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The Worldwide Crisis of Capitalism and the Relevance of Socialism

[Political Resolution Adopted by the Eighteenth National Convention of Socialist Action, October 12-14, 2018, Minneapolis, MN]
The Worldwide Crisis of Capitalism and the Relevance of Socialism
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Introduction

Socialist Action’s Political Committee and National Committee prepared the initial draft of the resolution in this pamphlet for consideration of the membership during the party’s three-month pre-convention period of internal discussion and debate in the lead up to Socialist Action’s October 2018 18th National Convention in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In its final adopted form, the resolution entitled, The Worldwide Crisis of Capitalism and the Relevance of Socialism, serves as the party’s assessment of the nature and depth of the present world capitalist crisis and, therefore, the framework for Socialist Action’s understanding of and participation in the myriad of social and political movements where working people struggle to improve their lives.

The pamphlet includes major excepts from a joint statement on the world economic crisis issued by Socialist Action and its sister party in Canada:

Global capitalist competition, including the current trade wars, is a completely unavoidable aspect of the system of private profit. Competition results in new innovation/automation that increases the rate of profit for the initial innovator. But these gains are offset again by the rapid adoption of ever more advanced technology by competitors, and profit rates continue to fall. In this profit or die system those competitors that can’t keep up are driven from the field or forced to consolidate or merge with others to stay in the game. In the end the profit or die game is played by giant multi-national monopoly corporations that continue the competition on a global scale with dire consequences for all humanity.
In their desperate struggle to fight the falling rate of profit capitalists try to reduce costs and increase their competitive edge by attacking trade unions and workers’ rights, by attacking wage and benefit levels, by attacking general social benefits such as education, health care, and pensions, by refusing to accept responsibility for the massive environmental damage caused by cutthroat capitalist competition, and by transferring production to low-wage, unregulated areas both within and outside their own countries…

The world’s working people have no interest in this potential world conflagration. When capitalists win, workers lose—a fundamental law of the capitalist system. The common interest of workers lies in defending working people everywhere against all the onslaughts of capital. This means international solidarity on every front, from united worldwide efforts to organize workers into powerful unions to united opposition to capitalist wars and the capitalist destruction of the environment…

There is no such thing as peaceful and/or regulated competition among capitalist nations. No self-respecting capitalist is in business to be the world’s ‘nice guy.’ There are only winners and losers in this deadly game of production for private profit.

Today, with U.S. and global corporate profit rates continuing to decline, the major capitalist behemoths increasingly shun investments in new plants and have turned to unprecedented government-promoted speculative investments in the stock market, hedge funds and other financial instruments that have generated massive paper profits and led to the present global shift of wealth from the vast majority to the elite one percent who literally own 50 percent of the world’s wealth. In this financialization of capital process giant paper bubbles of capital are produced with no corresponding creation of real value. The stupendous rise in the share values in the U.S. stock market has no relation to the actual
value of the corporations. As in the 2008-9 crash/depression, yet another massive bust is on the order of the day, wreaking untold misery on working people.

Thus, any serious explanation of today’s increasing global misery; massive impoverishment; environmental destruction; persecution and demonization of immigrants; endless wars; and racist, sexist, homophobic and Islamophobic attacks have less to do with whether the Democrats or Republicans are in power at any particular moment than with the inherent contradictions in the capitalist system itself. It is these contradictions that explain both the rise of rightwing and neo-fascist currents worldwide on the one hand, and the rising and simultaneous interest in socialism on the other. The ruling class response is always to foster divisions by scapegoating and persecuting the oppressed; the socialist response is to unite all of capitalism’s victims in common struggles that aim at challenging the legitimacy of the system itself. In this context the resolution in its various component sections focuses on unifying, strengthening and fostering the independent mass action character of all fighting social movements. (Editor’s note: A separate and supplementary resolution on Women’s Liberation was approved by the Socialist Action National Committee at its April 13, 2019 plenum. It is included in this booklet as an ADDENDUM.)

Russia and China

The resolution takes up some of the important questions that have been in dispute in the broader socialist movement, including the nature of the Chinese and Russian states. “China,” the resolution asserts, is “…a major and growing imperialist power in its own right, but considerably less developed in key areas than the U.S.” (See Keith Leslie’s, China: A New Imperialist Power, soon to be published by Socialist Action.) Russia too, the
resolution holds, is an imperialist nation “… of considerably less weight in the world economy and in many other respects. Socialist Action’s analysis of the respective roles of China and Russia in the increasingly polarized world political situation, as with all other analyses, is subject to an examination of the facts and context at hand.”

**Statewide teacher strikes**

The resolution devotes considerable attention to the eruption, seemingly out of nowhere, of statewide “red state” teacher strikes in West Virginia, Kentucky, Arizona, Oklahoma and North Carolina, predicting that these may well be the heat lightning that sparks broader and effective fightbacks that portend a fundamental change in the present negative relationship of forces. These teacher mobilizations employed a series of class struggle strategies beginning with powerful statewide strikes accompanied by massive teacher-community rallies as opposed to isolated strikes in a single school district. Mass decision-making based on democratic discussion and debate marked an historic return to the kind of democratic fighting unionism that won major gains in decades past. In this context the aroused and directly engaged teachers and their allies challenged and rejected the class collaborationist directives of the union bureaucracy, that counseled caution and warned against strike action that “violated the law.” Indeed, this conscious mass defiance of capitalist laws prohibiting statewide strikes, in combination with broad-based demands aimed at improving public education and uniting parents and working class communities, proved to be decisive.

In West Virginia, teachers broke new ground by demanding and winning the restoration of funds for all public employees, that is, not only for teachers. In contrast to the usual one-day, token strike wherein teachers are called to state capitols to lobby
legislators, teachers insisted that they would not return to work until their demands were met. And these included the key demand that the state legislature return to public education and public employees the billions of dollars that had been looted from state budgets and gifted to the corporate elite over the past decade. The teachers had the facts to prove it. Their demand to, “Tax the rich, not working people!” was elevated from a slogan to an immediate demand. This “red state” militancy undoubtedly inspired the Los Angeles and Oakland teacher strike actions that followed a year later – actions that demonstrated the power of teacher-community unity but lacked the decisive impact of the statewide confrontations in West Virginia.

Subordination to the Democrats

The Socialist Action resolution also took note of a critical weaknesses in the teacher union movement and, indeed, in most social struggles today. Following the strike victories, the AFT and NEA leaderships pledged to run some 400 teacher candidates as Democrats in the 2018 midterm elections. Similarly, the leadership of promising social struggles led by Black Lives Matter, March for Women’s Lives and 350.org, all of which have led massive mobilizations against racism, sexism and catastrophic impending climate change, largely ushered these promising movements into the electoral framework of the Democratic Party. Indeed, the 2020 national elections will undoubtedly see a concerted, if not unprecedented rush to “lesser evil” politics, as evidenced by the Democrats running some 23 candidates, all focused on proclaiming themselves best suited to “Dump Trump.” No doubt, all will dutifully unite, as was the case with Bernie Sanders in 2016, behind whichever candidate emerges as the top dog in capitalism’s carefully orchestrated election swindle. Already Sanders has been the first to sign such a unity pledge.
Receptivity to socialist ideas

Recent polls by the Pew organization, Gallop and the New York Times report that a majority of all youth under 30 prefer socialism over capitalism; for the Black communities over all age groups, the figure stands at 55 percent. Socialist Action’s recruitment of a new layer of Black and Latinx youth is a prime indication of the reality of this preference. Confidence in the capitalist system today stands at a low point in the modern era, while the appeal of socialism to increasing millions informs us that the times are propitious for revolutionary socialist ideas to sink deeper roots in broad layers of the population. In this context, Socialist Action’s decision in mid-April 2019 to run its National Secretary, Jeff Mackler, for the U.S. presidency and National Committee member, Heather Bradford for Vice President, offers the party a unique opportunity to popularize socialist politics and win new fighters to the socialist cause.

Similar polls register majority support for trade unions at a time when the percentage of union membership stands at a modern all-time low. The recent and impressive teacher strikes, the union mobilizations against the government budget shutdowns and other militant strike actions informs us that a new layer of class struggle union fighters is emerging.

DSA and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

In noting the mid-term election victory of New York City Democrat and Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the resolution states: “Here, we are qualitatively less concerned with criticizing the limitations of the Ocasio-Cortez campaign platform than we are in pointing to its overall confirmation that socialist ideas are increasingly finding a receptive ear among broad layers of the population.” The
resolution continues: “We need not review our historic opposition to any capitalist candidate or party. As we are fond of saying, ‘If Lenin ran as a Democrat on the Bolshevik program, we would not support him!’” Ocasio-Cortez and the DSA, their “socialist” imprimatur notwithstanding, had no problem endorsing all Democrats in the 2018 midterms, including the “Blue Dog” Southern racist variety and all other stripes within the spectrum of ruling class politics. Though they call themselves “democratic socialists” – falsely implying that other socialists oppose democracy – we prefer the traditional label, “social democrats,” which makes clear that the DSA and similar organizations are Democratic Party supporters first and foremost, who pretend that socialism – a fundamental break with capitalist exploitation and rule – can be won through electoral reforms and other incremental changes to the capitalist system.

**Trump threatens North Korea**

President Trump’s grandstanding negotiations with North Korea should not put anyone fearful of nuclear war at ease. For Socialist Action the starting point in explaining our views is our historic demand for the total and unconditional disarmament of the imperialist U.S. military nuclear behemoth. Not one penny for war! Just as Trump abrogated previous treaties with Iran and the near worthless COP 21 UN Paris climate “agreement,” he and any future president, in the name of “national security” or some other pretext, is fully capable of invading and destroying any nation.

**Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba**

U.S. recent threats to invade Venezuela and Nicaragua, to further embargo revolutionary Cuba and now threats to send 130,000 U.S. troops to the Middle East to potentially wage war against Iran and Iraq and to deepen the imperialist war against
Syria, inform us, yet again, that war is inherent in the imperialist system. Today, the bi-partisan war-making parties speak the same language, whether it be in voting for the $trillion annual war budget or in supporting Trump’s “regime change” wars in Latin America and the Middle East. To abolish war once and for all requires the abolition of capitalism. An indispensable step toward this end is the construction of a massive, united front, democratic antiwar movement to challenge all U.S. imperialist wars against working people at home and abroad. The central demands of today’s antiwar movement must be clear and unequivocal: “U.S. Hands Off!” and “Self-determination for all poor and oppressed nations!” Regardless of our most serious criticisms of the leadership of nations in the imperialist gunsights, we unequivocally and unconditionally defend their right to self-determination. While we lend no political support to these or any other capitalist governments, we defend their right to seek military aid from Russia and China or from any other quarter. We fully understand that a mass revolutionary socialist party is an absolute necessity in winning a socialist world. But the road to the construction of such a party begins with winning the confidence and mass support of the working class. This begins with a program of unalterable opposition to imperialist intervention and war, whether it be in the form outright U.S. coup efforts, sanctions, embargoes, blockades, drone wars, privatized army wars and all the rest. Our revolutionary comrades and co-thinkers in any nation facing imperialist intervention and war stand on the front lines in opposition to all imperialist invaders.

Socialist Action on Syria

The resolution reaffirms the party’s previously adopted position. To wit:
With regard to Syria, our unconditional support to self-determination includes Syria’s right to seek allies and support against U.S. imperialist intervention and war from Russia, Iran and the Lebanese-based fighters of Hezbollah.

While we extend no political support to the capitalist Bashar Assad regime in Syria, or to any other capitalist regime, we remain unconditionally opposed to all imperialist efforts to remove it. The job of challenging capitalism in Syria is the sole responsibility of the Syrian people. The future construction of a mass revolutionary party in Syria remains a prerequisite to socialist revolution there and in any other nation.

**Latin America’s “pink revolutions”**

Whatever differences have distinguished one of Latin America’s “pink revolutions” from another regarding the implementation of sometimes substantial reforms, all retained the essential social structures and institutions of the capitalist state. The fundamental ownership and control of the commanding economic heights of the nation remained in capitalist hands including the land and natural resources, the key banks and the financial institutions.

In sharp contrast, the Cuban Revolution of 1958-59, in the words of Fidel Castro leadership nationalized bourgeois property “down to the nails in the heels of their boots” and went on to establish a state of the working class. This is the preeminent explanation for why the Cuban state endures and all the others have suffered retreat and/or humiliating defeat.

Experienced revolutionaries, as well newcomers to the socialist cause, will find in this 2018 Socialist Action convention resolution, The Worldwide Crisis of Capitalism and the Relevance of Socialist Revolution, a resounding affirmation of the party’s
confidence in the socialist future. An acute analysis of the central and inherent contradictions of predatory capitalism today is combined with plan of action aimed at winning the present radicalizing generation of youth and all working people to the fight for new world where the fulfillment of the highest aspirations for human dignity, equality and social justice are primary.

Jeff Mackler, May 22, 2019
The Worldwide Crisis of Capitalism and the Relevance of Socialism

[Political Resolution Adopted by the Eighteenth National Convention of Socialist Action, October 12-14, 2018, Minneapolis, MN]

International situation

Analyzing President Donald Trump’s excoriating traditional U.S. trading partners at the recent Group of Seven (G 7) meeting in Quebec, Marxist economist Michael Roberts noted:

“What all these Trumpist antics [threats of trade tariffs, etc.] revealed is that the period of the Great Moderation and globalization, from the 1980s to 2007, when all major capitalist states worked together to benefit capital in all countries (to varying degrees) is over. The Great Recession of 2007-8 and the ensuing Long Depression since 2009 has changed the economic picture. In a stagnating world capitalist economy, where productivity growth is low, world trade growth has subsided and the profitability of capital has not recovered, cooperation has been replaced by increasingly vicious competition – the thieves have fallen out.”

The “thieves” here refer to the most powerful capitalist nations on earth. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Europe’s most influential leader and representative of its most powerful economy, concluded similarly. The New York Times summarized Merkel’s views as follows: “The United States of President Trump is not the reliable partner her country and the Continent have automatically depended on in the past. Clearly disappointed with Mr. Trump’s positions on NATO, Russia, climate change and trade, Ms. Merkel said that traditional alliances were no longer as steadfast as they once were and that Europe should pay more attention to its own interests ‘and really take our fate into our own
Merkel continued, “The times in which we could rely fully on others — they are somewhat over.”

Roberts’ brief summary of today’s world capitalist economic crisis is fully consistent with the assessment Socialist Action has laid out in great detail in the several adopted Socialist Action Political Resolutions over the past decade and longer.

Two additional paragraphs from his assessment are adequate to make the point that Trump’s disgusting reactionary hyperbole on an ever-broadening range of issues notwithstanding, the “antics” of a “rogue” president are subordinate to the reality of a deepening world capitalist crisis that increasingly pits the major international players against each other, always at the expense of the world’s working class. The margins for long-term resolution via the major international institutions that previously served to at least partially mitigate major disputes have narrowed.

Of course, China must be included among the major players today. On June 9-10, 2018 it sponsored in Qingdao, a coastal city in Shandong province, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit meeting including eight Asian countries – China, Russia, India, Pakistan and the Central Asian republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Iran was included as the ninth member. At 3 billion people, the SCO members account for half the world’s population. Needless to say, all of the participants operate within the framework of capitalism. There are zero revolutionary implications in their efforts to better regulate and foster trade and investment opportunities to their own advantage. As with the “leftist” Latin
American based ALBA trade and investment group, also operating in the context of exploitative capitalist systems, each seeks to establish the best possible relations in a world still dominated by the traditional imperialist powers, whose worldwide institutions, like the International Monetary Fund, increasingly impose ever more onerous conditions aimed at thwarting their hoped for emergence from underdevelopment and dependence to more “independent” capitalist states. Neo-fascist Modi in India and the Pakistani military regime, to name a few, are no friends of working people in any sense.

Trump’s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement, his withdrawal from the near worthless COP 21 Paris climate accords, his ultra-reactionary racist immigration policies – separating detained/imprisoned parents from their children – his praise for the Supreme Court’s approval of the “constitutional” right (freedom of religion!?) of a baker to refuse to prepare a wedding cake for an LGBTQI couple, his proposal/suggestion to his National Security Council to increase the U.S. nuclear weapons stock “100 fold,” and his most recent order to establish a sixth arm of the Pentagon – the “Space Force” – to militarily “defend” U.S. “interests” in outer space, to mention a few of his idiocies, combine to demonstrate that on virtually every front his twisted politics have a rational core, that is, to advance what he perceives as policies required to protect a weakened U.S. capitalism from its competitors abroad, while advancing their interests against U.S. workers at home. Yes, and again, he is an embarrassment to the majority of the ruling class elite, evidenced at least by the fact that virtually every major corporate newspaper and media outlet in the country daily pillory his too overtly rightwing pronouncements, but the essence of his direction, as opposed to the form, is not too dissimilar from mainstream ruling class views.
Robert’s summary is quite apt:

“At the [G7] meeting Trump slammed into the other leaders claiming that their governments were imposing ‘unfair’ trading rules on US products and they needed to reduce their surpluses on trade with the US. The other leaders had already responded to the US tariff measures with planned reciprocal tariffs on key US exports and now they replied to Trump’s attacks with arguments and evidence that, on the contrary, it was the US that restricted foreign imported goods and services.”

Roberts concludes dramatically: “And thus the trade war has begun – a war that the major capitalist economies have not engaged in since the 1930s depression and which was supposed to be resolved by international agreements like General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the post-war period. Trump has called the WTO the worst possible trade deal and NAFTA the next worst (for America).”

