GreenNewDeal, Copyright: CC BY 2.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en

"Socialist Makeover"

Republican Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell called the Green New Deal a "radical, top-down, socialist makeover of the entire US economy" (Bloomberg, March 26, 2019).

Ocasio-Cortez and other Democrats who support the Green New Deal do not intend to end capitalism with their legislation. However, it would be far easier to implement such reforms and keep them on a permanent basis if the movement would not limit its aims to fit within the framework of capitalism, but rather directed its efforts toward a democratic socialist society. This will not include a "top-down" approach, but it must indeed be a "socialist makeover" carried out by ordinary people taking over decision-making.

that we are fast approaching, or have already surpassed, the point where unprecedented environmental and human catastrophe due to climate change can be averted. Taking these facts seriously means taking immediate action.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal is the first plan that has actually gained traction in the broad public that proposes action approaching the scale of what climate change demands. It's widely popular among ordinary people. It has met fierce resistance, not only by GOP politicians who cynically deny climate change, but also by the Democratic Party apparatus.

The Democratic Party doesn't deny climate change per se; instead they talk about wanting to fight climate change while quietly taking fossil fuel money for their election campaigns and refusing to take real action. This is epitomized in the interaction that was filmed of Senator Dianne Feinstein berating children about being "realistic."

These politicians are able to hide behind conservative union leaders, who over the last decades have adopted a strategy of cozying up to the bosses of their industries to get this or that concession while falsely pitting good union jobs and climate action against one another.

How We Win the Green New Deal

Without a massive upsurge of the environmental movement, linked up hand in hand with the labor movement, the Green New Deal will not pass either the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives or the Republican-controlled Senate. As DSA activists Jeremy Gong and Keith Brower Brown, together with

Matt Huber and Jamie Munro, argued in Jacobin on March 21, 2019, the way we win the Green New Deal is by building a mass movement, starting with the huge mobilizations

that have already taken place. The People's Climate Marches in 2014 and the Fridays for Future student walkouts this year have shown that millions of people are prepared to participate in such a movement.

They continue: "Winning a transformative GND will require massive leverage over the political and economic system. We need the ability to force these changes over the objection of broad sections of the capitalist class, who are fiercely unwilling to lose their profits. The confrontational tactics and electoral challenges of the growing GND movement are essential parts of the leverage we need, but we think history shows they won't be enough. We will also need direct leverage against the capital-

ist class, right in the places where they make their money."

So far, the Green New Deal contains no mention of how to defeat the opposition of fossil fuel companies to the programs the Green New Deal calls for. And we can be sure there will continue to be massive opposition from the major energy companies.

The Fossil Fuel Industry

"Just 100 companies have been the source of more than 70 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions since 1988," The Guardian reported on July 10, 2017. "ExxonMobil, Shell, BP and Chevron are identified as among the highest emitting investor-owned companies since 1988." Despite knowing the facts of climate change for decades, these corporations have held consumers hostage, completely binding consumers to use their products and services, and refusing to invest in sustainable industry. In the 1970s, Exxon's own research revealed the role fossil fuels play in causing climate change, and yet the company intentionally suppressed the information. Instead of giving humanity time to slowly adjust, the energy companies deliberately lied, delayed, and wasted valuable time.

The industrial complex of fossil fuels, cars, airplanes, and military industry has dominated the world economy for decades. The accumulation of capital bound up in these industries is impressive. It's contained in factories, land, and oil extraction technologies, patents, supply chains, knowledge about consumers, and the education and skills training of their workforce. Under capitalism, the major capital powers of energy and the industries that rely on them will not give up their profits—and the power to secure these profits—without a fight.

The Koch brothers own the second largest privately-owned corporation in the US, which made a large part of its profits through fossil fuels. They buy politicians like other people buy groceries.

The fossil fuel industry has driven the US into two wars in Iraq; maintained an

interventionist role in the whole Middle East; propped up the ultra-conservative Saudi Arabian kingdom for decades; and attempted or carried out coups in Venezuela, Iran, Iraq, and countless other countries.

Some of them are moving slowly toward renewable energy to protect their image and diversify their portfolios to prepare for when fossil fuels run out. However, none of these mega-companies are willing to give up the profits they still aim to gain from fossil fuels, and they fight tooth and nail to delay any conversion plan to a time in the future where sea levels will already be out of control.

Taking Control Means Taking Power

The flow of corporate cash into politics must be banned from the election process. Overturning “Citizens United,” the Supreme Court decision to unleash corporate money as “speech” over our elections, can only be a small first step.

To seriously take up a Green New Deal for our planet means reckoning with the mightiest accumulation of power and

capital in history. We can't control what we don't own, and these fossil fuel corporations have been using their wealth and power to control our government for decades. They've shown time and again they will go to any lengths. Defeating them and passing a robust Green New Deal will require disarming them.

There's no way around it. Their power comes from their wealth, so disarming these warmongering billionaires means democratizing the industry by taking the major fossil fuel companies into democratic public ownership. In the end, only such a step will end their control over Congress and give us the best chance of winning this fight for our lives and our planet. As long as we leave the power in their hands, the fossil fuel billionaires will sabotage any effort to address climate change.

Under democratic public ownership, the resources amassed by the fossil fuel companies can instead be invested in

non-nuclear renewable energy, reforestation, and developing other environmentally sustainable products and practices.

To seriously take up a Green New Deal for our planet means reckoning with the mightiest accumulation of power and capital in history.

Greening the economy is not a threat to workers' jobs, but actually a huge boost to the economy, which would mean a proliferation of safe, well-paid jobs. The only people public ownership actually threatens are the corporations' super-wealthy owners, who would rather

see the world burn than give up their wealth and power.

Put the Oil Barons on Trial

If the fossil fuel bosses are overpowered by a combination of a mass movement of millions and their own workforce turning against them, they will try to demand enormous compensation for their loss. However, before any compensation is paid, the energy companies must be put on trial for their lies, and for the damage they have caused the planet and humanity. Their business model has caused untold levels of destruction, and they must be held accountable, criminally and financially. This has to include the profits amassed by the owners over decades.

The new revolt happening in society started as a reaction against what a new generation won't tolerate anymore: inequality, racism, and sexism. With the Green New Deal, there is a beginning of an outline of the future we need. Now to actually win this future, to prepare the movements to take on the question of power, the left in labor, DSA, and environmental activists should raise the demand to take the fossil fuel industry into democratic, public ownership. Winning this fight against the fossil fuel industry is the only chance our planet has. To win, it will not be enough to ignore power or try to mute it: we must take it into our own hands.



Exxon Mobil refinery seen from the top of the Louisiana State Capitol

Photo: WClarke, tinyurl.com/ExxonBatonRuge, CC BY-SA 4.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en

No Shortcuts

A well-written, bracingly honest book which takes the big questions facing the labor movement head on.

Reviewed by Philip Locker, the Political Director of the campaigns to elect Kshama Sawant, the first independent socialist on the Seattle city council in 100 years.

