



Abstract

Flint Water Crisis: A Capitalist Crime 3



Internationalist photo

Picket line outside Bröd Kitchen's W. 4th Street location on February 19. Over 300 unionists, activists and supporters participated.

Bröd...

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from key NYC unions, won the reopening of the restaurant and a union contract, including a union hiring hall.

The campaign to unionize Hot and Crusty was a lesson in the class struggle. As *The Internationalist* reported:

"[T]he unionization campaign emerged from the workers' resistance to conditions all too typical of workplaces in New York and around the country in which employers pay immigrants less than the legal minimum wage, deny them all benefits, oblige them to work when sick or injured on the job, and threaten to fire them if they protest. Fed up with abuse and workweeks in some cases of 60 hours or more and even up to 72 hours without overtime pay, Hot and Crusty employees got no response when they called the New York State Labor Department."

—"Hot and Crusty Workers Win with Groundbreaking Contract," *The Internationalist* special issue, December 2012

After suing the company and winning back pay, with the aid of the Laundry Workers Center, the workers set out to actually win a union. Key was keeping up a picket line, which they did for 55 days. Internationalist comrades played a key supporting role, standing with the workers day after day until victory was achieved.

Club members who participated in the campaign got a first-hand look at the dirty tactics in the union-busters' arsenal. Through organizing forums, tabling and classroom visits at Hunter College, we were able to gain the support of many students, as well as the Hunter chapter of the CUNY faculty/staff union (see "Hunter Internationalist Club Builds Solidarity with Hot & Crusty Workers," *Revolution* No. 10, October 2013). We also said at the time that the victory would inspire other groups of immigrant workers to organize, and that's exactly what happened with the B&H Photo workers (see article, page 1).

Bosses Lash Out

In the class struggle, a victory for workers is a thorn in the side for the owners. That

is certainly the case with Bröd. Early this year, after the HCWA's three-year contract with Bröd expired, the company moved to shut down the 63rd Street location in a renewed anti-union offensive. In response, several dozen unionists, students and community activists rallied on January 22 in front of the company's West 4th outlet.

The next week, on January 28, over 200 came out. Facing them, the store windows were plastered with posters accusing the "unscrupulous union" of aiming at "stealing our jobs." Signed prominently by the store manager, the broadside ended with the capitalized call to "SUPPORT US BY CROSSING THEIR PICKET LINES." But the store was conspicuously empty.

The next day, Uys fired union president Mahoma and another union activist, Marcelino Cano. The bosses seethed when scores of activists, including a determined contingent of B&H Photo workers, turned out on less than three hours' notice to protest the company's vindictive firings. Three days later, after Leyla Mejía, an Afro-Latina Bröd worker and mother of five, greeted Mahoma when he was leafleting the 63rd Street store, she too was fired.

Soon thereafter, Uys was captured on camera harassing an Afro-Latina activist of the Internationalist Club who was leafleting in support of the workers. "I will harass you," he repeatedly stated, then grabbed the phone and pushed down the hand of another young woman Club member who was filming his vituperations. Uys was in a frenzy, but he was not acting alone. Bröd is just one facet of the Diamond food conglomerate, with roots in South Africa.

The firing of union president López and other HCWA members was part of an all-out drive to humiliate and intimidate the workers. Rumors were spread that if the union at 63rd Street were broken, "perhaps" the restaurant could be kept open. Lies, intimidation, setting worker against worker—these are age-old weapons of the exploiting class.

In New York, "world capital of the restaurant industry," the norm is to treat immigrant workers who do much of the hard labor as no more than raw material for exploitation, their dignity smothered in the

daily grind of exploitation. Unforgivable from the standpoint of the exploiters is the collective struggle through which workers find their own voice and stand up for their rights and interests. That was the lesson and the memory the Bröd bosses wanted to destroy. At the mass rallies on January 28 and February 19, hundreds vowed to keep it alive.

On February 15, Uys announced that he was closing the Upper East Side restaurant, saying this would be permanent—and brazenly blaming it on the workers' union, even as he threw them out of their jobs and into the street. Workers and their families depend on their wages to survive, and losing their jobs can bring destitution. The capitalist owners say it's their private property, they can do with it what they want; the workers are just there to make the employers money. Seeing how this works up close should make anyone who takes the side of the oppressed want to overthrow the capitalist system.

Then on February 19, organizers arriving for the West 4th protest found the Bröd outlet there closed as well, its windows plastered with enormous new posters. "Congratulations Mahoma Lopez....you closed the store," blared the bizarre, vindictive message, hurling abuse at the HCWA president in yet another escalation of the anti-union vendetta.