**Working people have no stakes in trade wars**

The joint statement by Socialist Action (U.S.) and our sister party Socialist Action/Ligue pour l’action socialiste in the Canadian state summarizes our views well. A few excerpts here serve to make the major points.

“Global capitalist competition [including the current trade wars] is a completely unavoidable aspect of the system of private profit. As competition results in new innovation and automation increases the rate of profit for the innovator temporarily these gains are offset again by the rapid adoption of new technology by competitors and the resulting fall of profit rates.

“In their desperate struggle to fight the falling rate of profit, (or, as Marx said, “the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to
fall), capitalists try to reduce costs by attacking trade unions and workers’ rights, by attacking wage and benefit levels, by attacking general social benefits such as education, medical, and pension benefits, by refusing to accept any responsibility for the massive environmental damage caused by cutthroat capitalist competition, and by transferring production to low-wage, unregulated areas both within and outside their own countries…

“The world’s working people have no interest in this potential world conflagration. In the end, when capitalists win, workers lose—a fundamental law of the capitalist system that has been verified many times over the past decades. The common interest of workers lies in defending working people everywhere against all the onslaughts of capital. This means international solidarity on every front, from united worldwide efforts to organize workers into powerful unions to united opposition to capitalist wars and the capitalist destruction of the environment…”

“There is no such thing as peaceful and/or regulated competition among capitalist nations. No self-respecting capitalist is in business to be the world’s “nice guy.” There are only winners and losers in this deadly game of production for private profit. Donald Trump simply tore the mask off the brute face of a predatory system in decline. Justin Trudeau plays the same game as Trump on the world scene and makes sure that everyone knows that Canadian capitalism can bare its own claws in the profit game.”

The above evaluation of the world economic crisis has two central objectives: to reaffirm what we have previously written on this critical subject and mark its present day intensification to be best prepared to counter the expected “liberal/progressive” Democratic Party mantra that Donald Trump is a “rogue” president whose replacement in 2020 with a Democrat will return U.S.
politics and economic policy to a rational, collaborative and “civilized” state.

Yes, Donald Trump is a “moron” in the political sense only, the term coined by his former and fired Secretary of State and former Exxon Mobile CEO, Ross Tillerson when Trump proposed to the National Security Council a hundred fold increase of nuclear weapons. Yes, Trump is a billionaire businessman – an overt racist, sexist, anti-immigrant, detention center/concentration camp crusader, homophobic, Islamophobic, warmongering, imperialist beast. And yes, Trump has introduced a new and deeper round of reactionary policies on every front. But again, his policies and pronouncements are not fundamentally at odds with the present policies of the U.S. capitalist class, minus the never-ending reactionary tweets, idiotic proclamations, rejection of science and temper tantrums, that his more sophisticated counterparts long ago learned to keep behind closed doors while publically presenting themselves in less inflammatory terms.

The serious representatives of the ruling class would much prefer a more verbally tempered president, one like Obama, or even Hillary Clinton, who would seek the counsel of the leading ruling class representatives, that is, of the traditional team of cabinet and other “advisers” who are less blatant in guaranteeing the real interests of the nation’s leading bankers, financiers and corporate magnates. That Trump has fired one after another of his slightly less noxious and more cautious in their rhetoric advisers after each has counseled him to moderate his vitriol and embarrassing tone and tweets, is subordinate to the fact that no section of the ruling class has broken with Trump on fundamental questions.

There were near zero objections, for example, when a bipartisan Congress gifted $1.5 trillion in tax relief to the corporations and banks of the ruling rich, a fact that in and of itself
enabled bourgeois economic analysts to post and predict some figures that indicated a modest, but one-time uptick in otherwise stagnant GDP figures. Similarly, there were few, if any, objections when Congress boosted annual military spending by an unprecedented $80 billion, an amount exceeding even Trump’s initial request. We note here in passing that the $80 billion increase exceeds Russia’s total annual military budget of $50 billion as compared to the U.S.’s budgeted $1 trillion for overall all war purposes! On June 21, 2018 the U.S. Senate, by a vote of 85-15, approved this military budget. The few “doves” that vote “No,” like Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, and “libertarian” Rand Paul, did so likely to preserve their future political “peace candidate” credentials.

It is doubtful that any section of the U.S. ruling class involved in steel and aluminum production objected to Trump’s imposing tariffs on competitive foreign imports for these commodities, or, for that matter, on any others where U.S. corporations lag behind foreign competitors.

What irked the anti-Trump wing of the U.S. ruling class was qualitatively less the fact that Trump sought to defend one or another key section of U.S. capital and qualitatively more the fact that he failed to do so in the “civilized” framework of the already existing international trade institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO) where the U.S. still retains the upper hand.

The WTO and all other such institutions were established to attempt to mitigate the inherent conflicts and contradictions among and between capitalist nations. It is indisputable that the terms and conditions set by these institutions are determined by the relationship of forces between the major players, that is, to the advantage of the U.S. The “choice” as to whether or not to participate in the WTO is quite clear. Either a nation decides to join and play by the rules set by the dominant players, or not join
and be subject to the onerous conditions the excluded non-members are subjected to.

China is a classic example. China’s WTO entry in 2001 was conditioned on respecting foreign corporations’ intellectual property rights, that is, agreeing not to compete with its own primitive factories by introducing state of the art technologies – technologies that the U.S. insists are protected by U.S. patents, that is, “inviolable” intellectual property rights. As a result for close to two decades and to this date, the level of Chinese labor productivity, has lagged far behind most capitalist nations. But this is rapidly changing. With regard to an increasing number of key commodities traded on world markets China’s productivity levels are rapidly increasing – ever more closing the technology gap and thus posing a threat to U.S. corporate interests. In the imperialist mindset any nation seeking to introduce modern and competitive technology is considered a threat.

Trump’s recent announcement of the imposition of U.S. tariffs on this or that foreign product irked not only U.S. competitors abroad but the overall ruling class in the U.S., not so much because of opposition to this or that tariff but rather because Trump sought to impose himself and his limited team as chief negotiators on such matters as opposed to the broader establishment “team” of the ruling class elite, where more delicate and balanced trade adjustments are negotiated.

The North American Free Trade Agreement

NAFTA is a prime example of how trade agreements are arrived at. It emerged as the joint product of essentially the entire U.S. ruling class. Both NAFTA and the U.S. congressional vote to admit China to the WTO were accomplished under the aegis of the Bill Clinton Democratic Party administration. But both were opposed, for the sake of appearances only, by the then House
majority Democrats, who (falsely) claimed to be interested in protecting U.S. workers against cheap foreign labor. Similarly, in the case of China’s admission to the WTO the vote in favor included only 74 Democrats joined by 164 Republicans, the latter a congressional minority at that time, but joining with the needed Democrats to accomplish an overall ruling class objective. Despite its “free trade” imprimatur, NAFTA incorporated a myriad of negotiated protectionist measures aimed at defending the weaker sections of U.S. capital. It was the product, as with all such trade agreements, of the broadest deliberations between U.S. capitalists on the one hand, and similar negotiations with Mexican and Canadian elites on the other, with the latter two compelled to make concessions to the stronger U.S. capitalists in order to remain players – lesser players to be sure – in the game.

**Growing competition with Chinese imperialism**

Today Trump and his cohorts have made trade matters more public than at any other time. Trump’s list of proposed tariffs on Chinese imports literally includes 1,102 categories of goods, all focused on high tech industries like nuclear reactors, aircraft engine parts, ball bearings, bulldozers, motorcycles and industrial and agricultural machinery. These are precisely the categories where China has employed the advanced robotics and related super modern production technologies (intellectual property rights) that Trump claims were “stolen” by Chinese corporations, who were previously subordinate partners with U.S. corporations but today seek to enter the world trade arena with their own equally competitive, if not superior technologies. In the minds of U.S. capitalists China was to be permanently relegated to using inferior technologies while providing the world’s cheapest and largest labor pool, the latter in almost unlimited numbers. Further, U.S. corporations hoped to unilaterally exploit the emerging mass Chinese market where perhaps some 300 million or more of its
population of 1.4 billion people were able to purchase U.S. corporation-manufactured commodities. Needless to say the Chinese ruling class, as it introduced competitive technologies, had no intention of being banned from the markets in their own country.

Chinese capitalists had their own ideas. They estimated that their agreement to (temporarily) subordinate their economies to U.S. and world imperialist investment in order to secure the necessary initial foreign investment would in time allow them to participate on world markets as serious competitors. That time has come – hence the Trump countermeasure tariffs aimed at perpetually keeping China as a second rate player. Obviously, neither China nor the European Union nations, or any other “self-respecting” big time capitalist entrepreneur intend to remain permanent second-rate players.

As in the U.S., all understand that their for-profit-first-and-last systems, depend both on their capacity to dominate world markets, to deepen the exploitation of old ones and to simultaneously impose ever more noxious austerity measures on their own working masses – the ultimate source of all wealth. In this context, imperialist wars, renewed re-colonization efforts, “regime change” efforts, as are the norm in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East, and intensified inter-imperialist rivalry are on the order of the day.

Indeed, with regard to China, a major and growing imperialist power in its own right, but considerably less developed in key areas than the U.S. (See Keith Leslie’s “China: A New Imperialist Power,” soon to be published by Socialist Action.), and with regard to Russia, an imperialist nation of considerably less weight in the world economy and in many other respects, our analysis of their respective roles in the increasingly polarized
world political situation, as with all other analyses, is subject to an examination of the facts and context at hand.

China is an imperialist state. Built on a foundation of monopoly capitalism, it is a major capital exporter and exploits workers across the world. Its economy combines highly uneven developments, with advanced and highly productive regions combined with impoverished and underdeveloped regions. Its military is increasingly advanced and is deployed to support the interests of Chinese capitalism worldwide. China is a major player in most theaters across the world today and is continually seeking to expand its already significant influence globally.

**Worldwide political polarization**

Today, we see a deepening political polarization in the U.S. and worldwide, often with the emergence of openly racist, anti-immigrant, “populist,” rightest or neo-fascist movements as in India, Japan and Europe. Trump, Macron and May seek similar economic, and social objectives, but with sometimes more restrained rhetoric. All of these heinous developments have their origins in a crisis-ridden world capitalism wherein sections of the ruling elites aim to deflect blame for the overall systems’ failures onto immigrants, oppressed nationalities, women, the LGBTQI community, religious groups and/or whatever section of society or nations they choose to scapegoat and demonize for their own divide and rule objectives.

**Trump presidency**

Any significant explanation of Donald Trump’s election to the U.S. presidency must include mention of the widespread rejection of the Washington D.C./Wall Street associations of Democrat Hillary Clinton. Many workers and middle-class people turned to Trump, who postured in his electoral campaign as an
anti-establishment “populist. And his provocative rallies mobilized the racism and xenophobia deeply embedded in US capitalist society. At the same time, wide discontent over the Democrat’s eight years of broadly-imposed austerity, massive multi-trillion dollar bank and corporate bailouts, unprecedented mortgage foreclosures, mass deportations, endless wars, massive expansion of the racist prison-industrial complex-school to prison scenario, racist police violence and murder, offshore drilling, pipeline extension, fracking and other elements of environmental destruction, to name a few of the measures implemented to advance overall capitalist interests, helped to inflate support to Bernie Sander’s candidacy in the Democratic Party primaries, and later resulted in many abstentions in the general election.

On the other side of the equation, besieged by the effects of capitalist austerity, especially affecting young people, we see simultaneously the emergence of important working class formations and mass mobilization aimed at resisting capital’s encroachments. Spain/Catalonia, France/against Macron’s new Labor Code, England/Corbyn, South Africa/NUMSA, the U.S./post Trump election mobilizations for women, immigrants, opposition to global warming, Poland and Ireland/mass pro-abortion rights mobilization, are but a few examples. In the absence of clear revolutionary socialist alternatives led by deeply-rooted socialist currents aimed at a definitive break with capitalist austerity in all its manifestations, what we are witnessing today are the still limited, dramatic and periodic rise and demise of initial efforts to find a path forward. Nevertheless, as the spring 2018 statewide teacher strikes in five states have amply demonstrated, the gap between deep disdain of the system’s impact on the lives of millions and relative passivity can be closed almost instantly.
Statewide teacher strikes: The gap is closing

What we have previously described as the gap between the deep anger, frustration and hatred of the across-the-board austerity measures imposed by the ruling rich, Democrats and Republicans alike, and the still low level of fightback appears to be closing. The eruption, seemingly out of the blue, of Red State/Republican statewide teacher strikes, the “Red State Rebellion,” in West Virginia, Kentucky, Arizona, Oklahoma and North Carolina, may well be the heat lightning that sparks qualitatively broader and effective mass examples of resistance that portend a fundamental change in the present negative relationship of forces to the advantage of the broad working class. Here it is helpful to review some of the key lessons brought to the forefront of mass consciousness by these largely effective teacher strikes.

Proletarianization of teachers

Teachers today are among the most highly unionized sections of the working class, with the combined membership of the NEA and AFT approaching 4 million. They have long ago abandoned the notion that they were “professionals” who shunned unionization. Both the major teacher unions today incorporate non-teaching personnel, from secretaries to school custodians/janitors, painters and warehouse workers. As a group they have been victims of massive cuts in public education funding, pension and healthcare cuts, frozen salaries and regressive salary schedule changes, increased workloads and the introduction of the reactionary “common core” curricula and related endless testing requirements. Some one-third of all teachers are compelled to seek a second or third job to make ends meet. Increasing numbers do not earn enough to live in the communities they teach or work in. All of these factors combine to describe teachers’ self-identification as a group of collective workers with common
interests as opposed to relatively “privileged” individual professionals fully capable of fending for themselves.

Most of the teachers’ strikes took place in so-called “right to work” states. These were among those that suffered the most severe cuts in salaries and overall educational expenditures. The relationship between being and consciousness (or better, a dramatic decline in overall working conditions and the will to fight back) is clear.

**Breaking capitalist laws**

The “sanctity” of capitalist laws that banned collective bargaining and teacher strikes was smashed. Teacher power exercised at the state level and backed by massive public employee, parent and student support proved to be unbeatable. Threats of reprisals including arrests, massive fines, revocation of teaching credentials, etc., were ignored with impunity. Indeed, none were implemented. The most intelligent sectors of the ruling class easily calculated that imprisoning or otherwise punishing “illegally striking” teachers would more than likely bring on concerted acts of solidarity that had the potential of prolonging the closure of entire states’ educational systems and, perhaps solidarity strikes by public and private sector employees. To this day, the ruling rich fear nothing more than aroused and united workers’ mobilizations in any sector of capitalist society. The teachers, breaking with all the established rules limiting the exercise of their collective strength, set the example for a winning strategy for the future.

**Social media: new class struggle device subordinate to the will & intelligence to use it**

Without exception, the teachers’ use of Facebook and related social media in all the struck states proved to be key to
breaking the stranglehold of the union bureaucracy over critical elements of union organizing, communicating and ultimately, decision-making. The use of social media began with the first rank-and-file-led state strike in West Virginia. A literal handful of teachers started the process as self-appointed Facebook administrators. In short order the number of participants rose to 40,000 there, to some 50,000 in Arizona and to similar numbers in all the struck states. What was critical in all these massive and democratically-organized actions was less the effectiveness of the technologies and qualitatively more the will of the ranks to fight back and organize independently of the always reluctant union bureaucracy and threatening state officials. In state after state activists reported that even mention of a strike was considered dangerous by union misleaders, whose fear of state government reprisals and overall class collaborationist views have been ingrained in their consciousness.

Further, and undoubtedly, the initiating Facebook administrators, among them a reported few with socialist inclinations, had sensed a broad willingness of teachers in general to participate in the struggle in their own name. That is, the Facebook administrators effectively tapped into the long repressed anger and frustration of teachers and non-teachers alike at their abuse at the hands of the institutions overseeing the state power. This combination of angry teachers and public employees and a rank-and-file leadership with the basic program, will and tools to fight back, proved decisive. We should add here that absent these fundamental characteristics, no use of any technologies can be expected to spark mass working class action. We must also add that the capacity of state and national authorities, already armed with a virtual monopoly of spyware and with the capacity to technically shut down all such communications, is unlimited. What was decisive then is the fact that this small core of previously
unknown leaders had struck a raw nerve and won the overwhelming allegiance of their co-workers and beyond.

In all the statewide strikes, the lead organizers also relied heavily on local and state mass mobilizations, massive postering/flyering, local and regional mobilizations and other more traditional organizational measures, not to mention the usual school sight meetings where the myriad of new experiences and lessons could be collectively and personally shared, evaluated and put to good use. Finally, the fact that the teacher fightback coincided with and gave expression to the deep anger and frustration with the status quo felt by the broader working class was decisive. The time was right and the leadership was there!

Mass decision-making

Well aware of the absolute necessity of uniting teachers in a struggle to win, in defiance of their union, when necessary, and in defiance of school officials and state authorities, the Facebook pages provided an immediate and handy vehicle to measure teacher willingness to break with any and all existing institutions and to resort to statewide action. The actual West Virginia Facebook strike vote was prepared well in advance and, indeed, was likely unexpected, a seeming contradiction but nevertheless the reality. The actual strike was preceded by literally some 10,000 separate and coordinated “walk-ins” wherein teachers, often defiantly wearing banned red t-shirts walked into schools together along with other school employees. “If we can walk in 10,000 times,” said one school janitor on Facebook, “why not walk out together?” That question, that suggestion, from a non-teacher indeed, became the basis for the Facebook strike vote that registered some 80 percent of the state’s teachers voting “Yes!” It was a classic example of quantity turning into quality. The thousands of mini-steps forward taken by tens of thousands of
teachers and their allies, combined to convince almost all that the time was ripe for a giant and unprecedented leap into the relative unknown – a coordinated statewide strike.