No Shortcuts elaborates on valuable organizing techniques such as “power mapping”—systematically charting all the relationships among co-workers and their wider community. Another distinction McAlevey powerfully argues for is “structure tests,” a method of measurable assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of the organic leaders and members. Structure tests can range from how many workers the leaders in each department can get to wear a pro-union sticker on a common day, to how many workers a union can bring out on strike. Having regular real world, specific, measurable structure tests is something that can and should be utilized far more by organizers in left-wing and socialist movements.

But McAlevey’s biggest strength is her insistence that the traditional *strike* is workers’ most powerful tool, essential to building their power. And by strikes she means “real strikes” which actually shut down the economic activity of a workplace or industry.

While we have seen a promising return of such “real strikes” in the wave of teachers strikes over the past year, it has not been the norm over the past several decades. McAlevey contrasts this to symbolic protest strikes seen in the Fight for 15. The same can be said about much (though not all) of the 2017 and 2018 International Women’s Day strikes in the US, or the all-too-common (losing) strike where the workers walk out but the company keeps running with replacement workers.

No Shortcuts demonstrates through a series of case studies how the organizing model is far superior to the prevailing strategy of the labor leadership in winning unionization drives, strong contracts, and building a strong union. Given this McAlevey correctly asks: “If the organizing model is so effective, why was it so widely abandoned?” This, however, is the Achilles heel of her book.

Why do ineffective strategies dominate the labor movement?

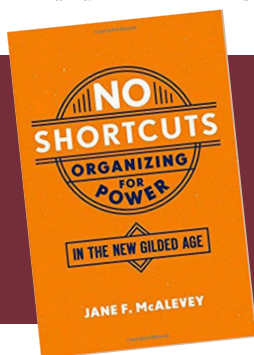
McAlevey’s answer highlights the dominance on the left of Saul Alinsky’s ideas about union organizing. While such an analysis is important, her book is lacking in a systematic analysis of why these ideas have been so desperately clung on to by the labor bureaucracy, despite all the evidence of their ineffectiveness.

This is not a place to give a developed answer to this question, but suffice it to say that the bankrupt strategy of the union

bureaucracy is rooted in their politics, which in itself reflects their interests, social position in capitalist society, and sociological makeup.

The political approach of the labor leaders is shaped by their acceptance of capitalism.

McAlevey’s analytic weakness on this question ironically leads her to take a “short cut” as Mike Parker points to in his review in his review in *Labor Notes*. “There’s no discussion about how to carry on the struggle inside unions to change them to adopt these policies... It’s as if [McAlevey] hopes that current leaders will see the light and ‘empower’ their members from above. In reality, often they must be replaced by opponents organizing themselves, running for office, and beating them. This kind of organizing can be just as difficult as



No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age

By Jane McAlevey

Oxford University Press, 2016

253 pages, \$29.95

the struggle against the boss, and just as necessary in order to get the union to a place where it can fight the boss.”

McAlevy locates workers, not staff or advocates, as the agency for a powerful labor movement.



Jane McAlevy, author of “No Shortcuts”

Photo: Video of Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, facebook.com/rosaluxstiftung/videos/1490339061096660/

But she does not present workers as the agent for overcoming the failed policies of the current union leadership and forging an alternative strategy for rebuilding labor. The organizing model that McAlevy promotes requires a political struggle to implement it through the building of independent working-class activity and rank-and-file union caucuses that campaign for class struggle policies.

Capitalism and Politics

No Shortcuts acknowledges at several points that the successful CIO organizing in the 1930s was inspired and

led by socialists. Yet McAlevy shies away from exploring why there was a close relationship between socialist politics and the kind of militant class struggle organizing methods she is arguing for.

The political approach of the labor leaders is shaped by their acceptance (consciously in some cases and unconsciously in others) of capitalism. Their class collaborationist outlook, their resistance to bold demands that raise workers’ expectations, and their respect for the law follows from this. To rebuild a powerful working-class movement, there will be no shortcuts—it will require the rebuilding of a vibrant socialist current that can popularize an alternative to capitalism.

McAlevy stresses the need to organize the “whole worker,” recognizing that union struggles can spill outside and draw strength from outside the workplace. It is therefore surprising that there is an absence of discussion on developing workers’ power by building a working-class political movement, or the need for workers to generalize their interests by building their own mass political party.

Regardless of these or other criticisms, there is no question that *No Shortcuts* is a very welcome critique

No Shortcuts is a very welcome critique of the bankrupt politics dominating the labor movement.

of the bankrupt politics dominating the labor movement and the wider progressive movement. It is a powerful intervention on behalf of a radically different model of mass organizing, based on class struggle methods, which centers workers and their ability to strike in any strategy for changing society. It deserves to be thoroughly read, discussed, and debated by the new generation of tens of thousands of organizers.

No Shortcuts sets out by distinguishing three models of change: advocacy, mobilizing, and organizing.

Advocacy “doesn’t involve ordinary people in any real way; lawyers, pollsters, researchers, and communications firms are engaged to wage the battle.” Mobilizing looks toward struggle, but is generally based on turning out the already committed activists, not the mass of the workforce and the community.

McAlevy argues for a third approach, “deep organizing,” rooted in the CIO tradition of mass organizing of the 1930s. Central to this classic union organizing method is the technique of “leadership-identification.” In this model leaders are not the most ideologically committed or hard working (activists in the mobilizing model), but those who workers listen to and respect the most.

This concept has real value but also raises some thought-provoking questions for socialists, who have usually been focused on bringing together the “militant minority” of workers. In their reviews of *No Shortcuts*, Sam Gindin and Mike Parker raise valuable and nuanced counter-points on the relationship between organic leaders and the militant minority—points that deserve further discussion.

Organizing, according to McAlevy, “places the agency for success with a continually expanding base of ordinary people, a mass of people never previously involved.” Campaigns, while important in themselves, are “primarily a mechanism for bringing new people into the change process and keeping them involved.”

This echoes the traditional strategic focus of Marxists—measuring the effectiveness of every campaign and every tactic by its success or failure in building the power of the working class through raising its level of organization, cohesion, and willingness to struggle. And it is in this sense that she hammers away that there are no shortcuts to building workers’ power.

Lessons Learned

Five Take-Aways from the Educator Strike Wave

Stan Strasner is an educator and vice president of the Seattle Substitute Association within the Seattle Education Association union (SEA).

When many were ready to write the obituary for public sector unions, the teachers strike wave has shaken the US and opened up an exciting new chapter in working-class struggle. This is the largest public sector strike wave in over 40 years. What lessons can we learn from these educators?



West Virginia asked: What is a union anyway?

In West Virginia, unions were under attack from Tea Party Republicans who had just recently passed “Right to Work” legislation.

Union membership was on the decline, and those unions weren’t putting up much resistance against attacks on education. So when the West Virginia educators voted in their buildings to

strike, they went around the official unions. They organized the vote themselves, and didn’t limit the vote just to unionized educators. Instead, all the staff in every building voted together. Strike votes are normally only taken by union members, but in this case, most of the workers weren’t in any union at all.