Hugo Uys wants to be a two-bit Donald Trump, bellowing "You're fired!" But the voices of over 300 unionists and students thundered in response, "**Mahoma López, we are with you!**" They filled the street with defiance of the union-busters, their smears and their unending lies. "**New York is a union town—Union-busting won't go down,**" they vowed.

"As a cafeteria worker, I know the pain and the struggle," said Debbie Johnson,



Erik McGregor

Mahoma López, president of the Hot and Crusty Workers Association, at January 28 protest. The next day Bröd fired him.

union steward of the Hunter College cafeteria workers, who are members of UNITE HERE. "Everybody needs their job, and we will not stop until these workers get their jobs back," she said. Phone workers "stand with you in this struggle," Pam Galpern of Communications Workers of America Local 1101 told the crowd. "Whether you work for a big greedy corporation like Verizon, or a small greedy corporation like Bröd Kitchen, they are all trying to do the same thing, which is trample down the workers."

"This struggle is everyone's struggle," Mahoma said in his speech at the rally. "We are facing many struggles in New York City. Right now, with this demonstration, we prove that we can be in solidarity." Alexia of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs called the Hot and Crusty workers "the heroes of the immigrant working class," saying "they relied on their own power.... You don't rely on the Democratic Party, you rely on your power as a worker, as a revolutionary force."

The struggle continues, declared our comrade Rudy, a former worker at Bröd, at the close of the February 19 rally: "There is one thing why the Hot and Crusty workers won—that is class independence from the bourgeoisie," he said as the crowd cheered. "That's why we need a workers revolutionary party. We need a whopping raise, but most of all we need to overthrow capitalism." The crowd responded, "**¡Luchar, vencer, obreros al poder!**" (Fight, win, workers to power). ■

Visit the League for the Fourth International/
Internationalist Group on the Internet
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Internationalist photo

Scores of activists and workers (including from B&H) showed up on less than three hours' notice to protest firing of Mahoma López, January 29.

Revolution

A Question of Whose Class Interests Prevail

Flint Water Crisis:

Capitalism Is Poisoning Us

By Rudy

The Spring of 2014 was the beginning of a nightmare for the residents of Flint, Michigan. At that time, the city emergency manager and the office of the Republican governor, Rick Snyder, decided to switch the water supply from Lake Huron to the Flint River. From the outset, the water of the Flint River was suspected of being unsafe and unfit for human consumption. Health officials were aware of the potential risks but remained silent until the end of 2015 when the scandal blew up. The bottom line is that the government was poisoning the residents of Flint, and behind it was barely disguised racism ... and capitalist austerity.

The crisis that Flint residents are facing is a direct result of dictatorial control by appointed managers that have spread in Michigan in recent years. As filmmaker Michael Moore pointed out, "This is a racial crime. If it were happening in another country, we'd call it an ethnic cleansing" (*Time* magazine, 1 February). The facts are plain to see: Flint is a poor city and almost two-thirds of the population are struggling black families. When Flint residents noticed that the water provided to them was not safe to drink they notified authorities, who did nothing. On the contrary, they turned their backs on the population and let them be poisoned.

Moore, who is from Flint, noted that this would never have happened in affluent white cities like West Bloomfield, Grosse Pointe or Ann Arbor. Who can be surprised at such racism in the 21st-century United States, with a black president, where we witness videos of lynch-type murders of African American and Latino youth? Let's not forget that capitalist America was founded on the genocide of Native Americans and the superexploitation of slaves imported from Africa in chains. Flint's water crisis and the poisoning of its residents is not a natural disaster but a man-made catastrophe fueled by racial and class oppression.

The financial crisis that this grew out of was the result of the closing of a number of Flint auto plants in the 1980s, which cut the city's population in half and devastated its tax base. Flint was the site of the historic sit-down strike against General Motors at GM's Fisher Body No. 1 plant in 1936-37, which established the United Auto Workers (UAW) as one of the most powerful industrial unions in the country. Not only did GM exploit Flint auto workers, but it also helped poison the water with its industrial waste which made it into a toxic blend which city residents have been drinking for almost two years.

Flint Water Crisis, Devastated Detroit Schools: Crimes of Capital

Mumia Abu-Jamal, the foremost class war prisoner in the U.S., pointed out in a radio message from behind bars that what



UAW Local 599 president Dan Reyes hands out bottles of contaminated Flint water outside Michigan state capitol January 19 during governor's "state of the state" speech. Workers should use their power to kick out "emergency management" dictators, break with Democrats and build a workers party.