**Challenge to union bureaucracy**

To cement the validity of the strike vote count and to further mark it as “official,” the website administrators proceeded to ask the formal union leadership to verify the vote tallies. And they did, establishing perhaps for the first time in the modern era, a precedent whereby a union’s ranks democratically organized a strike vote independent of any formal union structures. In truth, most all such union structures disappeared or gave way to the unstoppable wave of rank-and-file militancy. Some used the term “wildcat.” A rank-and-file leader of the West Virginia strikers explained this process to an enthusiastic June 9, 2018 public forum sponsored by the Oakland Education Association and four Northern California NEA and AFT locals representing teachers in Berkeley, San Francisco, Richmond and the Peralta Community College School District. “We worked outside, inside and, alongside the union,” said this teacher leader to the “Red State Rebellion” forum,” an apt description of a consciously crafted policy aimed at the maximum unity of the ranks and collaboration with the official union hierarchy to the extent that such collaboration advanced the interests of the teacher ranks and their public employee partners. Needless to say the 250 California teacher unionists present were well aware of the class struggle lessons taught by their Red State counterparts.

These same West Virginia striking teachers and their allies sent a shockwave through the state when they voted to reject the union leadership’s acceptance of a settlement proposed by the state legislature. The rejection was no accident. It served as a powerful affirmation and reminder that the ranks had not relinquished the
power they had won. But the teachers also had the hard facts to back up their rejection. They pointed out that the state legislature had cut educational and related social service funding by some 20 percent over the past decade. These same funds, they asserted, were then essentially redistributed to the state’s major corporate interests – that is, from the 99 percent to the one percent! The teachers demanded that the funds be returned to the people – to the school workers and indeed to all public employees and to the schools. To accomplish this they proposed a series of corporate tax increases. They rejected regressive tax increases, that is, taxes where working people would bear the brunt of the measures. “Tax the rich not working people!” was the essence of their stance.

Unevenness of victories and partial victories

In one form or another and/or to one degree or another all five statewide teacher strikes revolved around the central issues above. All were inspired by the example of the West Virginia teachers. But it would be a gross exaggeration to conclude that they were all successful. The results were uneven. While important gains were made in several instances, including pay raises for teachers and other school and state workers in the range of 5, 10 or 20 percent, immediately or over a few years, as well as significant increases in overall school funding, losses were also incurred. In West Virginia the most critical issue was the state’s move to change the existing defined pension plan, where specified monthly benefits based on years of service are paid to retired employees and guaranteed in advance, to a 401k type plan where unspecified future monthly benefits are determined by the exigencies of the stock market and other speculative investments that employers might use to finance pensions. Teachers were only partially successful in this matter, with present teachers maintaining their defined benefit pensions while all new employees are to be shifted to the less secure and unpredictable 401k plans. There were other
losses as well. In some states, contrary to teachers’ demands, state legislatures resorted to regressive taxes to fund increased funds for public education. In others states the promised and significant increases won for education were divided up and distributed to local school districts where teachers, barred from collective bargaining, were expected to make their case district by district as opposed to their original demands for across the board state mandated increases for all teachers and public employees.

Critical political weaknesses

The strikes also evidenced some key political weaknesses. While teachers understood that they had successfully engaged in unprecedented mobilizations that forced some important concessions, they also understood that they were still at the beginning of the struggle to revitalize public education and improve the quality of life for themselves and broader sectors of the labor movement. How to take the next steps forward and what these should be undoubtedly are central to the discussions and debates that will decide these questions as the new school year begins in the fall. But it appears for now that the central strike leaders, inside and outside the union structures, have turned toward a focus on the electoral arena. AFT and NEA officials have announced plans to literally run some 400 teachers as Democrats in the 2018 election cycle. “We will remember in November” was a common theme enunciated by the West Virginia, Kentucky and Arizona teacher leaders at the OEA rally in Oakland. AFT national president Randi Weingarten has announced that this summer’s AFT national convention will focus on training the first group of teachers with this objective. Undoubtedly, the NEA’s June convention will follow suit. Both the NEA and AFT top leaderships have always been staunch advocates of subordinating united teacher power in the streets to lobbying politicians and supporting Democrats in particular with regular and huge
campaign contributions. It appears that this failed strategic orientation will be deployed once again, with the twist that this time around teachers themselves, running as Democrats, will be selected to run for office. The rush to the 2018 elections has been central to the Democratic Party’s massive orientation to “win back the House and Senate” for the very same Democratic Party that largely presided over the past decade of broad-ranging cuts in all social services.

Thus, while the outlines of a class struggle strategy began to emerge, during the spring of 2018, the crystallization of a class struggle left wing remains a critical task to be accomplished. No doubt the teachers and their allies demonstrated in bold relief that seemingly, but not really, out of nowhere, important sectors of the working class are fully capable, and with lightning speed, of undertaking decisive actions and winning important victories based on their own independent class power. The mass spring 2018 teacher and allied mobilizations represented a powerful affirmation of our view that it is only a matter of time until the pent up anger and deep dissatisfaction of the working class majority burst onto the field of action and opens the door wide to a generalized fightback that has the potential to change the course of history. The central ingredient to the success of all coming struggles will be the merging of the cadre of the mass revolutionary party we aim to construct with the millions who will inevitably take the class struggle road. At this special moment, however, in the wake of the Red State upsurge, we should expect the full force of “lesser-evil” politics to be applied to thwart any immediate resumption of the class power that was unleashed. But the best fighters who are won today to across-the-board independent working class politics will prove critical to taking the coming mobilizations to the next level.
2018 and 2020 elections and disorientation of left and social movements

The present absence of clear class struggle alternatives in the electoral arena coupled with the still low level of independent organization of the broad social movements in the context of the Trump administration’s ongoing implementation of overt reactionary policies, will no doubt result in a concerted rush of the reformists of every stripe to the Democratic Party. We saw this in the lead up to the 2016 presidential elections, with the Sanders campaign, along with the Greens, as well as the “lesser evil” Clinton supporters, absorbing much of the social democratic/reformist left. Our decision to run our own candidate for the presidency, even as an extremely modest propaganda effort, stood us in good stead with regard to the education of our ranks along with the small radicalizing layers who were just beginning to learn the lessons of independent working class politics in the electoral arena.

With the reactionary Trump in office we should expect an even more dramatic shift among the broader “left,” the social movements in general and the Democratic Party in particular, toward electoral “solutions.”

Here we must keep in mind the fundamentals of life in capitalist America today – the incapacity of the ruling class to make anything other than cosmetic/superficial changes in their crisis-ridden system. As with the Red State teachers, for example, the most recent U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data inform us that a full one-third of the U.S. workforce today is compelled to hold down a second or third job to make ends meet. Thus, the data for teachers closely matches the data for the broader working class. On average, according to the NYT, teachers are making more than $3,000 less today than what they made in 2009, while their family
health insurance costs $1,400 more than it did a decade ago. No doubt, again, the figures are comparable for the broad working class.

The reported and rigged official unemployment rate of 3.8 percent masks the fact that some 35 percent of the overall workforce today, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics, are non-participants, a fany term for unemployed. Wide-ranging data abound to demonstrate that the explosive rise in stock market and related speculative institutions used by capitalist pundits to demonstrate an economic recovery stand in sharp contrast to the reality of working class life. Recent data on corporate wage theft, for example, demonstrates that $50 billion annually is literally stolen from working people, including employer refusal to pay promised wages, refusal to pay for the full number of hours worked and refusal to pay required premium rates for hours worked beyond the 40-hour work week. Of this, appeals or class action lawsuits to the various national and state labor departments and agencies have recovered less than 5 percent.

Some recent data present a more accurate picture of the reality of working class life as opposed to the periodic rosy picture painted by capitalism’s professional lying apologists who measure progress by stock market and GDP figures.

• US infant mortality rates in 2013 were the highest in the developed world.

• Americans can expect to live shorter and sicker lives, compared to people living in any other rich democracy, and the “health gap” between the US and its peer countries continues to grow.

• US inequality levels are far higher than those in most European countries
• Neglected tropical diseases, including Zika, are increasingly common in the USA. It has been estimated that 12 million Americans live with a neglected parasitic infection. A 2017 report documents the prevalence of hookworm in Lowndes County, Alabama.

• The US has the highest prevalence of obesity in the developed world.

• In terms of access to water and sanitation the US ranks 36th in the world.

• America has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Its rate is nearly five times the OECD [the 30-nation Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] average.

• The youth poverty rate in the United States is the highest across the OECD with one quarter of youth living in poverty compared to less than 14 percent across the OECD.

• The Stanford Center on Inequality and Poverty ranks the most well off countries in terms of labor markets, poverty, safety net, wealth inequality, and economic mobility. The US comes in last of the top 10 most well off countries, and 18th amongst the top 21.

• In the OECD the US ranks 35th out of 37 in terms of poverty and inequality.

According to the World Income Inequality Database, the US has the highest Gini rate (measuring inequality) of all Western Countries

The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality characterizes the US as “a clear and constant outlier in the child poverty league”. US child poverty rates are the highest amongst the six richest countries – Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Sweden and Norway.
The plight of the youth

Need we say more? Perhaps so. A December 14, 2017 Huffington Post article describes the plight of the estimated 75 million youth who fall into the category of millennials – people born between 1982 and 2004. “What is different about us as individuals compared to previous generations is minor,” the author, Michael Hobbes, states. “What is different about the world around us is profound. Salaries have stagnated and entire sectors have cratered. At the same time, the cost of every prerequisite of a secure existence—education, housing and health care—has inflated into the stratosphere. From job security to the social safety net, all the structures that insulate us from ruin are eroding…. Add it all up and it’s no surprise that we’re the first generation in modern history to end up poorer than our parents.”

Here, we must add the additional burden on youth of student loan debt, an amount that soared to an all time high of $1.4 trillion in 2015 – an amount that exceeded all credit card debt for the entire U.S. population. According to the Project on Student Debt, 68% of 2015 bachelor’s degree recipients graduated with student loan debts averaging $30,100 per borrower. These figures exclude debts incurred for graduate study. Increasing numbers of graduates find themselves unable to secure jobs at income levels sufficient to pay off the loans. The delinquency or default rate is approximately 17 percent. The non-payment rate is 43 percent. Previous laws allowing the discharge of these debts through bankruptcy proceedings have long been stricken from the books. If you don’t pay you are subject to a lifetime of often poor credit ratings, inability to secure home mortgages and rental agreements and endless hounding by debt collectors.
Growing support for unions

It is in the broad context that recent data from the *New York Times* demonstrates that “Among Americans under 30, unions’ approval rating is a stratospheric 76 percent.”

*The Times* continues: “Gallup and the Pew polls show public support for unions at its highest level in years: 61 percent at Gallup; 60 percent at Pew.” This generalized rising level of support for unions ranges from technical and professional workers, to school employees, to the poorest sections of the working class in the fast food industries. It includes union and non-union workers alike. It is the beginning of an accurate gauge of the very anger, frustration and hatred of the austerity measures imposed by capital against workers. The past decline in support for unions can be largely attributed to the class collaborationist bureaucracy’s polices. In the UAW, to cite just one example, this betrayal included overseeing the gutting of pensions plans via the 401k route and worse, negotiating two and three-tier wage schedules that reduced wages to almost one-third of what they were four decades ago – to placate the boss class’ never-ending demands to make U.S. capitalists more competitive on world markets – not to mention supporting multi-trillion dollar corporate bailouts and the otherwise overall operation of unions by super-well paid bureaucrats, insulated from rank-and-file control and ever-frequently exposed for their involvement in corruption scandals. Need we mention the grotesque allocation of dues to line the pockets of the bureaucracy and fund their Democratic Party “friends of labor” in the electoral arena to the tune of $millions set aside for the unions’ Political Action Committees?

Regardless of these atrocities, when just a few sectors of the trade union movement, as with teachers, and to a lesser extent, fast food workers, take the road to a major challenge to the status
quo, past ruling class promoted anti-union prejudices, evaporate, almost overnight!

In point of fact, the trade union movement in the U.S. and everywhere else on earth emerged when workers, oppressed and exploited by the bosses from A to Z, took the road to struggle. Marx’s famous opening line to the *Communist Manifesto*, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of the class struggle…” was no idle choice of words. It was a materialist crystallization of the conflicts that have largely determined the history of humankind in the “civilized” era. It remains so today.

The real and proud history of the U.S. labor movement is the conscious organization and mobilization of the working class to fight the capitalist class, at least on the economic arena. Labor’s still existing and fundamental contradiction today, in the U.S. especially, is the fact that unions by their very nature accept the proposition that the boss class has the right to own and essentially control the means of production while the working class is relegated to simply negotiating for a partial share of the wealth it produces, in almost all instances a share merely sufficient to keep it alive enough to perpetually work for the boss class in the first place. “Work until you die!” And when you die you have nothing!

In future struggles it will become clearer to workers, and especially to a vanguard layer, that as long as unions limit their goal to winning a few concessions, however important, that are always subject to future reversal, they remain limited players in the context of capitalist social relations. That is, they are bound to accept the proposition that the capitalist class retains overall control over the central levers of the economy and state power while workers are relegated to perpetually “negotiating” for a few crumbs. As this proposition begins to come into question – which class shall rule society? – the emergence of a working class alternative in the political arena, a fighting labor party based on
and funded by working people engaged in transforming and expanding militant trade unions and inclusive of the organizations of the oppressed nationalities, will pose the question of the illegitimacy of capitalist rule sharper than in any time since the 1930s.

**A deeper look at Janus vs. AFSCME**

Union power, the power to exact but a few, sometimes important, concessions here and there to improve the quality of life for the many against the few, derives fundamentally from the will of the workers to collectively fight and NEVER from the capacity of unions to fund their struggles from member dues. Here we turn to the U.S. Supreme Court decision in the case of Janus vs. AFSCME, where the court ruled on June 28, 2018 that union agreements to have employers deduct agency fees from employee paychecks and forward the money to the unions are “unconstitutional.”

This decision was clearly a defeat for the labor movement. It was an attack that will reach further than an employer court victory. It is a long-term plan to divide workers in the workplace and empower bosses. This was immediately clear within hours of the Janus decision when rightwing organizations and foundations funded by corporations sent massive email blasts to public workers at their worksites proposing to “assist” them in withdrawing from their union. This assault included mass leafleting and attempts to engage with members entering work, followed by postcards sent to their home addresses. All these attacks are based on the rightwing notion that unions can be further weakened by resort to the “technical” efforts listed above. As important as it is to combat these attacks our view of the real source of union power is far from a technical question regarding how to collect union dues. In our view the trade union movement can regain its stature only by once
again becoming a champion of all working people. Only such a strategic orientation can fundamentally reverse the steady decline of organized labor today, a decline that has reduced union ranks to the lowest levels in the past century.

We need not review here what is and is not “constitutional” under capitalist law. In the minds and methods of the ruling class and its associated institutions, everything is legal or “constitutional” that is necessary to defend the “national security interests” of the ruling class. This includes unlimited cyber spying on virtually all people on the planet to imperialist wars for plunder, to subordinating any and all constitutional rights to the same end, as was the case during the McCarthy era when First Amendment rights to free speech and association were obliterated. The pursuit of U.S. corporate oil interests and associated wars anywhere in the world are today blatantly deemed “national security” interests. Whatever laws are up for review in the capitalist courts and legislatures are largely decided by the class relationship of forces at any particular time. At a time when the ruling class believes that additional encroachments on workers’ rights can be had with the least amount of resistance, ending mandatory agency free deductions seems like the proverbial taking candy from a baby.

In our view, however, fighting unions are never the product of financially well-endowed union coffers. As with the entire history of the labor movement, and with the Red State strikes in mind, union power comes from the combination of the conscious organization of an aroused, confident and democratically engaged rank-and-file coupled with a militant leadership armed with the political equipment to unite the broad union movement with all its natural allies among the exploited and oppressed.
Origins of dues check-off

Mandatory dues check-off, later modified to agency fee collections, arose during the WWII period when it was gifted by the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration to the increasingly bureaucratized union tops in return for a “patriotic” wartime no-strike pledge. While Socialist Action has no principled objection to dues check-off or agency fee collection measures that facilitate the collection of union dues or representational fees, the latter are totally subordinate to the construction of fighting unions where members’ financial contributions are a reflection of their overall confidence in the union cause. Union power and union victories are qualitatively less a product of money than they are of the collective exercise of class power. We can only note in passing here, as a tiny example of the disgusting misuse of union dues, the California NEA’s statewide top officer, decades ago, spending $250,000 on the installation of a retractable and pushbutton desk that receded from sight at the touch of his likely polished finger. On the scale of things this horror likely pales before the $millions spent on corporate scale salaries and union perks, not to mention outright theft from union pension funds and the like. We must add here absolute misuse of union funds to fill the coffers of the Democratic Party. The SEIU, for example, spent multiple $millions on Democrats – more than the entire AFL-CIO unions combined! In summary, the idea that Janus will cripple union organizing is fundamentally flawed. What has really crippled union organizing over the past 80-90 years are the policies of the class collaborationist politically, morally, often “legally” corrupt parasitic union layer that sees partnering with the corporate elite “for the good of both sides” and supporting the same elite’s ruling parties as the only way forward.
Sexism, racism, environmental catastrophe and LGBTQI rights

In the past several Political Resolutions prepared for our pre-convention discussion periods and subsequently modified, adjusted or supplemented by additional material to one extent or another and then put to our national convention for final debate and approval, we have gone to great length to carefully evaluate the critical social movements of our time. Our aim has always been to understand the nature of these movements so as to best to engage our comrades in every struggle where working people and their allies among the oppressed seek to advance our common interests in the fight for freedom and equality. In all cases we are partisans of these movements and participate with the objective of mobilizing the largest numbers in united front-type, independent mass actions based on principled demands aimed at wresting victories from the ruling class for all working people.