West Virginia educators broke all the rules of how contemporary strikes are ‘supposed’ to be. At one point, the union leadership tried to send their members back to classrooms after securing a 5% raise for teachers and a 3% raise for all other public workers in the state from the Republican-controlled legislature. After decades of defeats under Democratic and Republican majorities, any victory was huge. But since educators were organizing alongside other public sector workers, they rejected the divisive deal with shouts of “We are the union bosses!” in a rebuke of the authority and failed strategy of the conservative leaders. They voted to stay on strike until they won a 5% pay increase for all public sector workers.

West Virginia educators were able to re-imagine this model. Although the actions they took only form the outlines of a real new effective union, they showed a new generation of workers how this idea of fighting for a much wider layer of workers is immensely effective.



Los Angeles Put the Community in the Union

Corporate education reformers often push the lie that educators and their unions are only interested in increased teacher pay.

This is designed with one purpose in mind: to divide educators from the communities that they serve. So before going on strike, educators are often rightly concerned that parents and the community might not be on their side.

Two years before the Los Angeles strike, a left-wing caucus won a leadership election by campaigning openly on a strategy for negotiations called “Bargaining for the Common Good.” They held public forums where they listened to the needs of the community and then championed those needs at the bargaining table and on the picket lines.

One example that community members put forward was to turn vacant lots owned by the district into green spaces to provide equitable access for kids, especially for low-income areas. The union won this demand for the community.

Immigrant families faced the threat of deportation, so the union successfully bargained for immigrant defence funds so the families could get a lawyer. Bringing these community demands to the bargaining table cut across this idea that 'greedy educators' were just out for themselves.

This model contributed to the mass turnout of tens of thousands of community members during the strike. They found that unions that stand for wider community issues get community support. With solid active community support, the elected officials were forced to give in.

Denver "Likes" its Bargaining Strategy



Unions often tell their bargaining team members not to share things outside of the bargaining room, but in Denver, they took a radically different approach by live-streaming their bargaining sessions on Facebook for all to see.

"There was a law that required we had some form of public bargaining," recounted Henry Roman, president of the Denver Classroom Teacher's Association (DCTA) in a phone interview. "It was put together by the right wing in Colorado, but we embraced it. They used it with the intent of causing some sort of lasting damage, but we ran with it."

"The district was against it. We definitely were for it. We generally talk about transparency. Whenever the district talks about it, they don't walk their talk. We have absolutely nothing to hide. People can see what we're advocating for... we got amazing support from our members, from parents, and from the community. For us, it has been a win-win. We have absolutely nothing to hide. At the end of the day, when we're advocating for the working conditions of educators, we're advocating for learning conditions for our students."



Around the Country, Strikes Work

West Virginia educators' successful fight against the Republican-dominated legislature in a Trump-majority state showed that political strikes can take on even the most right-wing political bodies. They inspired other educators to imagine what else is possible.

A year after that, the West Virginia legislature attempted to retaliate against public schools and educators who had dared to fight back. They introduced a bill in the dead of night that would grant an educator raise, while attacking public education in every other way. Educators across the state wouldn't be divided, and quickly voted on a one-day walkout aimed at this attack. All 55 districts participated and marched on the state capital. They won again, this time within hours of the walkout.

As educators wage a political revolution, the counter revolution follows right after. More political battles are ahead for the growing #RedForEd movement, and we need to be well prepared. The privatization of public schools has been a bipartisan neoliberal project for decades, backed by billionaires who want to loot the coffers of public education. It's our job to make sure they don't get a penny.

"We taught Los Angeles and the United States how to fight and how to win. Can we teach people how to fight and win? That's best thing that teachers do and you just taught the best lesson of your life!" United Teachers of Los Angeles President Alex Caputo-Pearl at the victory rally 1/22/19. https://twitter.com/_ericblanc/status/1087827680127418368

Socialists Have a Key Role to Play



"The core group of organizers that for months built up to the West Virginia strike first got involved organizing with each other through the DSA" (Democratic Socialists of America) reports Eric Blanc, author of Red State Revolt.

Socialists have played a key role not just in West Virginia, but in their unions across the country. In many places they are forming rank-and-file caucuses to organize and challenge conservative union leadership. The most developed of these would be UCORE (United Caucus Of Rank-and-file Educators) local chapters in LA and Chicago. These caucuses actually won leadership elections on a platform for changing their unions into organizations collectively run by ordinary educators, and willing to fight for themselves and the communities they serve.

DSA has been highly involved in one way or another with most of the teacher strikes across the country. DSA members have provided food to striking educators and the community with campaigns like Tacos for Teachers in LA and Bread for Ed in Oakland. Democratic Socialists also provided support by organizing flying squadrons that travel from picket line to picket line strengthening and giving a boost of morale.

Socialists know the power working people have to change society. Socialists do not constrain our demands to what the capitalist system considers acceptable; we base our demands on the needs of working people, regardless of the objections of those in power. We socialists are workers who believe that a better world is possible.

Is it Possible to Build a Union at Amazon?

A Perspective from a Fulfillment Center Worker

The worker prefers not to be named here, but the Editorial Board knows their identity.

Seattle, Washington, the original headquarters of Amazon, is the biggest company town in the US. I work in an Amazon warehouse just outside, where the built-for-the-rich city might as well be a hundred miles away. Our shifts are a series of orders disguised as smarmy pep talks, degrading comments from lower management, and sneaking friendly conversations between tall carts filled with packages bound for someone's home by 8pm.

My coworkers work two jobs for the most part: as electricians, pharmacy assistants, drivers, janitors, and on top of that, as single moms. Most speak multiple languages, including English, but regardless are spoken to as if they are stupid.

One afternoon, my coworkers and I stayed late to help with a big delivery that needed to be sorted. (This means taking thousands of packages off a truck, scanning them, and sorting them onto carts to be delivered by drivers.) While we sweated and tripped over each other, arms criss-crossing to reach the packages before they were conveyed away, one of our managers stood behind us, arms crossed, and asked if we could go faster, while the other stared at the numbers flashing on the laptop screen.

One of my coworkers, Renee*, and her two daughters, are forced to live with Re-

nee's abusive ex-husband because the cost of moving and rent is just not doable on the \$300 per week we make as seasonal associates. Renee tries every day to pick up extra hours in order to save up for a security deposit, but at least a couple days a week we are "VTOed"—sent home without pay because it's a slow day. VTO is "Voluntary Time Off." VTO is a revision of the MTO, "Mandatory Time Off" policy, which got Amazon some bad press. But VTO is hardly voluntary. If we refuse to accept VTO, we are warned that if we are caught standing around, we will be written up. But if there is no work to be done, what can we do? We are forced to accept it. But losing a shift on a wage of \$300 per week means another week of coming in with bruises for Renee, or not enough money to afford a bedframe for her son Hani*, who currently sleeps on a mattress on the floor while her young kids tuck in on the sofa.