General Motors did to the Flint River was a "crime of capital": "For decades GM threw on it, and then poured into it its chemical wastes and effluvia until it became the corrosive toxic brew that it is now." Despite all the efforts of the racist, capitalist state to bury him, holding Mumia on death row for three decades and now denying him crucial life-saving medical care, they have not been able to silence the courageous "voice of the voiceless."

Darnell Earley was appointed by Governor Rick Snyder as Flint emergency manager in 2014. Claiming it was necessary to save Flint's precarious finances, Earley and the governor's office switched the water supply in order to save \$5 million in the first year. By continuing to poison Flint for nine years, they would rake in another \$19 million. Flint residents and local media had complained from early on about the foul-smelling, sludge-filled tap water, but it was not until Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha of the local Hurley Medical Center issued a report last September detailing that lead levels in Flint children had nearly doubled (and nearly tripled in high-risk areas), that the official wall of denial finally crumbled.

A special report by the *Flint Journal* (21 January) on "How Government Poisoned the People of Flint" lists facts that give you chills when thinking of the magnitude of the Flint water crisis. The poisonous water contains toxic concentrations of lead that may have claimed the lives of at least ten people who perished due to Legionnaires' disease. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), drinking water should contain zero ppb (parts per billion) of lead. Detroit water has 2.3 ppb, but a research team from Virginia Tech took samples of household water in Flint that averaged more than 100 ppb. In a second study, the team found at least one house where the water contained over 13,000 ppb of lead (5,000 ppb or more

qualifies it as toxic waste).

Old people and the young are among those most at risk. Lead poisoning can lead to severe and irreversible traumas: high blood pressure, abdominal pain, constipation, joint pain, decline in mental functioning, headache and memory loss are among the potential effects. Pregnant women may suffer premature births or miscarriages. Babies and young children suffer learning difficulties as well as developmental delay and hearing loss.

After almost three years of official denials that Flint's drinking water was unsafe, by the end of 2015 the evidence was irrefutable, and the distribution of bottled water started. On January 16, President Obama declared a state of emergency to provide a ridiculously low \$5 million in federal aid. That's less than a 20-day supply of bottled water for the 425,000 residents of the Flint metropolitan area, assuming that the federal government can get it at half price from the water profiteers. But the water mains are still contaminated. Meanwhile, residents have to scramble to get the free water pro-

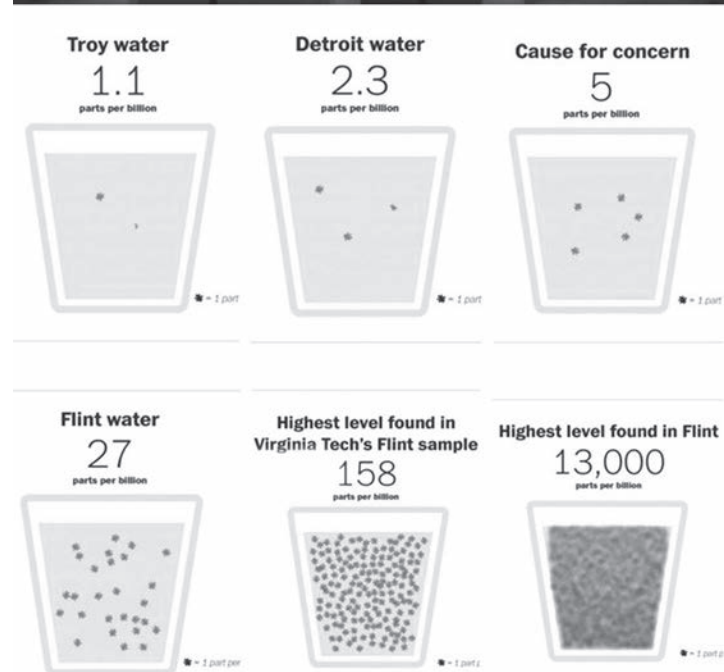
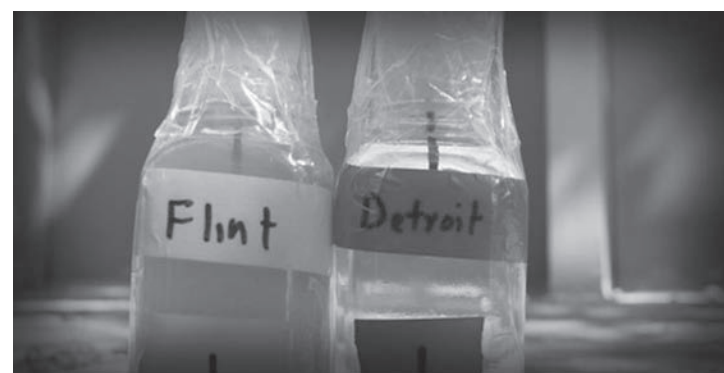
vided by the state government and Red Cross, or buy water at the local stores (if they can find any), which of course is sold retail at high prices.