In the course of this work, in our adopted resolutions, newspaper articles and numerous propaganda pamphlets we have laid out the basic nature of each and every struggle and proposed the tactical and strategic orientations we considered the best way forward. In this Draft Political Resolution we propose to not repeat the ground we have previously and adequately covered other than to briefly update each movement as it confronts the realities encountered since our last convention. Comrades unfamiliar with our adopted positions on these movements are urged to read what we have written. You will find a rich array of material included in pamphlet form and in our newspaper registering our views on every critical issue of our time. Here, we propose only to review and update the essentials.
**Brief overview as the 2018 and 2020 elections approach**

With regard to all of these movements we should fully expect a concerted ruling class effort, led by the Democratic Party, to channel all social movements into a coordinated effort to “re-capture the Senate and House from Donald Trump and the Republicans.” This applies in varying degrees to the Poor People’s Campaign to the September 12-14, 2018 California Governor Jerry Brown-orchestrated Global Action Summit Conference and the prior September 8, 350.org/People’s Climate Mobilization-initiated national mobilization planned for San Francisco (the Rise for Climate, Jobs & Justice campaign), to the massive anti-gun violence mobilizations, the massive June 30 nationally-coordinated immigration rights demonstrations in 750 cities to oppose Trump’s heinous family separation and otherwise racist deportation policies, to the already underway Red State NEA/AFT teacher election efforts and to the impending debates over the who will fill the just-announced U.S. Supreme Court vacancy. The upcoming election cycles will undoubtedly see the Democratic Party, with their associated reformist allies from every quarter in tow, posing the “Dump Trump” refrain as the only way to save the nation from catastrophe. To accomplish this the Democrats “big tent” strategy is to politically present themselves not as a leftist alternative to the Republicans but rather as “moderates” or “centrists” (in the capitalist meaning of these terms) so as to win voters across the political spectrum, that is, as close to the right as possible.” In all these social movements and mobilizations – all expressing to one degree or another a deep resentment against the government’s attacks on working people, as we have emphasized in our description of the dynamics of the Red State fightbacks – the still-existing gap between the mass anger that permeates working class consciousness and the will to *independently* struggle to win,
remains the critical obstacle to overcome. Our response to this moment of relative calm, this gap—punctuated by periodic huge protests against the myriad forms of social injustice—is patience and always wholehearted participation aimed at meeting the best activists and introducing our ideas and independent methods of struggle in preparation for the time when teacher/Red State-type actions again become the order of the day. We are optimistic that near-term breaks with the present but shaky capitalist “consensus” can be expected. The modest gains and increased influence we are experiencing today in Connecticut, California, Minnesota and elsewhere inform us that building Socialist Action and recruiting and educating a new layer of activists is an immediate and central priority.

**DSA growth & the Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez primary victory**

Here we note another important example of the receptivity to socialist ideas. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s Bronx/Queens, New York City Democratic Party congressional primary victory shook the Democratic Party hierarchy, who learned too late that their machine-dominated apparatus and six-term Democratic Party incumbent were insufficient to defeat a young Latina of 28 years who campaigned on a broad-ranging platform of progressive and radical demands coupled with an open association with a Bernie Sanders’ version of democratic socialism and open membership in the DSA as well as host of new Democratic Party front groups collecting funds for “progressive” Democrats. Here, we are qualitatively less concerned with criticizing any limitations of the Ocasio-Cortez campaign platform than we are in pointing to its overall confirmation that socialist ideas are increasingly finding a receptive ear among broad layers of the population. We need not review in any detail our historic opposition to any capitalist
candidate or party. As we are fond of saying, “If Lenin ran as a Democrat on the Bolshevik program, we would not support him!”

The DSA has indeed announced that over the recent period some sixteen of its members, running as Democrats, while also identifying as DSA members, have won elections in several states and at varying levels, including to state legislatures and for local office. Today, the list of DSA-endorsed candidates has expanded to include non-DSA Democrats. In point of fact, the DSA endorsed Hillary Clinton in 2016, a policy in accord with its historic support to the Democratic Party.

DSA has registered significant “membership” gains, today claiming some 40,000 adherents and growing. While the vast number of these are online members we have also noted that DSA chapters are springing up across the country with viable groups engaging in important political discussions and active participation in a number of social struggles.

A Bernie Sanders campaign organizer, Ocasio-Cortez was undoubtedly and immediately contacted by her party tops to quickly change her website so as to remove her stated opposition to U.S., wars and her solidarity with beleaguered Palestinians of Gaza murdered by Zionist Israel. But again, our objective here is not to dissect this or that political position of Ocasio-Cortez but rather to reject in toto her and the DSA’s view that the Democratic Party and capitalism itself can be reformed. In decades past, and with a bit more subtlety, noted Democrats, as with Berkeley/Oakland’s 26-year Democratic Party congressman, Ronald Dellums, the head of the House Armed Services Committee, also identified as DSA as did Democrat Gus Newport, a past mayor of Berkeley. Here it is critical to note that whatever tactical orientation we may decide on in any part in the country to engage DSA members, the qualitatively bigger picture that concerns us is that vast numbers of ordinary working people are
more open to socialist ideas than in many decades. How we meet up with and relate to this vast layer is the critical question before us. The important experience of our Connecticut comrades in the course of running a ballot-certified campaign for the U.S. Senate will provide much needed feedback for our whole party.

The struggle for Black Liberation

In immediate response to the publicly exposed wave of racist police murders and in the context of the ever-intensifying racist incarceration of oppressed nationalities in the increasingly privatized for profit, near slave labor prison-industrial complex in 2016, the Black Lives Matter movement moved to center stage in U.S. politics. When an assortment of police organizations and rightwing figures sought to usher this movement into mainstream channels with the counter thrust that “All Lives Matter,” they were soundly rebuffed. The most serious fighters refused to allow racist America to deny the primacy and reality of Black repression and to place it on an equal plane with society’s overall social injustices in order to relegate the struggle against racism to a secondary or relatively unimportant issue.

In this regard Socialist Action pointed to a welcome, strong and positive element of Black Nationalist inclination. We also noted that the massive national mobilizations that followed the most heinous of the racist police murders resulted in some immediate gains, including the hiring of a small layer of Black faculty, the banning of outright violent and racist campus fraternities, the introduction of a few Black Studies programs, the firing a few of the more overt racist police officials and the introduction of some palliative “police review” or oversight agencies to “investigate possible police abuse.”

We are also aware of the efforts of differing currents in the Black community to come to grips with a strategic orientation for
the Black liberation struggle, including a profoundly radical manifesto produced by an impressive number of Black activists who sought to expose the racist and institutional roots of Black oppression as well as the attendance of some 2,000 activists at a Black Lives Matter conference in Cleveland, Ohio. We also noted opposing views regarding whether or not to support and/or engage in the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign.

Two years later, as the 2018 and 2020 elections approach, it is fair to say that what we have seen with regard to a broad range of social movements that today exhibit a strong tilt to Democratic Party electoral politics is not too dissimilar from what is taking place in the struggle for Black liberation. In the face of ever-mounting attacks on every aspect of Black, Latinx and Native American lives, we have seen no clear currents that seek to organize a break with capitalist politics. And this in the face of hard facts demonstrating that the horrors of state and police violence, of the imposition of degrading poverty and a generalized deterioration in the quality of life continue unabated! Thus, the same gap that we have noted with regard to all social movements – deep anger and hatred of the assaults launched by “the system” and a concerted fightback – continues. At the same time the receptivity of Black and oppressed communities, especially young people, to socialist and related radical ideas persists.

The example of San Francisco Forty-Niner star quarterback Colin Kaepernick taking the knee during the course of the entire 2016 football season while the national anthem was played is an inspiring case in point. Kaepernick’s magnificent gesture spread like wildfire through the National Football League (NFL) and from there to professional sports of every type and then on to college and high school sports. His action reverberated across the country and internationally with the simple message that racism, racist police murders, mass racist incarceration and other concerted
government attacks on Black people and other oppressed nationalities were institutionally ingrained in the daily functioning of U.S. society. In November 2017 Kaepernick filed a grievance against the NFL and its owners, accusing them of colluding to not hire him, undoubtedly a truth that the billionaire football owners will go to great lengths to deny. In 2018 Amnesty International awarded Kaepernick its Ambassador of Conscience award, again a recognition that even mainstream human rights groups are compelled to acknowledge the deep institutional racism that permeates U.S. society.

**Receptivity to socialist ideas**

A Pew poll of a few years ago noted that 55 percent of Black youth preferred socialism over capitalism, the highest figure among any group. Socialist Action’s recruitment of a new layer of Black and Latinx youth is a prime indication of the reality of this preference, as we have seen in the Twin Cities, Connecticut, Miami and in the San Francisco Bay Area. In Connecticut our aggressive statewide U.S. Senate petitioning campaign to achieve official ballot status has put us in touch with literally thousands of working people, a significant portion of whom are open to our socialist ideas.

**Black Lives Matter & the Democratic Party**

A clear example of the present orientation of a significant section of leaders associated with the Movement for Black Lives to the Democratic Party is evidenced is a recent *Portside* interview that we reproduce in part below. We note the carefully-crafted radical rhetoric employed, but the orientation to the Democratic Party is clear. The remarks of the interviewee, Jessica Byrd, are instructive. (See her credential at the end of the quoted section.)
“Experienced electoral organizer Jessica Byrd from the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) Electoral Justice Table talks with Organizing Upgrade editor Rishi Awatramani about the Electoral Justice Project (EJP) strategy for electoral engagement…

RA: “In 2017, the Movement for Black Lives launched its Electoral Justice Project. The EJP is building a strategic political home with organizers from more than 50 Black Organizations around the country that are winning Black civic power and seeking transformative political change. Just this year, they launched the Electoral Justice League, a cohort of Black campaign managers that will develop the expertise to win campaigns where they live.

What is the EJP, and what is the strategy that it is pursuing in this period. What does EJP hope to accomplish in terms of electoral impact and building power?

JB: “The Electoral Justice Project is a project of the M4BL. It’s driven by Black-led organizations across the US that are engaged in radical political work. We’re in deep connection with each other to engage in shared strategies around radical Black politics. Our main strategy in the short-term includes creating a “help desk” where we offer confidential and loving advise on electoral work to Black-led organizations around the country, and the Electoral Justice League which is working together directly with 12 Black campaign managers to support their engagement in this 2018 election cycle. Our approach is to engage in electoral tactics while guided by a framework and commitment to Black Liberation that link their work directly to the movement for Black Lives. As part of that, we want to see, through our voter work, how our framing of the problems confronting our people impacts the way voters think about these issues. . . .

RA: “How will the EJP be using the 2018 and 2020 elections to accomplish your broader goals? What are your markers of success?
JB: “First, we’re all going to continue engaging in deep structural change work wherever we can. That means challenging the two-party system, money controlling politics, disenfranchisement of currently and formerly incarcerated folks, and other structure that don’t work for us or anyone, but especially for Black voters. Second, we are working at keeping people alive. That means electing candidates with radical policy visions. We view electoral work as also being about reducing harm to Black people. Third, we are building Black progressive infrastructure and independent political ecosystem. We know we are not going to get every voter on our side and that’s OK, but we believe that most voters are actually progressive, and so we believe we can mobilize votes on a fundamentally progressive platform…. I was trained in and got a lot of my formative experience in Democratic Party campaigns. I am clear that the job of the Democratic Party is to protect incumbents already serving and gain ground over Republicans by flipping seats to blue. That is not a binary that has been transformational for Black people and public policy that positively affects our lives. While the Democratic Party does its job this cycle, the M4BL intends to do its job, which is to engage in multi-tactical fights for the health, joy and prosperity of all Black people. Anyone who gets in the way of that will be held accountable…”

The interview concludes with the following: “Jessica Byrd is the founder and Chief Doer of the Three Point Squad. She founded Three Point Strategies in 2015 to provide a home for electoral strategy that centers on racial justice and is transformational rather than transactional. Jessica has worked on campaigns in 43 states and you can find her at the side of the most exciting races to elect Black women in the country, training hundreds of leaders, and building tools to serve the Movement. In 2016 Jessica was named the January Woman to Watch by Essence Magazine and was listed among “Twelve New Faces of Black
leadership” by *Time Magazine*. *Rolling Stone* named her one of the most influential millennials shaping the 2015 election.”

Again, rhetoric aside, Byrd’s politics are 100 percent within the framework of the Democratic Party. As the next election cycle approaches, to be sure, the number of figures like Jessica Byrd should be expected to multiply, perhaps even more so than with the 2015-16 period, where much of the socialist movement itself turned to reformist politics, ranging from the Greens to Sanders/Democrats to Hillary Clinton/Democrats. As with all social movements that challenge in one form or another capitalist injustice and oppression what is key for Socialist Action is to meet the best fighters in the grassroots struggles ahead and in the course of this work to prepare for the inevitable independent struggles where new and likely unexpected formations and leaders will pose the necessity of a clear break with capitalist politics with regard to the Black and Latinx communities and the broad working class. In both cases, the formation of a fighting Labor Party, in alliance with all the oppressed will find natural allies with emerging forces of the Black Liberation struggle. In addition, and perhaps simultaneously, the emergence of independent Black and Latinx political parties aimed at organizing oppressed nationalities in the political and social arenas in the best tradition of Malcolm X, may well be on the order of the day.

**Environmental destruction/global warming intensifies**

Recent data from the scientific community informs us that the rate of polar icecap melting today exceeds all previous estimates while new evidence predicts that by 2050 CO2 levels will reach the incredible level of 500 ppm. This data is reported in the context of a U.S. government administration of climate deniers replete with “Environmental Protection Agency” top officials who
systematically gut regulations that place some limits on corporate environmental degradation projects that threaten human health and safety, if not the viability of live on earth as we know it. In this context, the entire panoply of major environment groups – the Sierra Club, 350.org, Peoples Climate Mobilization and other “seven sister” major environmental organizations as well as the vast numbers of corporate-funded NGOs, are turning to the elections, armed with a limited set demands that are consciously designed to complement, not oppose, the near worthless positions of the Democratic Party. Reformist leadership notwithstanding, we will continue our participation in the environmental movement, looking for every opportunity to advance our program that challenges the private corporate for-profit core nature of the fossil fuel energy complex with the objective of winning the most serious forces, and, in time, the broad movement, to an independent mass action orientation. At present, the climate change movement lacks focus and direction. But as we have seen with regard to the massive national mobilizations against the Dakota Access Pipeline project and the inspiring solidarity with Standing Rock Native American fighters who paved the way in this struggle, the potential for ongoing and qualitatively broader struggles on ever-increasing fronts is not far off. We note here with enthusiasm that fact that leading groups like 350.org have increasingly incorporated a strong defense of immigrants and opposition to environmental racism as key planks in their platforms. We must also take advantage of the sophisticated discussion about the unfolding of disaster capitalism in Puerto Rico to drive home the need for eco-socialist solutions.

We will continue to press for making “Nationalize the Energy Industry, Under Workers’ and Community!” a central organizing, transitional demand. With this demand, already widely discussed and increasingly adopted by some mainstream groups, the climate change movement can be strengthened in multiple
ways: by identifying the key obstacles in its path; by embracing its natural allies and unmasking its adversaries; by providing a strategy around which a fighting movement can coalesce; and by focusing its collective strength to strike a real blow at the very heart of the problem. This, along with critical demands for a just transition at top union wages for all displaced workers, will help the movement close the gap between the union bureaucracy’s view of jobs at any cost, to the goal of a clear fight for a sustainable fossil fuel free energy system that all workers can see as a viable and necessary alternative to the present disastrous course.

While we have met with some modest success in a few parts of the country and in the course of our work educated and mobilized modest forces who understand the fundamental issues in this life-or-death environmental struggle, we can expect only limited gains today in the direction of forging an independent anti-capitalist movement. Nevertheless, and as with all social movements seeking to counter, however inadequately, the across-the-board and ever-deepening onslaughts on every aspect of life in capitalist America, the small forces we win to our socialist perspectives will serve us well in the future when the road to independent mass action challenges to capitalist prerogatives, in due time, clears.

**Women’s Liberation**

*(Editor’s note: A separate and supplementary resolution on Women’s Liberation was approved by the Socialist Action National Committee at its April 13th, 2019 plenum as an addendum to the section immediately below. See ADDENDUM on page 81.)*

Immediately following Trump’s inauguration, five million women and their allies mobilized in Washington D.C. and in cities across the country in perhaps the largest such mobilization ever. They mobilized to make clear to everyone that they rejected every
aspect of Trump’s sexist rants and broad ranging attacks on women’s rights. But, in the very act of mobilizing the essentially self-appointed handful of middle class leaders understood that in order to bring out the maximum numbers possible they had to broaden their appeal to include demands for the LGBTQI community, immigrants and to nationally oppressed minorities. No one objected! All the issues were fused in a way that all understood that to seriously defend women’s rights any serious effort had to defend everyone’s rights. While the numbers were astounding the turnout was in large part promoted by the Democratic Party and the corporate media with the objective of early on beginning the process of turning all social movements into mainstream, that is, bourgeois channels. The January 2017 mobilizations were followed by huge mobilizations everywhere on a wide range of issues, most all encouraged by the corporate media and facilitated by local police departments and city governments that doubtful required permits or any other form of “permission” that would otherwise have been insisted on. Most all featured as speakers a range of Democratic Party officials or others who sought future office by catching the wave of anti-Trump sentiment. In a matter of a few months the corporate media spigot was shut down tight and the mobilizations were largely brought to a halt as preparations began to refurbish the credibility of tarnished Democratic Party institutions and align its components to electoral “Dump Trump” perspectives and actions. Despite this direct organizational intervention of the Democratic Party, what was critical to understand was the genuine receptivity and embrace of millions to a host of principled critical demands that captured the imagination and fostered the participation of unprecedented numbers. Whatever we might point out regarding the barely disguised role of the Democrats, these mobilizations served as a powerful refutation of any notion that the U.S. masses are moving to the right. Yes, the ruling class as a whole is moving to the right, in some cases to the far right. Were this the case with any significant section of the
working class, we would undoubtedly be witness to similar mass mobilizations organized by rightist forces in all their variations. Today, “Trump’s base” included, these are rare indeed.