My coworkers are not okay with our wages or our treatment, but the idea of anything changing seems very far away. Yet, a few weeks ago we took a small step for ourselves. Feeling we could actually do something for Renee, we organized a multicultural holiday potluck in the breakroom. We had sombosas, ceviche, brisket, cupcakes, and most importantly, an illicit fundraiser. Between 40 workers, we raised over \$700—enough for Renee's security deposit on a room out of reach from her abusive ex. It wasn't a union, but it was solidarity—grappling with injustice and investing in a future together. It was building relationships and power, and the possibility of change.

Organizing at Amazon

The challenges acting against organizing a union at Amazon warehouses are real. The Fulfillment Centers are too big; conversations are difficult to have. Back-breaking work means that most people try to move on to a better job as soon as they can. Seasonal work means that most don't even have the choice. Even if one warehouse were to organize a union, Amazon has built-in redundancy between warehouses that makes no single location critical. More than anything, workers, not just at Amazon, but everywhere, have gotten used to bad conditions and the idea that nothing changes.

That's why it is so inspiring to see that this year on Black Friday, thousands of Amazon workers in Spain, the UK, Poland, and Germany went on strike. These weren't mass strikes, but the world took notice.

Following this, a group of workers in Minnesota, mainly Somali-American, forced Amazon's executives to the negotiating table—the first time this has ever been accomplished. They held small protests about being overworked and not having adequate religious accommodations.

Even when Amazon offered them small concessions, they recognized that they were united and strong enough to make Amazon really listen to their needs. By escalating their tactics, they won a dedicated prayer space and lighter workloads during Ramadan.

Following that, workers in a New York warehouse announced their intentions to

form a union. These actions weren't just confined to Amazon and warehouses, but were part of a global revolt against working conditions at tech giants. Last fall, thousands of Google employees around the world walked out of their jobs in protest of Google's policies on sexual harassment.

My coworkers and I recognize the injustice of earning barely enough to live on while we help make billions for the company, but now we need to convince each other that we can change this if we take collective action. Unfortunately, most of the people I work with would rather look for better jobs than fight to change the ones we have, because workplace struggle is almost unheard of, not just at Amazon, but in almost every jobsite in the US.

Building a union at Amazon would not only achieve better conditions for me and my coworkers, but would challenge the seeming futility and unending instability which have settled into working-class consciousness.

Nor will organizing a union at Amazon be sufficient. The decline of unions across the US over the last 40 years shows that the capitalist class—those making billions simply by owning majority shares of a company—has the power and the will to chip away at all that we fight for and win collectively.

The power of unions isn't just in an individual workplace or one industry, but in the consciousness it raises in the working class—that we are perfectly capable of making democratic decisions that affect not only us as individuals, but society as a whole. If working people are to roll back the unfathomable inequality and environmental destruction created by capitalism, it will be worker power against the billionaire class.

To build this collective power, workers will need to start in breakrooms across the US, discussing what could be different and how, over homemade food. From there we can build warehouse committees and take action across facilities, cities, and even countries. The confidence we gain, the victories we win, the expectations we raise—those are the union we will build at Amazon.

** Names have been changed to protect the identity of these workers.*



A Spectre is Haunting Berlin — the Spectre of Public Housing

A massive renters movement is demanding to take real estate companies with more than 3,000 housing units into public ownership

Christoph Wälz is a teacher and member of DIE LINKE (the Left Party) in Berlin. As a union member, he is advocating that the labor movement participate as an active part of the campaign to put the real estate companies under public ownership.

Over the past several months, tens of thousands of activists in the German capital have been mobilizing to push back against huge rent hikes and speculation. This movement has now triggered a national debate about taking over the real estate giants and even nationalizing large corporations in general.

Fifteen years ago, in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Berlin was a city in which it was possible to move from one place to another and find affordable housing. Now it's a different story, as painful rent hikes by private real estate companies monopolizing the housing market have led to a wave of economic evictions, gentrification, and homelessness. For many, the idea of housing as a right rather than a commodity seems like a distant shadow.

But renters in Berlin haven't accepted this change. In response, their renters

movement against these horrendous rent hikes has sunk deep roots in many different parts of the city. In April 2018, approximately 25,000 tenants took to the streets. That's when the demand—promoted by left-wing activists, that big real estate companies be taken under democratic public ownership—caught fire. Contrary to what all the pundits said would happen, there was a huge positive response to this idea among working people across the city and beyond.

Nationalize Deutsche Wohnen

Public anger was directed especially at the real estate company Deutsche Wohnen which owns more than 111,000 housing units in Berlin, but the movement has developed in opposition to big real estate companies in general, not just one company. In April 2019 more than 40,000 people occupied the streets. This was the largest tenants' mobilization in decades, and it was linked to the campaign for a historic housing referendum.

The referendum is demanding the use of Article 15 of Germany's constitution for the first time, which would allow for the nationalization of land and the housing or commercial buildings on it. To make it onto the ballot, the referendum campaign requires 20,000 signatures. In the second round 180,000 signatures are needed. If successful, it would then go to a vote. Al-

though the vote will be non-binding, activists know that it will create huge pressure on the government to act, and they can use it as a key organizing tool to build the movement with deeper and wider support than ever before.

Mass media outlets see this as a radical demand, but the renters putting it forward know that what is truly radical are these astronomical rent hikes. It is obvious to Berliners that small steps are not enough to stop this trend. Tenants of Deutsche Wohnen have described how they suffer from explosive rent hikes while the condition of their housing actually deteriorates. For these tenants, taking these homes over and placing them under democratic public ownership is an act of urgent self-defense.

In just a few months, this campaign has managed to put the real estate lobby on the back foot. The support for nationalization is continuously increasing among the population.

In response, the right wing is warning about the spectre of "socialism." The alt-right AfD (Alternative for Germany) warns about a "GDR 2.0"—a return of the Stalinist East German Government.

This stands in laughable contrast to what the campaign actually aims to achieve: housing that is publicly owned and democratically managed by the tenants. This is something that never happened under the Stalinist caricature of socialism.

Rather than a threat to democracy as the AfD claims, this would actually be a giant leap toward democracy, because the units are currently controlled by just a handful of wealthy owners while renters have no voice.

Why Stop There?

The debate about nationalizing large real estate companies has swept the country. Angry renters in all major cities have taken to the streets in recent months, and the demand for nationalizing large corporations has captured people's imagination.

In the wake of this discussion, Kevin Kühnert, the chair of the Young Socialists, the youth organization of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), was asked about his general vision for society. Vaguely speaking about public ownership of large corporations, like the car manufacturer BMW, he triggered an even bigger debate, with many more politicians weighing in—mostly against his daring to question private property over corporate power.

On May 2, the New York Times wrote: "Forget the wannabe socialism of American Democrats like Bernie Sanders or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. The 29-year-old Mr. Kühnert is aiming for the real thing. Socialism, he says, means democratic control over the economy. He wants to replace capitalism as such, not just to recalibrate it."