On January 20, Obama visited Detroit in conjunction with the North American International Auto Show held at the Cobo Center. That same day, Detroit teachers called for mass sick-outs to protest deplorable conditions in schools, including mold, broken windows, an infestation of roaches and even rats. There is also a lack of computers, and textbooks for teachers to work with are scarce. Some 100 schools shut down that day as teachers in Detroit denounced the fact that they have not had an increase in their wages in ten years.

There is a direct connection to Flint: the same Darnell Earley who brought in poisoned water is today the state-appointed emergency manager of Detroit schools!

While Obama was inside the glitzy auto show eyeballing the latest models, teachers on the steps of Cobo Center called for a "full strike," not just a one-day affair. The *Detroit Free Press* reported that the reaction of the state government following the massive sick-outs was to punish teachers with fines of a day's pay and \$5,000 for each additional day or partial day of missed classes. The following week, Detroit students decided to walk out of class in support of their teachers. They were hit with five-day suspensions. Students at Communications and Media Arts High School, Cass Tech and Renais-

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It's Not Just the "Banksters," It's the Capitalist System

By Rose

The 2008 financial crisis affected millions of people worldwide. In the United States, where the crisis broke out, according to the government some 8.7 million people lost their jobs (although the real figure is more than double that). At least 7 million people lost their homes. Economists considered it the worst national financial crash since the Great Depression. Everyday workers were startled by this crash, and it seemed as if no one had anticipated it. The movie *The Big Short*, directed by Adam McKay, attempts to dramatize and, to some extent, explain the financial crisis, and how some anticipated the crash.

The film is certainly worth seeing. It shows some of the devastation caused by the crisis, it gives a feel for the inner workings of Wall Street, and it ignites real indignation at the greed and indifference of the finance sector. But it is a Hollywood movie, and the chain of events is explained from a very liberal standpoint. Yes, the bankers and speculators were as fraudulent and greedy as imaginable. But the economic crisis was not just due to the shady practices of particular companies, or some magical secret that a few people were able to figure out. In fact, there was a clear and sinister logic to it. Liberals think economic crises happen because of flaws in the system; Marxists explain that they are inevitable products of the capitalist system. The 2008 economic crisis was due to the workings of capitalism itself.

A Financial House of Cards

The Big Short, based on the exposé of the '08 Wall Street crash with the same title by Michael Lewis, with A-list stars such as Brad Pitt, Ryan Gosling, Christian Bale and Steve Carell, builds a story around main characters Michael Burry and Mark Baum. With a few other financial operators, they bet against the finance giants' hype about an ever-rising market fueled by speculation. These characters are on a journey in the years before 2008 to detect when and how the crash will occur. Thus the film provides some insight into the logistics of the housing market.

We're introduced in the beginning to Lewis Ranieri, the man who made banking "sexy" in the late 1970s, in other words much more profitable and exciting. He did this by introducing "mortgage-backed securities," a form of investment that made it easier to speculate in the housing market, particularly

Review of *The Big Short*



Key scene in *The Big Short* where Jared Vennett (at right) shows how tower of collateralized mortgage-back securities bundling low-rated (BBB) with prime (AAA) securities could collapse.



when mortgages were bundled together for higher profits. Soon the film introduces Michael Burry, played by actor Christian Bale, who obsessively reads thousands of pages of loan records. This leads him to observe that while the number of loans was dramatically rising, people were increasingly falling behind on their payments. Declaring that the housing market was certain to crash, he invests several hundred million dollars betting against the housing market.

We see other characters do the same as they try to profit from something they think no one else has discovered. Among them is Jared Vennett, played by Ryan Gosling, who makes the rounds of finance firms trying to convince them to fund his scheme for betting against the market. This is how we are introduced to Mark Baum, played by Steve Carell, a sympathetic character enraged by the frauds Wall Street imposes on "the little guy." Baum is able to extract information from a number of full-of-themselves wolves driven by blinding greed.