**The #MeToo Movement**

The emergence of the #Me Too movement against sexual harassment is likewise an expression of a growing understanding that like racism, sexism and sexual abuse are ingrained in capitalist culture and society. When the hundreds of celebrity signers of the recent *NYT* full-page advertisement acknowledged that they took inspiration from a communication they received from farmworker women representing thousands of agricultural workers who had experienced the same sexual violence, degradation and abuse, no one dared to respond that these were rare and exceptional individual instances of sexual harassment. As with capitalist inspired and perpetuated racism, wherein an entire people are marked as inferior and treated as such, a similar but today less overtly stated credo is inherent in the operations of capitalism that has the effect of branding women as inferior and thus subject to economic, political and social abuse. The global capitalist offensive has also created the conditions in which the fight over the social wage is more deeply understood as a fight for women’s rights. These working class issues are increasing being integrated into even mainstream women’s mobilizations.

The horrors perpetrated on working women in Asia and elsewhere – closed factories employing women at slave wages converted to mass sex slave operations with the same women – are a perfect example of a society whose top leaders view women as inferior and therefore subject to the most inhuman and degrading treatment.
Abortion victories

The abortion referendum victory in Ireland and the vote to decriminalize abortion in the lower house in Argentina, both won with unprecedented mass mobilizations and mass campaigning, reflect an incredible step forward for the global women’s movement. Both struggles were built on the pioneering fight to defend abortion rights in Poland. All are powerful examples of women and their allies’ ongoing capacity to extract critical gains even from nations where rightwing governments or otherwise reactionary forces like the Catholic Church exercise major influence. In the U.S. the ongoing attacks at every level on abortion rights continue to erode previous abortion rights gains. Once again, we point to and advocate the effectiveness of the proven weapon to win the most essential of women’s rights. The united front-type mass mobilizations of increasing magnitude and breadth make clear to all that women’s lives will not be subjected to the reactionary views of religious bigots and the state powers that they often influence or control. However, we see new potential for women to utilize their strength as part of the organized or semi-organized working class to press for their needs to be met. In the abortion and sexual violence struggles in Argentina, Italy, Spain, and numerous other countries, for example, women have been using their position as part of the organized or semi-organized working class to give their struggles additional and critically important social weight.

International Women’s Strike US

It is this confluence of global economic crisis and the growing combativity of working women that spurred the worldwide emergence of the International Women’s Strike network and the establishment of IWS US. IWS aims to assemble a leadership base of women who will work to consciously advance
the organization of working women fighting in their own interests to create a class struggle left wing in the labor movement that can actually unleash, rather than suppress, the power of their female and gender non-conforming union members.

**Fight for $15 and a union now!**

We have previously noted the important mobilizations for increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 per hour and the often-associated demand for a union now. All of these have dramatically exposed the fact that the present hourly federally-mandated minimum wage of $7.25 is nothing less than a bad joke. Indeed just 2-3 percent of all U.S. workers are paid this amount. “Living wage” figures in cities across the country estimate that a worker earning between $15 - $23 hourly can barely make ends meet depending on whether they live in overall lower living costs cities like Houston or in sky high living cost cities as in New York City and San Francisco. These estimates too undoubtedly understate the real “living” expenses of the average worker. To date increases in the minimum hourly wage have been registered in several cities, usually as a result of city or state legislation or ballot referenda. In most cases the top level wage of $15 per hour is to be phased in over the course of several years. In other cities, like Oakland, CA, the adopted referendum, backed by the SEIU, limited the minimum wage to $11.25. As we have previously noted a number of minimum wage ordinances include an exemption for unionized workers. In Los Angeles, a 2014 city council resolution that approved a minimum salary for hotel workers of $15.37 per hour excluded, with SEIU approval, unionized workers! Unionized hotels such as the Sheraton Universal earning $10.00 per hour, for example, were frozen at that rate, whereas non-union employees at the non-union Hilton less than 500 feet away earned at least $15.37 as mandated by law for non-unionized employees. Similar union exemptions have been
adopted in other cities, including Chicago, SeaTac, Washington, Milwaukee Country, and in the California cities of Long Beach, San Francisco, San Jose, Oakland and Richmond.

These SEIU atrocities aside, the overall strategic orientation of the SEIU and other unions is reliance on Democratic Party support or sponsorship of various local and state legislation or referenda efforts as opposed to organizing workers across the country into fighting unions capable of bringing into the union fold the millions of fast food and other low wage workers. While SEIU has undoubtedly organized some significant nationally-coordinated mobilizations and conferences featuring rank-and-file fast food workers, none of these efforts has aimed at the broad unionization of low wage workers. “Organize the Unorganized!” remains less than a distant thought among the ranks of today’s class collaborationist union mis-leaders. But as with the emergence of a fighting leadership in the teachers’ unions, the expected wave of militant and democratic worker struggles, inside and outside the official ranks of the trade union, will find a way to overcome the present barriers and bring new millions into the ranks of a fundamentally re-constituted labor movement.

**Rise of LGBTQI movement**

The past several years have witnessed important gains for the still beleaguered and persecuted LGBTQI community, especially in the beginnings of a cultural shift that has won recognition of the fact that human beings’ gender identity is expressed in a variety of forms. The increasing inclusion of LGBTQI leaders and the issue of gender equality more generally into the overall movement for women’s equality, as we saw in the January 2017 national mobilizations, is an indication of the growing strength of this important movement as is the still-limited but important gains regarding gender identity, choice access to
public bathrooms and a range of legislative gains barring discrimination.

But these gains notwithstanding, 2016 was the deadliest year for physical attacks against lesbians, gay men and transgender women according to the U.S. Justice Department. While data for hate crimes against LGBT persons are the most underreported of any category, the statistics for 2016 are the highest yet recorded. There were 6,121 hate crime cases reported. Of these 1,076 were based on violence against lesbians and gay men and 124 based on gender identity. This represents an 11 percent increase. Hundreds of jurisdictions do not require hate crimes statistics.

Since the election of President Trump there has been an epidemic of violent attacks on LGBTQI Centers. In Tulsa, Oklahoma an LGBTQI Center was shot up, broken into and ransacked. There were also attacks on an LGBTQI Health Center in Milwaukee as well as on centers in Los Angeles and Florida. A new phenomenon seems to be violent ripping and or burning of rainbow flags in some of these centers.

For four decades lesbians and gay men have been working for a federal job protection bill. A federal bill that adds lesbians, gay men and transgender workers to the 1964 Civil Rights Act languishes in Congress. Absent such national legislation the only formal protection that LGBTQI workers have in 29 states is a union contract banning such discrimination. The recent U.S. Supreme Court Janus vs. AFSCME decision, will likely put LGBTQI workers at greater risk. The attacks on public sector unions are the same unions that often include those protections in negotiated contracts. Part of the ruling class assault on unions today is undoubtedly the division of workers at workplace. Those who are most vulnerable will be racial minorities, immigrants and LGBTQI workers.
“From Charlottesville to Boston, Berkeley, Seattle and elsewhere across the country, right-wing racists have spilled out of the shadows, moving beyond their Internet chat groups and into the public streets. Though small in numbers, these KKK and Nazi admirers represent a threat that must be taken seriously.

“Virulent racist and neo-fascist groups feed off the misery and economic uncertainty of the 99% that are the hallmarks of capitalism in crisis. Endless war, poverty, rampant inequality, obscene levels of unemployment and underemployment, declining health, environmental catastrophe, injustice and ever-lowering expectations are the realities that greet working people each morning.

“Militarists, chauvinists, racists and neo-fascists blame all of societies ills on ‘the other’ – some presumed ‘inferior’ country, culture, race or ethnic minority that threatens the rest of us. The rightists carry water for the 1% by obfuscating the real source of the problems we face, by undermining solidarity, and by sowing divisions among the victims of the current economic and political onslaught amidst attacks raining down on us from our common oppressors.

“Typically, the ruling rich keep the fascist threat on the back burner so long as the democratic charade they use to control the majority proves effective. At present, racists and neo-fascists are only able to mobilize small groups of adherents. However, we know from history that as a last resort, when the veneer of democracy can no longer hold opposition to their system in check, the robber barons will throw their weight behind the fascist movement in order to obliterate unions, left political parties and other fighting organizations of the working class.
“To defeat the right, a two-pronged strategy is required: We must harness the power of working people, in massive numbers, to stand up to the racist and neo-fascist threats. We must offer a comprehensive, convincing counter narrative that explains the current crisis and how to extricate ourselves from it.”

So reads the introduction to our new pamphlet, *How to Defeat Neo-Fascists, Racists and the Extreme Right*, authored by a number of SA comrades who have been involved in the significant mobilizations when a handful of fascist and neo-fascist types publically announce that they are coming to town. In Berkeley and Boston a literal handful of these heinous types were met by 7,000 and 50,000 counter-demonstrators respectively, organized by united front-type coalitions whose effectiveness was in direct proportion to their massive numbers. As with most of these provocative fascist-tinged announcements of events, the organizers’ objective is to publicity present themselves as a serious mass threat.

In a few instances, the fascist-like fanatics, still miniscule in numbers, come with assorted arms in hand as in Sacramento and Charlottesville, where local police afforded them aid and comfort as they inflicted serious injuries to a small number of people. In Sacramento, one of our comrades who attended last year’s counter-Nazi protest with his video equipment was speared by a fascist, hospitalized and then persecuted and threatened with prosecution by the complicit area police. A deranged fascist in Charlottesville killed peaceful protestors, Heather Heyer as he drove his car into a peaceful crowd. Aside from President Trump, who criticized demonstrators and drew an equal sign between “both sides,” the vast proportion of the media and political establishment felt compelled to distinguish between the legitimacy of the anti-fascist protestors and the violent would-be fascist thugs.
Our newspaper and literature have devoted significant space to this relatively new phenomenon, taking great pains to present our mass mobilization strategic conceptions in sharp contrast to tiny ultraleft currents who seek to organize small groups to physically confront the usually tiny groups of fascists. A recent survey by the Anti-Defamation League found that in the past 15 months, September 2016 – December 2017, organizations such as the Traditionalist Worker Party, Identity Evropa, American Renaissance and Vanguard America directed some 200 college campus campaigns in 42 states. Some 140 incidents were recorded where there were “displays of organized racist activity,” as compared to 41 such incidents during the previous period. Again, in most of these the numbers of rightists rarely exceeded a handful.

The most recent and onerous activities of these hate-mongers has been their “free speech” campaigns wherein they falsely pose themselves as defenders of democratic rights and their opponents as anti-democratic bullies. Here we find a political (not organizational) convergence of the neo-Nazis with campus-based Zionist groups, with the latter joining with campus administrators, politicians and courts to literally ban or seriously restrict the exercise of democratic rights, including the right to peaceful protest. Penalties for violating these restrictions today include expulsion from college and banning or suspending student anti-Zionist organizations. In the name of defending “free speech,” those who seek to mobilize to protest the Zionist murders in Palestine or fascist provocateur hatemongers are banned! With regard to these bans, and the more generalized and increasing restrictions inflicted by campus administrators and/or their associated state-funded entities, the most effective response is united front mass mobilizations aimed at winning the broadest support for the exercise of democratic rights and, simultaneously demonstrating that the top level authorities and their political “One
Percent” allies are the real enemies of free speech and democratic rights.

**Immigration rights**

Since the unprecedented massive immigrant rights mobilizations of 2006, effectively a nationwide strike against the proposed passage of the reactionary Republican-sponsored Sensenbrenner Bill, the movement for immigrant rights has expanded its scope and power. The historic 2006 strike mobilization was overwhelmingly supported by the vast majority of the nation’s 12 million undocumented workers. Today the struggle encompasses mobilizations for DACA (the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), TPS (Temporary Protected Status (TPS), for immigration rights for Muslims, and now, for the elementary right of immigrant children to not be brutally separated from their parents when they enter the U.S., as has been the case under Trump’s “zero tolerance policy.”

A portion of a December 18, 2017 article in *Working Class Perspectives* outlines the stakes involved in this critical struggle.

“Created by Congress in the Immigration Act of 1990, TPS was meant for people from countries going through environmental disaster and other extraordinary and temporary conditions or confronting armed conflict. Currently, the program is administered by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

“In the past two months, TPS has come under attack from the Trump Administration. In November 2017, DHS terminated the program for Haiti, and four months later it extended that terrible decision to TPS-protected immigrants from Nicaragua and Honduras. Starting January 2019, an estimated 50,000 Haitians, 57,000 Hondurans, and 2,550 Nicaraguans with TPS status will become undocumented. They will be expected to leave the U.S.
Furthermore, TPS was allowed to expire for three black-majority countries: Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone earlier this year. None of them were granted a renewal period as the DHS had done in previous years.”

Following in the footsteps of the “great deporter,” Barack Obama, with some 2.5 million deportees to his credit, the Trump administration seeks to impose the next wave of punitive deportations in the name of saving jobs for U.S. workers, as well as other lies and racist rationalizations. In truth, the graphed deportation record of Democrats and Republicans alike appear as a near straight horizontal line. From their viewpoint the need for a low wage, fearful, non-union labor force is their overriding motivation for any policy change and never the human needs of immigrants or any other section of the working class. From our viewpoint we begin and end with the perspective of championing the interests of all workers and uniting them in common struggle against the boss class.

Trump’s most recent June 20, 2018 Executive Order, supposedly stopping the inhuman border separation of parents from their children was issued only after major street protests across the country gave proof that millions of working people reject the racist notion that immigrants pose a threat to their well-being and security. The resulting broad-ranging solidarity with the ever-threatened and persecuted immigrant communities provides the best basis for future united front mobilizations to defend immigrant rights and to deepen the unity of all workers for all the coming struggles.

We note with interest the statement by the immigrant rights group COSECHA urging the immigrant rights movement to learn from the West Virginia teachers strike and to organized to use immigrant worker power at major industrial sites and cities to further the cause and will try to observe the September national
conference called to discuss this perspective. Key movement demands today are:

Amnesty Now for All of the 12 Million Workers Without Papers!
No Human Being Is Illegal!
Abolish ICE!
Abajo Las Fronteras!
No to the Monstrous Separation of Parents and Children!

**North Korea Trump Kim Jong Un “Denuclearization” Negotiations**

President Trump’s grandstanding negotiations with North Korea should not put anyone fearful of nuclear war at ease. For Socialist Action the starting point in explaining our views is our historic demand for the total and unconditional disarmament of the imperialist military U.S. nuclear behemoth. The U.S. boasts a nuclear arsenal of some 5,000 weapons capably of delivery from virtually everywhere in the world. It’s 1,100 military bases in some 100 nations around the world guarantee not only its ability to destroy every nation on earth but also fuels a domestic arms market unprecedented in world history. In contrast, no other nation has more than a handful of military bases outside its borders. North Korea, with perhaps 5-10 nuclear weapons, has none. It is surrounded by land, sea and air by ever-threatening U.S. forces. It is not far-fetched to predict that if North Korea discarded its nuclear weapons and related missile delivery systems, it would be invaded by the imperialist U.S., no matter what treaties might be negotiated at a particular time. As Trump abrogated previous recent treaties as with Iran and the COP 21 Paris climate talk attendees, he and any future president, in the name of “national security” are fully capable of invading and destroying any nation.
U.S. recent threats to invade Venezuela and Nicaragua, not to mention the present seven wars continued or began by the Obama administration, and the literally hundreds of recorded U.S. military interventions around the world over the past 150 years, inform us that the imperialist beast is never bound by treaties. War is inherent in the imperialist system. To abolish it once and for all requires the abolition of capitalism/imperialism at the hands of the world’s workers.

Socialist Action also rejects the decades long demonization of the leaders of North Korea. As with all such corporate media promoted efforts, the demonization serves the imperialist purpose of justifying U.S. intervention and war. We say this regardless of our views of the capitalist leaders of North Korea or any other capitalist state – regardless of our view that any and all such leaders can only be effectively removed as a product of the organization and mass mobilization of the working masses themselves in the course of socialist revolution. And, we say this in the context of our unconditional support of the right of poor and oppressed nations to self-determination, that is, to be free from U.S. imperialist intervention in all its manifestation.

Thus, with regard to the supposed upcoming rounds of negotiations between the U.S. and North Korea, we make no demands on the oppressed nation of North Korea to comply with alleged or real agreements reached with U.S. imperialism. As in Vietnam during U.S. imperialism’s ten-year genocidal war that murdered four million Vietnamese, our central demands are U.S. Out Now! and Self-determination for North Korea! Should North Korea be compelled to sign a “peace treaty” with the U.S. of any sort, including a treaty that includes concessions to the imperialist beast, we have zero obligation to either support it or to advocate support for it. Once again, our demand is U.S. Out Now!
We conclude by reiterating that we focus our full fire on the U.S. and reject any notion that the U.S. has any right to negotiate the future of any oppressed nation. We can only add here our rejection of any idiotic notion that the President Trump has politically turned to be a “man of peace,” not to mention his disgusting braggadocio that he is deserved of the Nobel Peace Prize! Wonders never cease in the Truman Show/Potemkin Village fairytale world daily manufactured by “our creators.” After all Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize in the course of his fabricated “peace” image while he oversaw U.S. imperialist wars in seven nations. Perhaps one more concluding note on the recent North Korea talks is in order. This relates to the noxious and willing assumption of the Democrats in the role of warmongering Trump opponents who argue that the president has given away the kitchen sink to the North Korean “monster dictator.” Wonders never cease!