Unfortunately, Kühnert is a member of the SPD which accepted the dogma of capitalism and neoliberalism long ago. Even a fully fledged Corbyn-style revival of the former traditions of the social democracy is highly unlikely. However, this could be a huge opening for the more radical Left Party to argue the case for socialist policies and a fundamental change in society in a much bolder and clearer way.

A Transformation Is Underway

Decisive sections of the Left Party are still not looking in the direction of bold socialist policies. The party's moderate wing has worked hard over the last decade to prove itself reliable in pro-capitalist governments as a junior partner of the SPD.

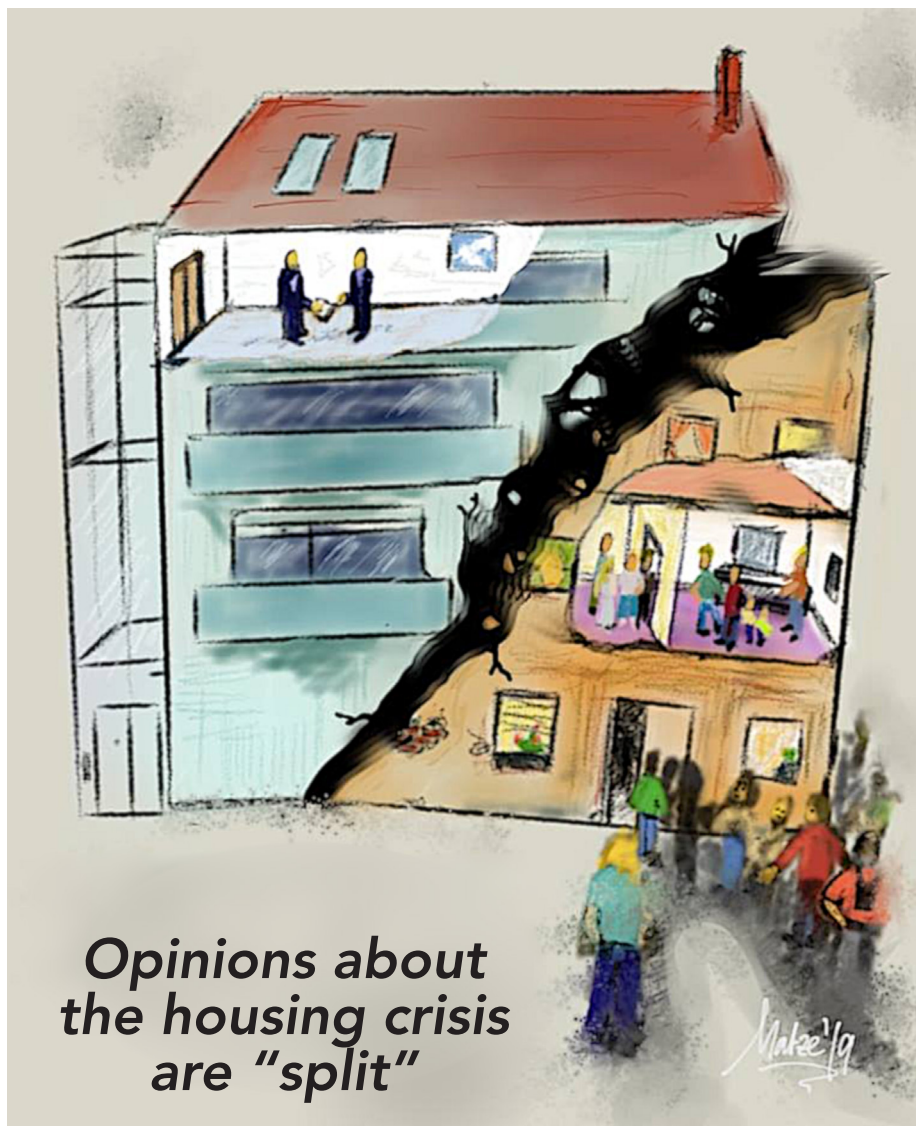


Illustration by Matze Grüber

At the moment, three parties make up the government of the regional state of Berlin: The SPD is the largest party in the coalition. The Greens and the Left Party are referred to as junior partners.

The recent convention of the Left Party in Berlin voted by a large majority to support the demand to bring the large real estate companies into democratic public ownership. This was a big step forward. The Green Party and the SPD are still hesitant, but they are feeling the pressure.

For instance, after years of overseeing privatizations and neoliberal policies, the SPD now says that they want to stop rent hikes for the next five years. They even announced an in-depth discussion on the question of nationalizations, which will

be resolved this November. Similar to how many Democratic Party candidates for president are adopting parts of Sanders' 2016 primary platform, like Medicare for All and tuition-free college, the dramatic change from these politicians shows how powerful and popular the movement for public affordable housing has become.

Under the pressure of the campaign, the real estate company Deutsche Wohnen has also made concessions to the tenants, in a vain attempt to improve their reputation.

The fact that the Left Party took on the demand for public ownership of these companies is significant. It marks a fundamental shift from past decades when one of the two predecessors of the Left Party was, in fact, responsible for selling

off public housing, which led to the current crisis in the housing market.

What is the Left Party?

The Left Party was formed in 2007 from a merger of the former PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) and the WASG (Labour & Social Justice—the Electoral Alternative). The PDS had developed out of the former governing Stalinist party in East Germany. Later on, it served in pro-capitalist governing coalitions on regional and state levels. In doing so, they took responsibility for implementing budget cuts, destroying public sector jobs, and privatising hospitals and housing—the antithesis of what they supposedly stood for.

From 2003–2004 the governing coalition in Berlin, formed by the stronger SPD and the smaller PDS, implemented a series of austerity measures to pay the interest on the debt that the city government owed to private banks. This involved selling publicly owned housing units, including 65,000 units to Deutsche Wohnen alone, for 405 million euros. The company now claims that these homes are worth 7 billion euros. The ex-Stalinist PDS implemented these policies of budget cuts and privatizations in opposition to the interests of its predominantly low-income voter base.

In 2007, the PDS fused with the WASG, which had developed as a protest party out of social movements. Together they formed DIE LINKE (the Left Party). Initially, this triggered a range of sharp debates in Berlin over what to do. However, the Left Party remained in this governing coalition with the SPD till 2011.

Since 2016 the Left Party has been back in government in Berlin. The leadership claims they have learned from their mistakes. This was initially a fairly easy claim to make, since the privatization damage has already been done, and the financial situation is better today, allowing for the easy passage of a few social reforms.

Now, the secretary and head of the department for city development and housing is a member of the Left Party, and she is completely on the hook for what happens. On the other hand, she is also well-positioned to stand with the movement against exploding rent hikes, and to take action to make housing publicly owned again.

A Badge of Honor

If the Left Party were to continue to develop and actually implement the policies they decided to support at their last party convention in December, the con-

flict within the government between the Left Party and the other two partners in that coalition, the SPD and Green Party, would dramatically increase. This could result in the Left Party being kicked out of the coalition. The real question would be when, not if, this would occur, as the SPD and Green Party are not prepared to fundamentally clash with the profit-driven system and the power of the markets.

This is not a bad scenario. It is wrong for the left and socialists to govern if they govern against the interests of working people. If the Left Party were kicked out of the governing coalition, they could then offer support to an SPD and Green party minority government on a case by case basis: voting for any proposals that benefit the working class and poor people, and voting against any pro-corporate legislation.

However, if the Left Party were to be kicked out of government for standing up for working-class and oppressed people under the heel of big rent hikes from corporate real estate firms, it would be seen as a badge of honor. Under such a scenario, new elections might be called. Under these conditions, the Left Party could even campaign to win majority support for socialist policies.

New Carpet in the Hallways? Get Organized!

Stuart Strader is a *Kenton Apartments* Tenant and Co-Organizer

On February 1, 2019, Milestone Properties LLC took over a 15-unit, 1920s era apartment building in Capitol Hill, Seattle and attempted to raise the rents by as much as 68% and ratchet up utility fees. Responding with shock and anger, the tenants began meeting together and organizing. We made coordinated phone calls every hour to the manager, held a press conference in front of the building, and canvassed other Milestone apartment buildings where tenants faced similar experiences.

Over the course of the struggle, the tenants, some hesitant at first, moved from asking the previous landlord to sign new year-long leases, to proposing to buy the building ourselves as a cooperative, to demanding the new landlord meet with us and freeze rent increases over 10 percent.

Through our collective action, we won! After the old lease notifications were rescinded, new notices only called for 10% increases, and parking and utility fees were cut. The landlord even acknowledged she made a “mistake” by raising the rents so high. These are rare concessions for a landlord to make, much less to a group of self-organized tenants.

It is important to take the news of these successes to other groups to show it is possible to fight back and win, and also to begin linking up our individual housing struggles.

DSA should help build fighting tenants’ unions across the country that fight for both immediate protections for renters as well as an end to the for-profit, speculative housing industry. We should also call for taxing the rich to build publicly-owned, democratically controlled housing, rent control, and an end to speculation in housing altogether by taking the largest real estate companies into public ownership.

To read more about this struggle as well as capitalism and the housing market, see the full article on our website, ReformAndRevolution.org

Stop Trump's Coups in Venezuela

How Chavismo Got Derailed in Corruption and Poverty

Manuel Carrillo
is a Seattle DSA activist
and shop steward in his
union, UNITE HERE Local 8.

“It will make a big difference to the United States economically if we could have American oil companies really invest in and produce the oil capabilities in Venezuela,” National Security Adviser John Bolton told Fox Business just one day after Juan Guaidó declared himself Interim President.

The Venezuelan people currently find themselves in the midst of the greatest political crisis since the 2002 coup attempt against the now deceased President Hugo Chávez. Today, a decade and a half later, the remaining forces of Chavismo and Nicolás Maduro, Chávez’s successor, find themselves confronting an emboldened political right, supported by the US and European ruling class, attempting to privatize the remaining industries currently under state control and fully integrate Venezuela into the global capitalist economy.

US Interests

Unsurprisingly, Juan Guaidó’s most significant support has come from the United States, which has long lamented the nationalization of Venezuela’s oil industry under Hugo Chávez, as was made clear by John Bolton’s comments. While in office, both the Republican President George W. Bush and the Democrat President Barack Obama were vocal in their hostility toward Venezuelan leaders while imposing and maintaining sanctions against them.

This is reminiscent of the approach of the US government to Chile in the 1970s. When the Chilean government nationalized copper and nitrate mines, President Nixon responded by telling US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to “make the economy scream” (Democracy Now!, December 10, 2013). The democratically elected government was brought down by a US-backed military coup that led to a dictatorship so that US corporate interests could reclaim “their” Chilean property.

Today the Trump administration continues the trend of US support for the Venezuelan right wing and, from the start, has been one of the biggest cheerleaders of Guaidó’s attempts to seize

power. In doing so, the administration has had no qualms in pointing out that one of their key considerations is access to the Venezuelan oil industry.

The Rise of Chavismo

Hugo Chávez remained popular through the entirety of his presidency, being elected and re-elected a total of four times, before ultimately passing away two months into his fourth term. While much of the Venezuelan private sector remained intact, Chávez gained a reputation for being a vocal critic and resistor of the neoliberal project of privatization, and as a foe to US Imperialism which has long treated Latin America as its personal playground. In a world of increasing privatization, globalization, and expanding inequality, Venezuela swam against the current. In the realm of foreign affairs, Chávez aligned himself with other left-leaning leaders in Latin America many of whom, at least in words, resisted neoliberalism, such as Rafael Correa of Ecuador, Evo Morales of Bolivia, and Fidel Castro. The US government was particularly obsessed with pointing out the relationship between Chávez and Castro.

The 1998 election of Hugo Chávez as president, a mere six years after being

imprisoned for attempting to overthrow the Venezuelan government, upended the political order. The increasing likelihood of a Chávez victory led two of Venezuela's traditional political parties to abandon support for their own candidates' presidential campaigns as they rallied around a third candidate in a last-ditch effort to prevent him from winning the election. This tactic was unsuccessful. A longtime crusader against political corruption, Chávez was able to win 56% of the vote by running a populist campaign vowing to raise the living conditions of the poorest sectors of society in the oil-rich nation.

While Guaidó's announcement came as a surprise to most ordinary people, the same cannot be said for the capitalist leaders of countries across the world.

While never fully challenging capitalism in many sectors of the economy or implementing a genuine socialist democracy, Chávez's presidency, until his death in 2013, was marked by considerable investment in education, healthcare, and various other social programs. As a result, poverty levels plummeted from 50% in 1999 to 31.9% in 2011, and extreme poverty decreased from a high of 19.9% in 1999 to 8.6% in 2011.

Chávez was able to pay for many of these investments due to high oil prices during much of his presidency. According to OPEC, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, the international body which controls much

of the world's supply of oil (with the notable exception of the US), 98% of Venezuela's export earnings in 2017 were a result of oil revenues.

Under Chávez, Venezuela faced brutal opposition from the US and international capital: loss of investment, attempts to isolate Venezuela from neighboring countries, funding of anti-government groups, and backing of an attempted coup in 2002.

Under the Chávez presidency, however, corruption also spread. After the nationalization of the oil industry and in the name of the Bolivarian revolution, a new corrupt network of bureaucrats pocketed much of the wealth of the nation. People in Venezuela called this development a "Boli-bourgeoisie." A new pro-capitalist elite was developing and getting rich through Chavismo.

A Post-Chávez Venezuela

Following the death of Chávez, Nicolás Maduro, a close ally of the recently deceased president, went on to win a special election by less than a quarter million votes. This narrow victory kicked off a tumultuous presidency for Maduro, who inherited a country on the brink of economic recession, and a decline in oil prices, which had funded much of the social reforms implemented by his predecessor. At the same time, the results of the new spreading corruption and the weight of the Boli-bourgeoisie on the economy also contributed to living standards being undermined.