**Latin America’s “pink revolutions”**

More than a decade ago Socialist Action devoted considerable attention to the emergence of leftist reformist formations in several Latin American countries that to one degree or another appeared to be moving to challenge at least some aspects of the previous domination of their nations by an assortment of U.S.-backed capitalist tyrants that were fully subordinate to U.S. imperialism. As revolutionary socialists we were and remain critically concerned regarding the inadequate leadership of all these reformist currents, in all their variations. We were and remain doubtful would prove capable of leading often-promising situations to decisive victories. We were and remain especially concerned that U.S. and world imperialism would, as always, exploit any and all hesitations, mistakes or conscious concessions that these reformists would make to native and/or international capitalist forces to undermine any advances made. Overt and/or covert U.S. intervention is always the long or short
term strategic orientation of U.S. imperialism. Thus, we have always begun our work with the application of the principle of unconditional support to the right of self-determination of any and all poor and oppressed nations. In the U.S. this has always been best expressed in the demands, “U.S. Hands Off!” or “U.S. Out Now!”

We need not review in any detail the history of the past decade other than to note that with the coming to political power of the governments of Lula/Brazil, Morales/Bolivia, Kirchner/Argentina, Ortega/Nicaragua, Correa/Ecuador and Chavez-Maduro/Venezuela none of these reformist or social democratic leaders/regimes, rhetoric notwithstanding, contemplated a revolutionary break with capitalism. Whatever differences distinguished one from the others regarding the implementation of sometimes substantial reforms were subordinate to the fact that in all cases the essential social structures and institutions of the capitalist state remained largely intact. “INTACT” means that the fundamental ownership and control of the commanding economic heights of the nation remained in capitalist hands; the land and natural resources, the key banks and financial institutions remained in capitalist hands. With regard to key oil and natural gas resources, even these, albeit sometimes formally “nationalized,” were bound by many of the traditional “small print” or fake nationalization agreements with foreign capital that insured its interests.

Unlike the Cuban Revolution of 1958-59, where the Fidel Castro leadership nationalized bourgeois property “down to the nails in the heels of their boots,” none of these “revolutions” challenged capitalist property rights. None challenged capitalist ownership of the banks and leading financial institutions. None challenged corporate ownership of the major media. None fundamentally broke with international capitalist trade
organizations. None established a monopoly of foreign trade and none established any semblance of control of the working masses over the political institutions that governed their lives. All of the above guaranteed that whatever measures were implemented to temporarily alleviate the terrible conditions endured by the masses for decades and longer, were incapable of securing permanent advances as with Cuba’s 60 years of implementing free and quality health care, education and housing and free access to a myriad of cultural and related social services. In short none, again, rhetoric aside, organized the working masses for a fundamental break with capitalism. All attempted to co-exist with capitalism, a fatal and impossible project that in time doomed all to regression and inevitable failure. Here we should add, in passing, the terribly failed example of the Syriza government project in Greece, where the reformist leaders, pressed mercilessly by the European Union, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, imposed even more far-reaching austerity measures than their predecessors and refrained entirely from organizing a class struggle response aimed at engaging Greek workers to challenge capitalist power and prerogatives.

Yes, again, and without doubt, the forces of U.S. and world imperialism were always at work seeking to undermine and reverse any and all gains made. This included implementation of measures ranging from economic sabotage, establishment of corporate and often imperialist-inspired or funded NGOs aimed at organizing reactionary political oppositional forces, attempted military coups, sanctions/embargoes, if not outright intervention and war. These are among imperialism’s stock-in-trade counter-revolutionary measures. Without the perspective of a sharp and permanent break with native and foreign capital based on the independent organization and intervention of the masses and their constitution of a new and revolutionary state power, in alliance with revolutionary currents outside its borders, all these promising
projects are doomed to failure. Our analysis of the inherent limitations of the “Pink Tide” capitalist governments, our advocacy of the absolute necessity for the construction of a working class opposition led by a revolutionary socialist party, however difficult the circumstances, to challenge all anti-working class measures – all based on our theory of permanent revolution conceptions – were a major Socialist Action contribution to the education of vanguard forces in the U.S. and abroad. Needless to say, our political and theoretical contributions were always matched by our unconditional opposition to all forms of imperialist intervention and our united front-type mass mobilizations to stay the hand of U.S. imperialism.

Lessons of the Nicaraguan Revolution

We offer this broad analysis here only for the purpose of assessing the present debates in Latin America and especially the course of events in Nicaragua today, where tens of thousands have mobilized against the pension and related austerity measures proposed by Daniel Ortega-led capitalist government. Here comrades are urged to review the great quantity of literature Socialist Action has produced in the course of our ten years as a leading force in organizing mass opposition to U.S. intervention in Nicaragua and Central America and in support of Nicaragua’s right to self-determination. During this period, approximately 1979 to 1990, Socialist Action distinguished itself simultaneously as the best opponents of U.S. intervention and defender of Nicaragua’s right to self-determination and as perhaps the harshest but comradely political critic, on the left, of the major shortcomings of the Sandinista government. (See Socialist Action’s three books: Nicaragua: Dynamics of an Unfinished Revolution; Dynamics of the Nicaraguan Revolution and Nicaragua: The Untold Story of the U.S. Secret War.)
While participating as critical initiators and leaders of the 1980’s mass mobilizations against U.S. intervention in Nicaragua, that at times drew crowds of 80,000 – 100,000 in San Francisco, and similar numbers in other cities, Socialist Action went to great lengths to present our views on permanent revolution to the best U.S. activists and to the Sandinista leadership when they invited us, and a few other currents on the socialist left, to represent the U.S. antiwar movement at international conferences they organized in Managua. In essence we patiently explained our view that the FSLN’s (Sandinista National Liberation Front) failure to implement a massive land reform and to nationalize capitalist industry, coupled with its failure to initiate any forms of workers control, that is, to rapidly and of dire necessity, move in the direction of socialist revolution, posed a grave danger to the revolution itself.

Under pressure from the Stalinist Soviet Union at that time, whose essential denial of material aid to Nicaragua seriously undermined the revolution, the FSLN took the opposite course of struggle pioneered by the Cubans. To placate U.S. imperialism and naively try to pose itself as a non-threatening “democratic” revolution only, it rejected any significant land reform and nationalization of capitalist property that would have undoubtedly antagonized U.S. imperialism. The FSLN allowed Nicaragua’s central cash crops – those critical to its major exports and overall financial capacities – to remain in the hands of the previous bourgeois owners. On the political level, all central economic and political decisions were centralized in the nine-person FSLN directorate. The FSLN ranks never met in conference, from the days following the revolution’s military defeat of the Somocista dictatorship to the day Daniel Ortega, embarking on a campaign for re-election to the presidency in coalition with a leading capitalist (ganadero/big capitalist rancher/landowner) as his vice presidential running mate, shockingly lost the election in 1990.
When Socialist Action leaders had the opportunity to discuss in Cuba the Nicaraguan Revolution’s demise one leading Cuban official, then the head of the Cuban Communist Party’s cadre school, aptly commented, “You can’t make half a revolution.”

With undisputed political and military control over the state and every aspect of the election process Ortega and Co. lost the 1990 election! While a handful of U.S.-based solidarity activists and numerous left academics that uncritically supported the FSLN’s disastrous course attributed the FSLN’s loss solely to the undeniable effects of the U.S. secret “Contra” war, Socialist Action saw the roots of the defeat also in the abject failure of the FSLN to follow in the footsteps of the Cuban Revolution, that is, to take the road of permanent revolution that Lenin and Trotsky pioneered in Russia in October 1917 – to distribute the land to the peasant masses, nationalize bourgeois property and establish a workers’ state headed by government of workers and peasants aimed at establishing a socialist society.

Immediately following his election defeat Ortega used the short interim period until the inauguration of the new president to essentially abscond with a mass of state property and enrich himself and a handful of FSLN tops. In disgust many former FSLN fighters later proclaimed, “I am a Sandinista, not a Danielista.” The FSLN soon after convened its first and only conference since the 1979 Revolution and declared that a fundamental mistake was its failure to distribute the land! Yet the distribution of land to the poor peasants has always been fundamental to the success of any revolution on earth! In the modern era the nationalization of capitalist property under the control of the working class is similarly a pre-requisite to the success of any revolutionary effort. When Ortega was returned to the presidency via the 2007 election process it was not as a revolutionary fighter for the interests of Nicaragua’s most oppressed and exploited but rather as a posturing
politician, with 17 years of experience in coalition-capitalist politics and maneuvers and with the support of Nicaragua’s middle class and economic elite. Under his regime his government passed perhaps the most reactionary anti-abortion laws in Latin America while overseeing an entirely capitalist economy with some provisions for modest handouts to the poor, as with similar reformist capitalist governments in Latin America. Today, undoubtedly, U.S. imperialism, always on the alert for opportunities for regime change to advance its interests, has undoubtedly established connections with a layer of youth and others who would channel the existing mass discontent with Ortega’s proposed pension reform and government attacks on peaceful demonstrators to reactionary ends. Our demands for U.S. Hands Off! and support to Nicaragua’s right to self-determination, free from imperialist intervention, remain our starting point. We must also produce an analysis of the material conditions faced by Nicaraguan working people and shared expressions of revolutionary optimism when they rise to defend themselves. Needless to say, the construction of a mass revolutionary party in Nicaragua, organized independently of and against all imperialist interventions, however difficult, remains a key task ahead for revolutionary socialists.

A note on the upcoming Brazilian elections

Here it is important to add a note on the upcoming Brazilian presidential elections framed by the current arrest and imprisonment on questionable corruption charges of the leading (in the polls) candidate, Luiz Inacio “Lula” da Silva. A former popular Brazilian past president and founder of the Workers Party, Lula has been banned from participation in the elections. In this “soft coup” engineered by Brazil’s Supreme Court and the appointed and corrupt, scandal-ridden rightwing capitalist regime of the appointed president Michel Temer, the person who seems the most
likely, in all estimations, to win the presidency cannot compete for office. Few doubt that if Lula were afforded this right he would win. If he were to win the right to run for office, no doubt, as in the past, he would run as a coalition-capitalist candidate, that is, with an openly capitalist, if not right-wing vice presidential running mate. In this context, while Socialist Action would never proffer any support to a potential Lula campaign, we would defend his democratic right, seriously infringed on by the present austerity and pro-U.S. imperialist government, to be an official candidate. We supported the same right years ago in Mexico, when the PRI government twice falsified the election results that clearly demonstrated that Cuauhtémaco Cardenez has been elected to the presidency. We did not support Cardenez’s capitalist party, the PRD, or campaign, but we did support the democratic right of the Mexican people to elect him. In both cases, Cardenez and Lula, we support the essential democratic right of poor and oppressed nations to self-determination, including the right to fair and democratic elections, free from imperialist or capitalist government manipulation.

The ongoing U.S. war in the Middle East and Syria

We have written volumes on U.S. imperialist interventions in the Middle East. Here we limit ourselves to outlining the fundamental positions that have guided our work that were codified and adopted at our 2016 national convention in Kansas City.

• With regard to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Iran and Palestine we have opposed every aspect of U.S. imperialist intervention, demanding in all cases, “U.S. Out Now!”
• In this context we have unconditionally supported the right of all poor and oppressed nations to self-determination, that is, to be free from all forms U.S. imperialist intervention – from sanctions, embargos, special operation/CIA secret wars, drone wars, to direct or indirect wars using U.S. troops in concert with NATO and the U.S. reactionary Gulf State monarchies.

• With regard to Syria, our unconditional support to self-determination includes Syria’s right to seek allies and support against U.S. imperialist intervention and war from Russia, Iran and the Lebanese-based fighters of Hezbollah.

• While we extend no political support to the capitalist Assad regime in Syria, or to any other capitalist regime on earth, we remain unconditionally opposed to all imperialist efforts to remove it. The job of challenging capitalism in Syria is the sole responsibility of the Syrian people. The future construction of a mass revolutionary party in Syria remains a prerequisite to socialist revolution there and in any other nation. Any such party must stand in total opposition to U.S. and allied imperialist intervention.

• Today, some 2,000 U.S. troops occupy an estimated one-third of Syria, including regions in Northern Syria that are rich in oil and agricultural resources. They are supported by additional tens of thousands of U.S. troops on the nearby U.S. air base in Qatar and by a massive array of offshore U.S. warships in the Mediterranean. We demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all these forces.

• U.S. protestations to the contrary, U.S. forces often operate in consort with and alongside of the jihadist forces of Al Qaida and ISIS, which it deploys to advance its regime change objectives in Syria. Similarly, the U.S. and its allies organize, finance and arm the so-called Free Syrian Army with the objective of imperialist-led regime change in Syria.
Over the course of the past two years we have detailed all of the above and more in periodic articles in our newspaper and in our pamphlet entitled, “Syria: Anatomy of Another U.S. Imperialist War” by Socialist Action National Secretary, Jeff Mackler. We reaffirm the political line on Syria approved by our 2016 national convention.

The U.S. antiwar movement

Socialist Action continues to play a modest role in consistently advancing the need for an independent, democratic, mass action, united antiwar movement. Our work in the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), the leading antiwar coalition in the U.S., has focused on the above united front principles. Our recent effort was to join in initiating and helping to lead the April 14-15, 2018 weekend of coordinated national mobilizations centered on the demand to “End All U.S. Wars at Home and Abroad.” This was an experiment of sorts aimed at measuring the movement’s capacity to galvanize the broad opposition to the deepening government wars at home against working people (racism, mass incarceration, environmental destruction, global warming, attacks on immigrants, women, unions, the LGBTQI community) and the inseparable U.S. wars abroad from the Middle East, including Palestine, to Africa, Latin America and beyond. April 15 was a valiant effort to test the waters to re-ignite the long dormant antiwar movement. Initially the organizing effort met with success, winning the formal endorsement of several hundred broad ranging antiwar and social justice movement groups, including elements of the two relatively dormant antiwar coalitions, ANSWER and the UFPJ. Regardless of the several hundred endorsements, however, the effort proved to be without any significant substantial gains that might have allowed for a relatively immediate antiwar resurgence. The fact that April 15 took place in the context of yet another monstrous Israel slaughter
in Gaza and a renewed U.S. bombing of Syria, events that would have ordinarily spurred increased participation, informed us that the movement’s long slumber would not be overcome in the immediate period ahead. The largest turnout in Oakland, California, where Socialist Action’s efforts combined with a core of some 40-60 activists meeting weekly for several months and some 120 endorsing groups contributing modestly at best, resulted in an uninspiring turnout of some 1,000 participants. In better times, a similar effort would have mobilized qualitatively more. Other area wide coalitions that joined the coordinated April 14-15 effort registered comparable, but even more modest results, with some 500 in New York City, 300 in Chicago and smaller numbers and even lesser turnouts in cities across the country. In the face of the present rush to the 2018 elections, the widespread but mistaken view that wars abroad were waining, the deep opposition to U.S. wars registered in majority or near majority figures in most national polls, and the deepening across-the-board attacks on working people at home, were only minimally registered on April 15. In this regard any expectation that the antiwar and most other social movement struggles that challenge the status quo will flourish as the 2018 election cycle approaches can be modest at best. No doubt, we can’t “suck the movement out of our thumb,” as we used to say. But we must remain ever alert for opportunities to return to the streets in far greater numbers and greater influence as events allow. Building a democratic, powerful mass action united front movement against all U.S. imperialist wars remains a high priority for us as well as a crying necessity for the world’s working class, who have no interest in fighting for or defending imperialist wars.
Connecticut hospitality/hotel workers fight back

Here we include a few brief observations regarding the important union election victory at the Stamford, CT Hilton hotel, where workers voted to join Unite Here Local 217 in December 2017 by a vote of 110 in favor of the union and only 5 against. This was a stunning defeat of the bosses, who shelled out nearly $2 million in a three-week anti-union campaign. Managers and lawyers from across the country were flown to Connecticut, to live in the hotel for three weeks and were afforded unfettered access to the workers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The campaign was largely won due to the efforts of rank-and-file members from the Hyatt Regency next door in Greenwich, CT as well as the efforts of a small layer of experienced activists. These pro-union workers, including several from Latin America, Latinx, African-Americans, women and youth confirmed full force that this section of the working class, among the most oppressed, were eager to actively participate in a union organizing drive and were more than capable of standing up in united actions, to employer threats. Having won the union representation election these Hilton workers are now fighting for a union contract, a struggle that can be expected to meet with concerted corporate resistance.

While many trade union locals across the country have retreated behind business unionism and signed concessionary contracts, Local 217, the Connecticut area local that inspired the Stamford Hilton drive, has gone on the offensive with an aggressive new organizing campaign coupled with contract fights in hotels and cafeterias across the state that are not only defending past gains but winning concessions from the bosses regarding wages, healthcare, and pensions.
Conclusion

Our small forces notwithstanding, Socialist Action’s participation in and contributions to the building and strengthening of a broad range of social and political struggles are impressive. It is clear that the present period of intensifying capitalist crises and the directly associated and deepening attacks on working people has produced a growing and angry working class more open to socialist ideas than in a long while. Our close attention today to winning the best fighters to our socialist banner will prove invaluable as new opportunities emerge to break with deadend “lesser evil” ruling class politics and parties, to participate in building a militant, independent and fighting trade union movement in alliance with the struggles of the oppressed, and to advance the power and unity of all social struggles that challenge capitalist injustice. Confidence in the capitalist system stands at a low point in the modern era while the appeal of socialism to increasing millions informs us that the times are propitious for our revolutionary socialist ideas sinking deeper roots among broad layers of the population.