The death of Chávez combined with Maduro's narrow election victory served to embolden the Venezuelan political right and the capitalist governments of North America and Europe who continue to lend it support. In 2015, the Venezuelan opposition (a broad pro-capitalist coalition called MUD: Mesa de la Unidad Democrática, or, the Democratic Unity Roundtable) was able to successfully gain power in the National Assembly for the first time since the creation of the unicameral legislature in 1999, winning 106 of the 167 seats. From this point forward, the National Assembly began to play a cen-



As Trump's warmongering National Security Advisor John Bolton openly threatens to invade Venezuela for its oil, protests in the US have erupted, saying "Hands Off Venezuela!"

Photo: Susan Melkisetian, Washington DC, March 16, 2019, tinyurl.com/VenezuelaHandsOff, Copyright: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/

tral role in attempting to destabilize and bring down Maduro.

Faced with this resurgent opposition, Maduro's government used Venezuela's Supreme Court to curtail the MUD-controlled National Assembly. In early 2017, the court attempted to revoke the legislative powers of the National Assembly. Months of protests ensued, some of which were estimated at one million participants, and continued even after the Supreme Court reversed its decision. The government resorted to bureaucratic methods to enforce their rule after not being able to develop the economy—the latter after the impact of the policies of US imperialism and the fall of the price of oil. Losing the popular support Chávez had, the Maduro regime resorted more and more to police state measures in order to stay in power.

A Contested Presidency

In late January 2019, Venezuela entered a renewed stage of political turmoil as Nicolás Maduro was sworn in for a new term as President of Venezuela. The National Assembly, run by the opposition to Maduro whose parties chose to boycott the May 2018 election, announced that they would not recognize the outcome of the most recent election. The new leader of the National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, declared himself Interim President instead of Maduro. While Guaidó's announcement came as a surprise to most ordinary people, the same cannot be said for the capitalist or right-wing leaders of countries across the world. Almost immediately, Donald Trump of the United States, Teresa May of the United Kingdom, Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, and most of the right-wing leaders of Latin America countries declared that they would recognize Guaidó as the legitimate President of Venezuela.

This was an attempt at a managed soft coup from the US and other imperialist forces. Trump even toyed with the idea of escalating by sending 5000 troops to Colombia, which could have

The fundamental mistake was, not to move on and establish a real workers' democracy.



Thousands rally in Caracas for the 5 year anniversary of the failed 2002 US-coup attempt in Venezuela. With low oil prices, a top-heavy bureaucracy, and crippling sanctions undermining the economic gains of the Bolivarian Revolution, will the US coup attempt be successful this time?

Photo: Globovisión, tinyurl.com/VenezuelaChavez, CC BY-NC 2.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/

risked turning it into a full-on war. In the following months, both Maduro and Guaidó have galvanized hundreds of thousands of their supporters to protest in the streets.

Caution Ahead

The popularity of left-wing ideas is on the rise in the United States. Medicare for All, tuition-free higher education, and the Green New Deal are all topics of discussion among the left. As the 2020 US Presidential election approaches, Trump and his allies in the mainstream will increasingly put forward Venezuela, and more broadly the idea of socialism, as a boogeyman for the choice facing the nation. If Senator Bernie Sanders continues to solidify himself as a serious contender for the Democratic Party nomination, the party establishment will also be pushing this false narrative as another tool in their arsenal to stop him.

Leftists and socialists should prepare themselves to fight back against this red-baiting.

The failure of Chávez's "socialism of the 21st century" was not in the attempt to establish misiones (community programs) for education or providing food for the poorest. It was also not a mistake to take over the wealth of the nation, oil, to fund these programs. The fundamental mistake was not moving on to establish a real workers' democracy, which would have been able to fight the bureaucratic weight of the new elite which was establishing itself.

Socialism in one country is not possible against the might of imperialism. Capitalism is an international system of corporate domination and must be replaced by an international system of democratic socialist cooperation. Socialism cannot be overseen by a bureaucratic clique. It requires democratic management of the entire economy and society by the working class. The future of Venezuela will either be a revolution from below to institute a real workers' democracy or, under the guise of "democracy," it will be re-privatized and carved up by the executives of Exxon and BP, with the full support and cooperation of US Imperialism.

Frida Kahlo, Art and Revolution

Some people think art is unimportant to the socialist movement - but Frida Kahlo showed it is essential to the struggle.

Ruth Ann Oskolkoff
is an activist with
Extinction Rebellion
and DSA, and recently
published a book
of political quotes
"Capitalism Must Be
Composted."

Rule #1: Don't talk about politics. Isn't that what many of us were taught as a child?

But I just want to ask - how has that worked out for our society? Not fantastic. Our world is facing climate collapse, we see a heartbreaking gulf between rich and poor, and now are faced with a vulgar, self-serving president who is an embarrassment - and a terrible symptom of the systemic problems of capitalist society. All while many of us still avoid political discussion in order to be polite.

But since the last Bernie campaign, myself and thousands of other progressives have joined informal social media networks where ALL we do is live and breathe politics. So when one of my online artist friends was invited to speak at a panel to coincide with the Frida Kahlo exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, I was able to travel to NYC to see it for myself.

The exhibit was called "Frida Kahlo: Appearances Can Be Deceiving." It was the first time in the US that Frida's personal items were displayed - such as Mexican traditional clothing, hand-painted casts, and large cultural bead necklaces. In addition to some of her well recognized oil paintings, there were smaller black and white sketches, family photographs, film snippets, photos of various collections, and letters.

Viewing the displays, attendees got a better idea of who she really was. Although not widely publicized, Frida and her husband, Diego Rivera, were active in the revolutionary socialist workers movement, and in 1928 they briefly became members of the Communist Party. In the 1930s, Frida grew close to Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition's struggle against the Stalinist perversion of socialism. However, by 1948 she ended up re-joining the Communist Party of Mexico which was aligned with the Stalinist state (see "The Life and Politics of Frida Kahlo," *The Socialist*, May 26, 2017.)

In most exhibits, Frida's radical politics are often downplayed - instead emphasizing her plaintive paintings depicting physical suffering, her feminism, her embrace of gender fluidity (before that was even a phrase), and her visionary realism. But she was also a comrade. And in spite of personal challenges and physical injuries which caused her lifelong pain, she advocated for a world that

will benefit ordinary working people, not the ruling elite.