ADDENDUM

Women’s Liberation Resolution

(The Women’s Liberation Resolution below was approved by the Socialist Action National Committee at its April 13, 2019 plenum as an addendum to the Political Resolution, “The Worldwide Crisis of Capitalism and the Relevance of Socialism. The resolution herein is in three parts. The first is an introduction to Social Reproduction Theory (SRT). The second introduces some of the important struggles women are involved in today, looked at
through the lens of Social Reproduction. Finally, we conclude with some preliminary thoughts on the way forward.)

PART ONE -- A Brief Introduction to Social Reproduction Theory

Before we delve into the origins of women’s oppression, let’s dispel a central myth in our society—that women have ALWAYS been oppressed. This viewpoint claims that women’s subordination is inevitable because it is a function of their biology or psychology. History shows that women have not always been oppressed. Women have borne children since the beginning of the species, but their social status has dramatically changed throughout history. Before the rise of class society, social production was organized communally and products shared equally. The material basis for the exploitation of one group over another did not exist. The social status of women and men reflected the indispensable roles each played in the subsistence productive process. The change in women’s status developed along with the growing productivity of human labor based on agriculture, the domestication of animals, and stock raising; the rise of new divisions of labor, craftsmanship, and commerce; the private appropriation of an increasing social surplus; and the development of the possibility for some humans to prosper from the exploitation of the labor of others. In these specific socioeconomic conditions, as the exploitation of human beings became profitable for a privileged few, women, because of their role in the generational transmission of wealth, became valuable property. Thus, the origins of women’s oppression are economic and social in character. The development of women’s oppression is intertwined with the transition from pre-class to class society. In this view, we differ clearly from the essentialist outlook of Radical Feminism, a theory developed in the 1960s during the Second Wave of feminism and which posits that sexual oppression predated class
society. Instead, Radical Feminists blame an ahistorical patriarchy whose misogyny is implemented by men as a class. In contrast, we argue that women's oppression began with class society and that the specific method by which that oppression is maintained under capitalism is best explained by social reproduction, or unitary theory. This theory also puts us at odds with social democrats who posit dual systems of capitalism and patriarchy and the economists who see women's oppression as arising solely from their super-exploitation on the job.

Socialist feminism starts from the assumption that there is a material root to women’s oppression, and that the family is a major terrain. Social reproduction theory considers two concepts of Marx’s work as a point of departure: labor-power and the reproduction of labor power. Workers sell their ability to labor, or “labor power”, on the market as a commodity. Labor power is realized when workers produce something with a use-value, which may or may not be exchanged. But workers also suffer wear and tear and eventually die. They must renew themselves on both a daily (individual) and long-term (societal) basis—this is the reproduction of labor power.

There are three types of processes that make up the reproduction of labor power in class societies: daily activities, the maintenance of non-laborers (for example children, the sick, and the elderly), and biological/generational replacement.

The reproduction of labor power can take place in many locations, such as labor camps or barracks, and through many different processes, such as replacing laborers through slavery or immigration. However, most capitalist societies primarily reproduce labor power through kin-based family units and through biological procreation. Today these units are not exclusively based on heterosexual unions either. Yet, family units organized on the basis of the heterosexual norm and private responsibility for child
and elder care are institutionalized in class-based societies. These units are maintained, in part, by male domination and structures of female oppression. Thus, no private family units under capitalism can escape their role in social reproduction. These family structures are constantly reinforced and made to seem like they’ve been around forever, even though (as we have seen) this is not historically the case.

Let’s turn to the concept of labor for a moment. There are two types of labor in capitalist society: necessary labor, and surplus labor. Necessary labor is the labor needed to renew a worker so they can continue to work the next day (this can be on an individual or societal scale). For example, cooking food, taking care of children, or preparing for the next day’s work. When workers work for their capitalist bosses, part of their work during the day is necessary work (the work they do to earn wages). Workers need wages in order to buy the products of capitalism for their personal consumption and renew their labor. The other part of their work is surplus labor. This is the extra labor they are essentially doing for free—the labor the capitalists bosses appropriate for their own profit.

It is important to note here that women also play an important role in production and have often worked outside of the home (both in the present and historically). But it is due to their assigned role in the reproduction of labor that their oppression arises. Family members who are not working and are maintained by the family wage also help make up a reserve army of labor that capitalists can draw on when they need more workers. In fact, it benefits capitalists to have women and nonconforming people as a mobile workforce they can exploit on demand, and women entering the workforce doesn’t necessarily mean that a family’s circumstances or wages will improve. Capitalists can use gendered family expectations to justify lower wages, based on the idea that
men and women (and in some circumstances children) are collectively contributing their salaries to the family’s needs. Not only does this justify wage differentials between men, women (and children), it also justifies the expected poverty faced by people falling outside gender norms and/or those rejected by their families.

So now that we understand where women’s oppression comes from, what can we do about it? Domestic labor has often been a class battleground as working people strive to win the best conditions for their personal lives and the renewal of their labor. Efforts to organize and expand equality can also reveal the fundamentally exploitative character of capitalism while moving everyone towards a more equal footing. Despite the family’s base for the exploitation and oppression of women, families can also have a protective aspect for the working class—they can sometimes be centers for organizing against exploitation and can provide social ties and supports to working people.

It is important to recognize here that there are democratic demands that we can fight for through our unions and working class organizations right now with the expectation that gains can be made. First of all, we can fight for a breakdown in institutionalized sex roles and gender norms on every front. In addition, we can fight for dramatically extended family leave, sick leave, and parental leave for every adult in a household. We can fight for free 24-7 childcare and eldercare. We must also fight for special treatment for women, and others with childbearing ability due to their biology—for example, lighter work during pregnancy, paid time off for maternity leave, or the right to express milk during the work day. Most importantly, we can fight for all the economic and social provisioning demands that would leave women in a stronger position to escape, with their children if they desire, from unhappy or abusive relationships.
But at the same time, we must also recognize that a true end to women’s oppression can only be achieved through a socialist society. Socialist society will give us the freedom to re-think and re-distribute labor, which is the only way to eliminate the material root of women’s oppression. The need for domestic labor will never go away, but socialist society will allow us to socialize domestic labor under workers’ control. It is interesting to think here about what will happen to the institution of the family under socialist society. Once the material basis for women’s oppression is gone, the family will also begin to naturally shift and take on new forms and shapes.

We end this section with a quote from Lise Vogel: “Historical materialism poses the difficult question of simultaneously reducing and redistributing domestic labor in the course of transforming it into an integral component of social production in communist society. Just as in the socialist transition ‘the state is not “abolished”, it withers away’, so too, domestic labor must wither away…In the process the family in its particular historical form as a kin-based social unit for the reproduction of exploitable labour-power in class-society will also wither away—and with it both patriarchal family-relations and the oppression of women.” (Marxism and the Oppression of Women, pages 181-182)

PART TWO -- Women in Today’s Important Struggles

Teachers Strikes Are Women’s Strikes

One of the phenomena that suggests a way that the fight for women’s liberation from the privatized tasks of social reproduction may unfold are the new wave of teachers’ strikes. The recent one week strike in LA that featured demands to arrest the privatization
of public education and improve student health services reaffirms the potential of political strikes to socialize care work.

The strike wave among teachers walking off their jobs in 2018 got a lot of attention, but it all started the year before on International Women’s Day. The March 8th strikes were organized in the three months following the mass outpouring of four million women in marches across the country on January 21, 2017. The enthusiasm from these marches and the launching of the International Women’s Strike U.S. resulted in the closing of school districts as teachers and staff walked out on International Women’s Day. The first school districts that announced they were closing were in Right To Work states. Sixteen schools were closed in North Carolina and all the schools in Alexandria, Virginia. In addition 33 teachers walked out at an elementary school in Philadelphia to protest working for four years without a contract and 1700 teachers and transportation staff closed the school district in Prince George’s County, Maryland.

In 2018 the teachers strikes were no longer sporadic by district but statewide. The strikes were organized and led by women. While public sector unions have a strong strike tradition, in the past decades they have been quiet. The question seems to be what moved these women workers to organize major strikes, including political strikes. Public sector workers always have their eyes on the legislative budget process. In the past decades the emphasis has been on elections. But this year a massive and militant strike of women workers went to the state capitals not to lobby disinterested politicians but to make demands, dare them to jail strikers and then refused to return to work until they were ready and saw the deal in writing. Of course there are ever increasing cuts to education funding but this year it was more than that.
For the last few decades the working class has been under assault. But for women this has been accompanied by extreme cuts to social services and pressure for women to “volunteer” to fill the gaps by working for free.

But now it is clear that the gaps in social services funding is oftentimes now being done by teachers - for free.

Additional work outside the classroom now includes programs to assist students who are homeless, addressing food insecurity, and dealing with cuts in positions for school nurses. In many schools they now serve both breakfast and lunch and for homeless students they also pack additional food for the weekend. Counselors, social workers and teachers all work together to find better homeless shelters that are closer to the school and also deal with increased student anxiety. Teachers generally pick up clothes at garage sales for students.

The lack of parenting skills often lands on teachers who work with parents. Due to cuts in Children’s Services they only deal with crisis situations which leaves children suffering from basic neglect to receive assistance from teachers and counselors. Also gender wage disparity has disappeared from most salary schedules but it is easier for male teachers to take additional classes to be able to receive higher pay but for women, who have responsibilities in the home it is more difficult.

These responsibilities are also the focus of the strike vote on August 31, 2018 for the Los Angeles School District. This is the second largest school district in the country and the strike vote was 98%-2%. The two primary issues are the contract language on teacher/student ratios which are up to 46 students without a class assistant. The other issue is “restoring essential support structures that students need”. Examples they gave were specifically nurses, social workers and counselors. One school currently has a half
time nurse for 2,000 students. Schools that have social workers never have enough time to work with students so it falls on teachers or counselors.

The increasing militancy of teachers will challenge state austerity budgets. The teachers have often advocated for all public workers in their strike demands. Next year bargaining will start for state worker contracts and we will see if they will join together with teachers on the picket line. The current strike wave will continue but employers will start pushing back. In Washington state recently they started threatening teachers to return to class or they would be replaced. Community support will be needed to engage in more solidarity to resist the increasing pressures on teachers. In most strikes both students and parents have been supporting picket lines. There will need to be more support and solidarity from all unions to continue seeing victories. At best, these strikes can set an example of how to fight against the deepening privatization of social reproduction and point to a future in which women can use the most proletarian methods to fight their oppression overall.

Social Reproduction Theory and the Immigrant Rights Movement

Immigrants and refugees are one of the most vulnerable and easily exploited layers of our society, and immigrant women doubly so. Our capitalist economic system depends on the cheap and expendable labor of immigrants from the fields to the construction industry, to factories and the restaurant business. Undocumented immigrants without legal status, or refugees who depend on a tenuous or time-limited work permission, such as TPS, are more easily threatened by their bosses into working for little pay or under unfair conditions. However, immigrant and refugee women face multiple layers of oppression, making them a
super-exploited part of our society. Immigrant women not only face oppression because of their class, skin color, or legal status, but also because of their gender.

If this is the case, then we can also see that anti-immigrant policies tend to affect immigrant women more profoundly. For example, because the majority of childcare duties most often fall on women (especially women who come from countries where a traditional family hierarchy prevails), the recent Trump policy of separating children from their families will inevitably affect women more deeply. But Trump isn't the only U.S. President who has deported immigrants. Obama, the so-called "Deporter in Chief," removed more than 2.5 million undocumented immigrants from the United States during his presidency. Obama claimed in 2014 that he would focus on "Felons, not families. Criminals, not children. Gang members, not a mom who’s working hard to provide for her kids. We’ll prioritize, just like law enforcement does every day." However, many times immigrant families are made up of a mix of undocumented people, those with legal status, and children who were born in the U.S. and are citizens. And if we assume that the man (most likely the primary family breadwinner) is more likely to be removed from the family through deportation, then the entire responsibility of earning a wage plus the duties of social reproduction falls on the woman. And unlike women who are U.S. citizens, women without legal status are not able to benefit from social welfare programs designed to help families in need.

History has also shown that immigrant women, especially those without documents, are extremely vulnerable to human trafficking schemes. According to the ACLU, "The inequalities women face in status and opportunity worldwide make women particularly vulnerable to trafficking." They estimate that 80% of trafficking victims worldwide are women and children and that in the U.S., victims of human trafficking are almost exclusively
immigrant women. Because of their vulnerable status, they are often lured by promises of promising employment, but then are forced to work long hours under horrific conditions for little or no pay, while they lack legal recourse. And what drives human trafficking? According again to the ACLU, "Trafficking of humans is driven by a global demand for cheap, unskilled, exploitable labor. Global profits from forced labor total an estimated $44.3 billion annually. Human trafficking is now the second largest criminal industry worldwide, after drug trafficking, and the fastest growing criminal industry."

Many women and their children who are currently joining the caravans traveling from Central America are fleeing gang violence and extreme poverty in their countries of origin, only to face untold violence on their journey to a better life in the United States. On the way to the U.S., 80% of women and girls are raped. Many begin taking contraceptives as a precaution before they begin their journey. They must pay bribes to gangs and traffickers along their journey, and face violence and murder along the way. Unaccompanied children often ride La Bestia, the notorious freight trains that travel through Mexico on their way to the border with the U.S. Those who are not careful may fall or be pushed from the top of the train, falling to their death or losing limbs in the process. Others face extortion by gangs during their journey and many migrants have been disappeared. Some sources estimate that as many as 120,000 migrants have disappeared during their journey through Mexico since 2006. A 2011 report from the National Human Rights Commission in Mexico revealed that between April and September of 2010, a period of just 6 months, 11,333 migrants traveling through Mexico had been abducted.

When these women arrive in the U.S. after facing such extreme trauma on their journey to make a better life for their families, they face a new set of challenges, including low wages,
racism and discrimination both in U.S. society and on the job. Immigrant women and women of color tend to make up the majority of domestic labor for the well-off. This has been the case since the time of slavery. Black women and immigrant women perform the domestic labor tasks assigned to the women of the ruling class, cooking, cleaning, and caring for their children during the day, before going home to do the same for their own families. According to the American Immigration Council, the greatest number of low-wage immigrant workers currently work as maids and housekeepers, followed by cashiers, personal care aides, cooks, and finally as nursing, psychiatric and home health aides. Two fifths of these women are earning extremely low wages of under $20,000 a year. The U.S. economy depends on the labor of low wage immigrant women to complete the social reproduction tasks assigned to the most well-off members of our society.

The Struggle for Reproductive Justice

One would imagine that a theory called “Social Reproduction Theory” would be relevant to the struggle for Reproductive Justice, and it certainly is. Thanks largely to the insistence of the African American women’s organization Sistersong, demands for Reproductive Justice have replaced the Second Wave feminists call to focus on “the right to choose” abortion. Reproductive justice implies not only the right to decide on abortion, but the right to access fully excellent women’s health resources no matter one’s income. It recognizes and foregrounds the horror of the criminalization of pregnant poor women. It refuses to downplay the continued existence of programs of forced sterilization or coercive contraception in prisons, on reservations, or accompanying US AID programs. And most of all, it links access to abortion to access to all that is needed to raise healthy children in the face of systemic poverty, leaded water, asthma-producing air, the carceral state, and police violence. Without the
ability to exercise full autonomy over our bodies and reproduction, women cannot participate in society on an equal footing. All people capable of childbirth, regardless of income, must be able to choose if they wish to bear children and when they wish to do so. We must, of course, repeal the Hyde Amendment. Abortion facilities must be accessible and affordable to all women and must be linked to programs for maternal health and childcare and nutrition programs. The needs of trans and gender non-conforming people whose role as childbearers is often misunderstood, ignored, or erased, must be included in the struggle. For example, there are concerns that the new Irish abortion law may exclude trans persons. We demand that gender inclusive sex education, birth control, and abortion and gender appropriate reproductive health care must be free and accessible on demand without restriction.

The lack of societal support for children / the inability to PERSONALLY bear the cost of a child, is among the main reasons given for having an abortion by women seeking the service. According to a January, 2018 fact sheet produced by the Guttmacher Institute: “The reasons patients gave for having an abortion underscored their understanding of the responsibilities of parenthood and family life. The three most common reasons—each cited by three-fourths of patients—were concern for or responsibility to other individuals; the inability to afford raising a child; and the belief that having a baby would interfere with work, school or the ability to care for dependents. Half said they did not want to be a single parent or were having problems with their husband or partner.”

If capitalist politicians cared about women, and wanted to support them in choosing to carry pregnancies to term, they would set about providing the supports women themselves cite as lacking in their lives. These are the same supports that SRT notes are shifted from society as a whole onto individual families, and
especially women, under capitalism. But capitalist politicians have focused their energy instead on attacking women’s access to safe, legal abortion. The same Guttmacher Institute fact sheet cited above notes that: “As of January 1, 2018, all but 10 states had imposed at least one of five major abortion restrictions: unnecessary regulations on abortion clinics, mandated counseling designed to dissuade a woman from obtaining an abortion, a mandated waiting period before an abortion, a requirement of parental involvement before a minor obtains an abortion or prohibition on the use of state Medicaid funds to pay for medically necessary abortions.”

This attack on women’s ability to access abortion has been ongoing since the Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v Wade* in 1973 legalized abortion. The 1976 Hyde Amendment quickly followed the Supreme Court ruling, barring the use of federal funds to pay for abortion, and the battleground in the fight for abortion rights shifted to the individual states. As of mid-2018, only 17 states actually use their own funds to cover abortion services (allowed but not required by the Hyde Amendment), and 57% of women aged 15 to 44 live in a state that is hostile or extremely hostile to abortion rights, while only 30% of women aged 15 to 44 live in a state that is supportive of abortion rights. This coordinated attack on abortion access is having an increasingly detrimental effect on women’s access to all types of family planning services (especially contraception) as members of Congress continue to go after funding for Planned Parenthood (claiming this funds indirectly subsidize abortion services). Nationwide, Planned Parenthood health centers provide contraceptive care to 2 million women and 41% (1.6 million) of the 3.8 million contraceptive clients served by Title X (which is also under attack) - funded providers are served at Planned Parenthood health centers. (All statistics from Guttmacher Institute).
In capitalist societies, restrictions on women’s right to control their bodies are used as a tool to control women and make them more vulnerable to exploitation as surplus labor and to reinforce the kin-based family as a private unit of consumption. The struggle for reproductive justice---from improving access to abortion, decriminalizing miscarriage, and getting rid of forced sterilization, to dramatically improving women’s access to a full spectrum of health care services and their ability to raise healthy children---is ever present in one form or another in the United States. And this struggle is not limited to the United States. In the last few years, masses of women in the street challenged extremely harsh abortion bans in Poland and Ireland. In Argentina, the women’s organization Pan y Rosas (Bread and Roses) led an impressive mass movement within labor unions and in the streets to fight for the access to legal abortions in their country. Socialist Acton’s role in hosting an IWS speaker from Argentina is a good example of the kind of international solidarity we should continue to do.

Reproductive Justice and Sterilization

We are constantly reminded that forced sterilization is not a horror from the distant past. Because trans people are denied the right to have their gender legally recognized in many countries, they face further hurdles with regard to reproduction. Many governments continue to compel trans people to undergo sterilization to have their gender identity legally recognized. A Japanese law explicitly demanding sterilizations of transgender people recently survived a challenge in the Supreme Court - a terrible blow to trans people’s rights demanding a long fight ahead.

Along with trans women, thousands of women of color and women of low economic status have been subjected to forced sterilization for decades. During World War I, the American Plan
was a government-sponsored program aimed at eradicating prostitution that threatened to infect U.S. soldiers with venereal diseases. Under the American Plan, thousands of poor women and especially women of color, were rounded up for merely being “suspected” of promiscuous behavior (which often amounted to being in the wrong place at the wrong time) and forced to undergo painful and useless treatments for venereal diseases like syphilis and gonorrhea. The women were detained for months in detention hospitals without due process and if they tried to escape or protest, they were often brutally punished. As part of the American Plan, hundreds, perhaps thousands of women were forcibly sterilized, simply for being part of an ethnic minority, or for being suspected of being “feeble minded.” In some parts of the United States, the American Plan continued into the 1960s and 70s. And women of color continue to be subjected to similar brutal practices even today. Recently in Saskatchewan, Canada, over 60 indigenous women filed a class action lawsuit against the Canadian government for being subjected to forced sterilization after giving birth in public hospitals. International development programs funded by the major imperialist countries continue to link sterilization and coercive contraception programs to much needed foreign aid.

**Social Reproduction Theory and Cuts in Social Services**

Throughout history, women and children, and workers lacking any family support, have depended the most on social supports and services, so cuts or the lack of social services will obviously affect them the most profoundly. This can include cuts in almost any benefit you can think of. As quoted in their work *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Social Welfare*, Frances Piven and Richard Cloward note, “Relief arrangements are initiated or expanded during the occasional outbreaks of civil
disorder produced by mass unemployment, and are then abolished or contracted when political stability is restored. In other words, relief policies are cyclical—liberal or restrictive depending on the problems of regulation in the larger society with which government must contend.” In other words, the working class must fight hard to gain social benefits like social security and medical care. But there is a constant tension between the amount of time a worker must spend to reproduce their own labor for the next day (for example, in transportation to and from work, cooking, taking care of children, washing clothes, etc.) and the amount of time a worker has to dedicate to working to help the capitalist accumulate more profit. When it benefits the ruling class, they will grant concessions to workers. They may invest in mass transit or public education. But at other times, the drive to increase profit will cause the ruling class to attempt to privatize what should be social services for the masses, and the burden is inevitably pushed onto nuclear families, or those who lack family support.

For example, if medical insurance benefits are eroded, the task of medical care will inevitably fall upon the family unit, by increasing women’s unpaid domestic labor. If workers have no family support because they have been rejected by their families for being LGBT, and/or because their families have faced generational racist oppression, they will also bear the brunt of increased suffering. If, as we have seen with the example of the recent teachers’ strikes, funding for schools and benefits for teachers are cut, who will bear the brunt of educational cuts? If the social safety net is continuously shaved away who will cuts in programs like SNAP, Medicaid, and WIC most directly affect? In all these cases, women and children will face increased suffering. Not to mention that the United States ranks last out of the 28 wealthiest countries in infant mortality rates, despite spending more on health care than any other country. A research paper on the topic published by Alice Chen of the University of South
California, Emily Oster of the University of Chicago, and Heidi Williams of MIT, showed that the higher infant mortality rates in the U.S. are due "entirely, or almost entirely, to high mortality among less advantaged groups." They concluded that "there is tremendous inequality in the US, with lower education groups, unmarried and African-American women having much higher infant mortality rates." And according to the National Women's Law Center, "More than one in eight women, nearly 16.3 million, lived in poverty in 2016. Poverty rates were particularly high for Black women (21.4 percent), Latinas (18.7 percent) and Native women (22.8 percent). Families headed by single mothers (35.6 percent) were 5.4 times more likely than married couple families to live in poverty. Nearly six in ten poor children (59.5 percent) lived in female-headed families in 2016." And the Pew Research Center reports that U.S. students continue to lag behind many other industrial nations in reading, math and science skills.

The Pew Research Center reports that in about half of two parent households, both parents are now working full time and in 40% of two parent households, the woman is now the primary breadwinner. Women who do actually work outside of their home earning a wage to help support their families also face special discrimination in the workplace. And this is not limited to lower wages compared to men, and the all too frequent sexual harassment that women must endure. Because of women's biology and their expected role in biological reproduction, working women are also deeply affected by cuts in (or lack of) maternal benefits. According to the Pew Research Center, out of 41 industrialized nations that were surveyed, the United States is the only county that doesn't provide a paid maternity leave for working women. And only recently have accommodations for women who choose to breastfeed their infants become more widespread. In fact, in many hospitals in the U.S. formula companies are still allowed to come in and give free samples to new mothers to promote their
products. Another burden that affects many working women is the astronomical cost of childcare. According to a 2017 report released by Child Care Aware, the average cost of childcare for one child takes up 10% of the income of a married couple and 36% of the income of a single parent. And, of course, any weakness in social provisioning of this kind contributes to forcing women to stay in abusive or unwanted relationships.

**Violence Against Women and the #MeToo Movement**

Violence against women has been used to control women through fear for centuries and has been endemic, not just in the capitalist system, but throughout the history of the patriarchal system as well. Violence or the threat of violence has been used to keep women from speaking out for their rights as human beings, or to keep them from attempting to break free from their assigned roles as the reproducers of the labor pool.

The hashtag #MeToo was actually created more than 10 years ago by Tarana Burke. As a survivor of abuse and the program director for “Girls for Gender Equity”, she was looking for a path towards healing for young girls of color. About 18 months ago the hashtag suddenly took social media by storm. The New York Times first reported accusations of sexual harassment against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein on October 5th, 2017 (by prominent actresses Rose McGowan and Ashley Judd). Less than a week later the New Yorker magazine published allegations from 13 more women (3 of whom said they were raped by Weinstein). Soon women everywhere were taking to social media to share their own experiences of abuse. Burke is not surprised by the outpouring of allegations but, “it is important to realize that for every R. Kelly or Bill Cosby or Harvey Weinstein, there is an owner of a grocery store, coach, teacher, neighbor. We don’t pay
attention ’til it is a celebrity. We need to keep talking, but this is not about a hashtag—it is not a moment, it is a movement.” Burke’s hashtag democratized the struggle as it gave voice to all women who had not been heard. The victim or the perpetrator did not have to be famous, it was now all about women speaking and listening to each other.

As much as we admire all the women who have spoken out in this movement, and appreciate the “consciousness” raising and solidarity it has fostered, it is important to note that sexual harassment and sexual assault are part of the everyday lives of all women in this society BECAUSE women have unequal power and worth under capitalist patriarchy. If this is true for a famous Hollywood actress, how true must it be for women of color and immigrant women working in the fields and factories across this country? Breaking the isolation and feeling connected to other women is an important step towards healing for the victims, but it does not solve the pandemic of violence rooted in the misogyny of capitalism. As socialists, we need to support these movements, but we also need to educate about the roots of violence and move beyond individual victim and perpetrator towards dismantling the system that requires and feeds off the exploitation of women.

Socialists need to challenge the way that liberals have appropriated #MeToo in order to argue that a more powerful criminal justice system would be in the interest of women. Socialists must ally with the critique of radical women of color who refuse to connect the fight against sexual violence with support for the racist criminal justice system. We, instead, look to massive but non-carceral anti-sexual violence campaigns around the world, new union tools, and to the restorative justice (under community control) projects underway in the Black community as ways forward that will develop as the radicalization deepens. We fight for a feminism that understands that the police, the courts,
and the prison–industrial complex will never serve African American, Latinx, Native, and other working class women.

We take special note of the fact that trans and nonbinary people have faced an astonishing amount of violence in recent years. Trans people are disproportionately victimized by domestic and police violence, a tenth have been physically assaulted, and half of all trans people report experiencing sexual violence in their lives (National Center for Transgender Equality). Trans women are four times as likely to be homicide victims as the general population of women, and last year (2017) was the deadliest year on record. Black trans women are particularly at risk of fatal violence (HRC). The particular violence experienced by trans women aids in preserving their status as marginalized and precarious workers who are disproportionately jobless and imprisoned.

An example of this violence directed against trans women of color is the case of CeCe McDonald, an African American trans woman who was attacked outside of a bar in Minneapolis in 2011. During the transphobic and racist attack, CeCe was stabbed in the face with a glass and defended herself by stabbing her attacker with a pair of scissors in the chest. After the attacker later died, CeCe had no choice but to accept a plea bargain of 41 months in prison for second-degree manslaughter rather than risking a 20 year prison sentence. Despite identifying and living as a trans woman, CeCe was housed in a men’s prison until she was released in 2014. CeCe’s case sparked a widespread grassroots defense movement in Minneapolis to support her, and she was allowed to take her needed hormones in prison after an online petition was circulated. CeCe now works as an LGBTQI activist in the Twin Cities, MN and spoke at the recent Women’s March at the State Capitol in St. Paul.
Climate Crisis and Gender

The image of an immigrant mother and her children being tear-gassed at the US-Mexico border is not only a powerful evocation of the white supremacism and poisonous nationalism of the U.S. ruling class but also the perfect image of the gendering of the climate crisis by global capitalism. Honduras is ground zero for the climate crisis in the Americas. It is the worst section of the “dry trough” that is disrupting farming in Central America and exacerbating the human misery already set in motion by imperialist extractivism in the region. Each particular climate crisis that disrupts working class and farming communities increases the difficulty of the unpaid work of social reproduction. Women in disaster zones must react to the disruption of school, childcare, eldercare, feeding, cleanliness, healthcare and housing. Climate change dramatically raises the possibility of displacement and attempted migration to rich countries which hide behind higher walls, sophisticated surveillance, and more militarization. Today, imperialist military white papers are likely to list birth rates in the underdeveloped world as fundamental security threats.

The Bill Gates Foundation leads in the imperialist effort to reinstitute population control measures in the less developed world and to promote reactionary demographic theories that tie birth rate and the maturation of male children in countries with severe unemployment as the major security threat emanating from the new warming world. Along with US AID, the Gates Foundation promotes the reckless injection of impoverished women with dangerous long term contraceptives and opposes linking these innoculations to the most basic improvement in women’s health care. “Development aid” from the US is often ties loans to the agreement by semi-colonial countries to carry out coercive campaigns to reduce family size with drugs unpopular in the US because of their side effects or, on occasion, via sterilization
drives. The normalization of neo-Malthusian politics always goes hand in hand with anti-immigrant politics. Together they victimize and threaten the agency of the climate mitigation actors that have been most successful so far: indigenous women fighting extractivism and poor women farmers of the less developed world who lead the return to sustainable agriculture and conservation.

More and more the fight for women’s liberation will be intertwined with the defense of climate justice here and abroad.

**Trans Women’s Struggles**

The movement for trans liberation is also growing. Following the leaked memo outlining the Trump administration’s plans to further roll back legal recognition of transgender people, networks of trans activists and allies responded with protest actions all over the country. Dozens of unions have reaffirmed their commitment to protecting the rights of trans workers in and out of their bargaining units. In Argentina, factory workers have even gone on strike against discrimination towards their trans co-workers. We view the movements for trans and workers rights as part of one struggle and understand gendered oppression to be fundamental to ruling class efforts to discipline the working class, uphold the ideal of the nuclear family, and maintain a “flexible” surplus population. Socialist Action must advance our perspective to help build the biggest and broadest coalitions to fight against working class divisions, including a trans inclusive women’s movement, to unite workers with different experiences and ultimately build a movement that can overthrow the system of capitalist exploitation itself. In the UK we have seen an unfortunate movement for trans-exclusionary feminism growing in response to proposed changes to the Gender Recognition Act, and hold that such a bigoted perspective is flawed and undermines the women’s movement by sowing divisions. Trans women are
women and trans women’s rights must be part of the women’s liberation movement.

**Self-Identification**

Many countries in the world continue to deny transgender people their basic right to legal recognition of their gender, but unfortunate problems persist even where that right has been fought for and won. Most governments where gender recognition is possible, including the US, pathologize the state of being transgender, forcing trans people to go through a difficult process that makes their gender a question of medical inquiry. It is dehumanizing to have to get permission from the government to be who you are, yet there are only a few countries in the world where people may legally change gender with a mere statutory self-declaration. Socialist Action stands in solidarity with the current movement for self-identification in the UK, and movements for self-ID everywhere in the world.

**Role of Lesbians, Past and Present**

In the face of a growing practice of erasing lesbian history, lesbian contributions, and even the word itself, Socialist Action will work to restore and deepen the understanding of the special role of lesbians, past and present. The lesbian movement today continues to contribute greatly to the LGBTQI and women’s liberation movement. Since the earliest days of the Second Wave of feminism, lesbians have anchored women’s centers and other centers of the fight against sexism, for abortion rights, and against domestic violence, to say nothing of LGBTQI rights. They are prominent in key labor organizations such as Pride at Work, which is fighting for an LGBTQ amendment to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, an amendment which is needed to fight discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodations, and other areas in all fifty
states. Lesbians are also in the leadership of an effort to move, on the fiftieth anniversary of Stonewall, from corporate-backed Pride Parades to civil and human rights marches.

**PART THREE -- Conclusion / The Way Forward**

After many years of low mobilizations for women’s rights, we are suddenly in a new situation. We have examples of women and their allies mobilizing in unprecedented numbers on a world scale. In addition, women’s movements have increasingly been using proletarian methods of struggle, including really mass actions connected to workplace walkouts and other strike actions assisted by the unions. In the United States, mobilization has been more or less effectively captured by the Democratic Party. Yet, we have very good examples of truly independent action that involves youth and working women on a dramatic scale in Argentina and other countries. This gives us a modest but important tool for assembling the leadership core of an independent women’s movement with a working class orientation in the U.S.

For all its limitations, the International Women’s Strike U.S. gives us a framework through which to gather a base for future struggles. The IWS tour has helped us explain to a ready group the kind of movement that we need and allowed us to find individuals to join the Connecticut IWS chapter, where we can carry out education and inspiration. We can work with whatever modest groups we can assemble out of this tour and March 8 activities to build an upcoming IWS national assembly, Americas Assembly, and a national membership organization. This grouping has a sophisticated core of intellectuals and representatives from most serious parties of the anti-Stalinist left and can guarantee an assembly with strong politics and theoretical education on women’s oppression. (Check out [this link](#) to see the IWS Platform:
Without strengthening such a base, we have no possibility of creating an alternative to the Democratic Party-dominated movement. With such a base, we have the potential to build the core of the movement we need. This work could boost recruitment of women to Socialist Action, as SA is one of the key groups that can help manifest social reproduction feminism in action. For some branches, assembling a base may occur outside of the IWS framework, but the fundamental tasks remain the same.

Does Socialist Action have the capacity to take-on this work? It is a question of where we decide as a body to put our collective energy and resources. We cannot leave this work entirely to the already overburdened women in the party (a minority of our membership and leadership) and pretend that is sufficient. To view this as “women’s work” is to miss the entire point of this resolution. Women and so-called “women’s struggles” cannot simply be an afterthought, tacked onto the end of our Draft Political Resolution. We are looking for a “cultural shift” which needs to begin inside our party. The party AS A WHOLE must make Social Reproduction Theory, women’s theory, and the very real ongoing struggle for women’s liberation across many fronts more central to our work. Only by continuing to engage in the ongoing intellectual debates on Social Reproduction Theory, while also continuing to participate in the mass struggles for women’s rights and the effort to prioritize women’s issues inside the unions can we hope to win the best and most militant women fighters to our party.
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