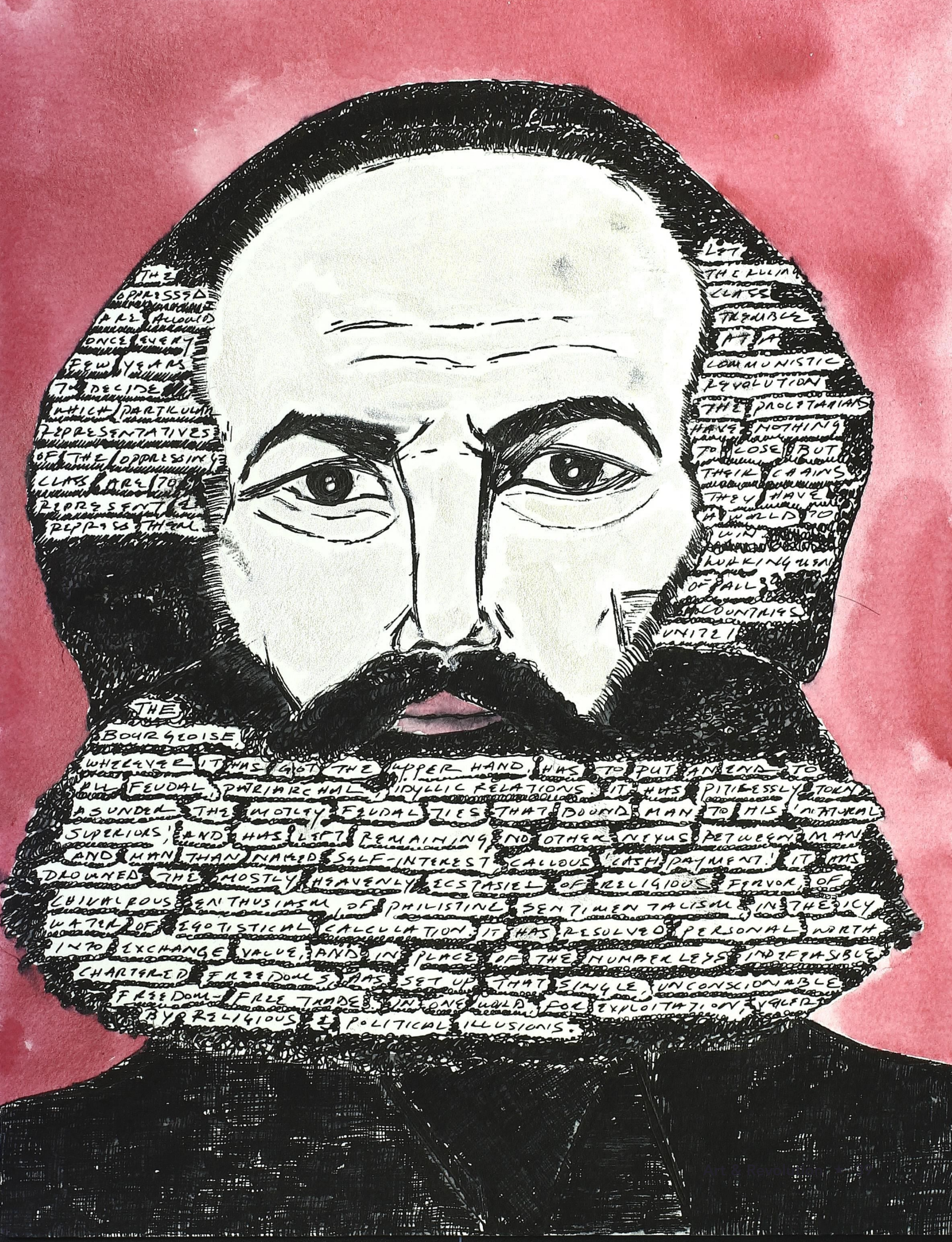
That's where an exhibition on Frida's life, her clothes, and her appearances "Can Be Deceiving" indeed.

After soaking in the art and life of Frida, I headed upstairs for a moderated panel, "Permissions of Truth," featuring rapper Taphari and my friend - artist and political activist Sneha Sinha. Sneha shared about being a local political activist and creating a large online network to promote social justice.

Some would conclude art is a bougie pastime for elitist liberals. Well - it certainly can be. But for others, including Sneha Sinha, it's one avenue of worthwhile expression - on the canvas, online, or locally. Sneha and many artists like her are not only making art; they are working to build social movements to change the world.

So the answer is yes, let's talk politics. While eating dinner. Certainly during demonstrations. Even in the art we create, or the stories we write.

Painting of Karl Marx by Sneha Sinha, an artist and activist in New York City. You can find Sneha on Instagram at [instagram.com/snaybelle](https://www.instagram.com/snaybelle)



THE OPPRESSED
TAKE ACCOUNT
ONCE EVERY
FEW YEARS
TO DECIDE
WHICH PARTICULAR
REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE OPPRESSED
CLASS ARE TO
REPRESENT
THEIR
CLASS

LET
THE BURNING
CLASS
TREASURES
THE
COMMUNISTIC
REVOLUTION
THE PROLETARIAS
HAVE NOTHING
TO LOSE BUT
THEIR CHAINS
THEY HAVE
THE WORLD TO
WIN
WORKING MEN
OF ALL
COUNTRIES
UNITE!

THE
BOURGEOISE
WHenever it has got the upper hand, has to put an end to
all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn
asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his natural
superiors, and has left remaining no other nexus between man
and man than naked self-interest, callous 'cash payment'. It has
drowned the mostly heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of
chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy
water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth
into exchange value, and in place of the numberless, indispensable
chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable
freedom—free trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled
by religious & political illusions.

reform



revolution

Reform & Revolution is a website and magazine published by a new caucus in Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) who are active in unions and social movements. Our Reform & Revolution caucus stands in the revolutionary socialist tradition, and we are committed to ending economic inequality, racism, sexism, and all forms of oppression.

Reform & Revolution views the capitalist system – with its nonstop global competition for profits and power – as the main driver behind inequality, oppression, and the climate crisis. Capitalism is fundamentally undemocratic because the real levers of power are in the hands of billionaires who, at the end of the day, control the economy, the mass media, the government, and all branches of the state, including the army, courts, and the police.

We stand for bringing the corporations that dominate the economy into democratic public ownership and replacing the anarchy of the market with democratic economic planning in order to meet the needs of people and the planet. We advocate a socialist democracy where our whole society, including our workplaces, neighborhoods, and schools, is democratically run by popular assemblies.

The resurgence of socialist ideas and the explosive growth of DSA represent the biggest opportunity in decades to build a mass socialist movement in the United States, the epicenter of global capi-

talism. We stand for building DSA into a broad mass socialist party rooted in the struggles and organizations of the working class and the oppressed. Reform & Revolution also seeks to contribute to the construction of an organized Marxist current within DSA which is committed to international socialism.

One of the central questions activists are grappling with is the relationship between fighting for reforms and the need to fundamentally change the whole social system. Our name is taken in honor of the answer that Rosa Luxemburg gave to this question: “Between social reforms and revolution there exists for [the Marxist movement] an inseparable connection. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim.”

We hope Reform & Revolution can provide a valuable forum for lively debate on the program and strategy that social movements need to achieve their goals, drawing on lessons from past struggles. We strive to contribute to a critical and living Marxism that analyzes new developments in society and engages in the ideological debates facing the Left in the 21st century. We welcome contributions from all who share these commitments.

If you want to resist Trump and the whole billionaire class, if you want to fight all forms of oppression, join DSA at dsausa.org! If you also want to find out more about joining Reform & Revolution and building a Marxist wing of the socialist movement, please visit **ReformAndRevolution.org**