Lastly we meet two friends, Charlie Geller and Jamie Shipley, who have a small "garage business" investment company and are not even allowed to pitch their ideas to big Wall Street firms because they do not have an ISDA (International Swaps and Derivatives Association) agreement. In order for them to even speak to the big players, they must have this agreement, which means they would have accumulated millions to *billions* in profits. The two young partners get the help of Ben Rickert, played by Brad Pitt, who has retired from Wall Street in total disgust with the industry. Having the Wall Street connections to make deals happen, he helps them bet against the housing market.

So why were all of these characters so certain that the housing market would crash, so much so that they were willing to invest millions and millions of dollars in betting against it? We are given a number of reasons. When banks were bundling mortgages together for bigger profits, they started need-

ing more loans to put into these bundles. That is when "subprime" mortgages were added to the mix. These are mortgages unlikely to be paid off, which banks invested in to pad out the bundles, thinking that if necessary they could just take back the mortgaged land or business and sell it off. But as subprime loans increased, banks started to bundle the lowest-rated ("triple-B") mortgages along with a few top-rated loans, labeling the whole bundle as "triple-A," the most secure and profitable type of mortgage. Then by bundling bundles of mortgages, the banks speculated massively in "credit debt obligations" (CDOs). The percentage of subprime mortgages kept growing.

Yet even in the mid-2000s the housing market did not crash. The banks continued to bundle and hide their mislabeled mortgages at an ever-higher rate. Adding to the chaos were "synthetic CDOs," based on insurance payments from "credit default swaps" (CDSs), a kind of insurance policy on defaulted CDOs. Yes, it makes your eyes cross. These financial sharks were betting on bets about bets and the chain of betting would continue through many steps, creating billions of dollars of "synthetic" profit – or what Karl Marx called "fictitious capital." These bets created much more revenue than the actual mortgages, which were defaulting due to their unstable foundation. Synthetic CDOs went from \$15 billion to \$61 billion in one year, then jumped to an eventual \$5 trillion in profits at the end of 2006.

Alligators and Casinos

The bankers and real-estate speculators were betting with the lives and livelihoods

of millions of people. The film symbolizes this by showing families evicted and living out of their cars, while a rampaging alligator has taken over the dried-up swimming pool in an abandoned Florida housing development.

The Big Short tries to explain how it could be possible that those engaged in this frenzied profiteering would think it would never end, let alone crash. The actress Selena Gomez appears in a cameo to provide an analogy. She's in a casino betting, and finds herself on a winning streak. People gather around the popular star, wanting in on the excitement. Thinking she'll keep winning through the next few rounds, they bet in her favor.

While this analogy might have some basis, we know the ugly truth that the banks were able to play with so many people's lives because they knew they would get away with it, because the capitalist system exists to serve the capitalist class. And get away with it they did. When the crash finally occurred in 2008, the banks were bailed out by the federal government.

The Big Short points out that virtually no one was arrested for what the film depicts as a giant shell game. The impact fell on the everyday people whose jobs were lost and whose homes were torn away; on the poor and the working class, while sectors of the middle class were newly pushed down into poverty. It was all labeled an "accident," an unexpected occurrence. Yet the film clearly shows the crash was far from an accident. Those who bet on it occurring – like the protagonists of the film – were trying to profit from it. And the big banks that fueled the speculation profited handsomely even as the market crashed.

So the bankers won and the working class and big chunks of the middle class took the hit, losing jobs and homes. By 2009 there were a whopping *19 million homes sitting vacant* due to foreclosures or because no one could afford to buy them. The bank bailout authorized by Congress known as the "Troubled Assets Relief Program" totaled \$700 billion. And the government kept on shoveling huge sums to the banks to keep them solvent, to the tune of *over 7 trillion dollars*. The government passed what is known as the "Dodd-Frank Law," which asks for more transparency in banking transactions. What this law basically amounts to is nothing. It does not even establish any actual protection from fraudulent bank activities. And at the end of *The Big Short*, Mark Baum recognizes that he and the rest of the movie's "heroes" were just profiting from the crisis while those who suffered its effects were not going to be helped in any way. Thus we see how corporate America works.

The message behind the movie is that the driving force of the economic collapse was a huge scam. Liberals blame the crash on unscrupulous financial speculators, the "banksters." And there was plenty of criminality involved. But the endless "bubbles" (as actress Margot Robbie details in the movie in a bubble bath) are not the result of some con game, but due to the workings of a decaying capitalist system that fuels rampant speculation. And those who actually made bundles

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Revolution



October 2011 march against police attack on Occupy Wall Street protests.

New Mexico Students Show the Way to Fight the Common Core

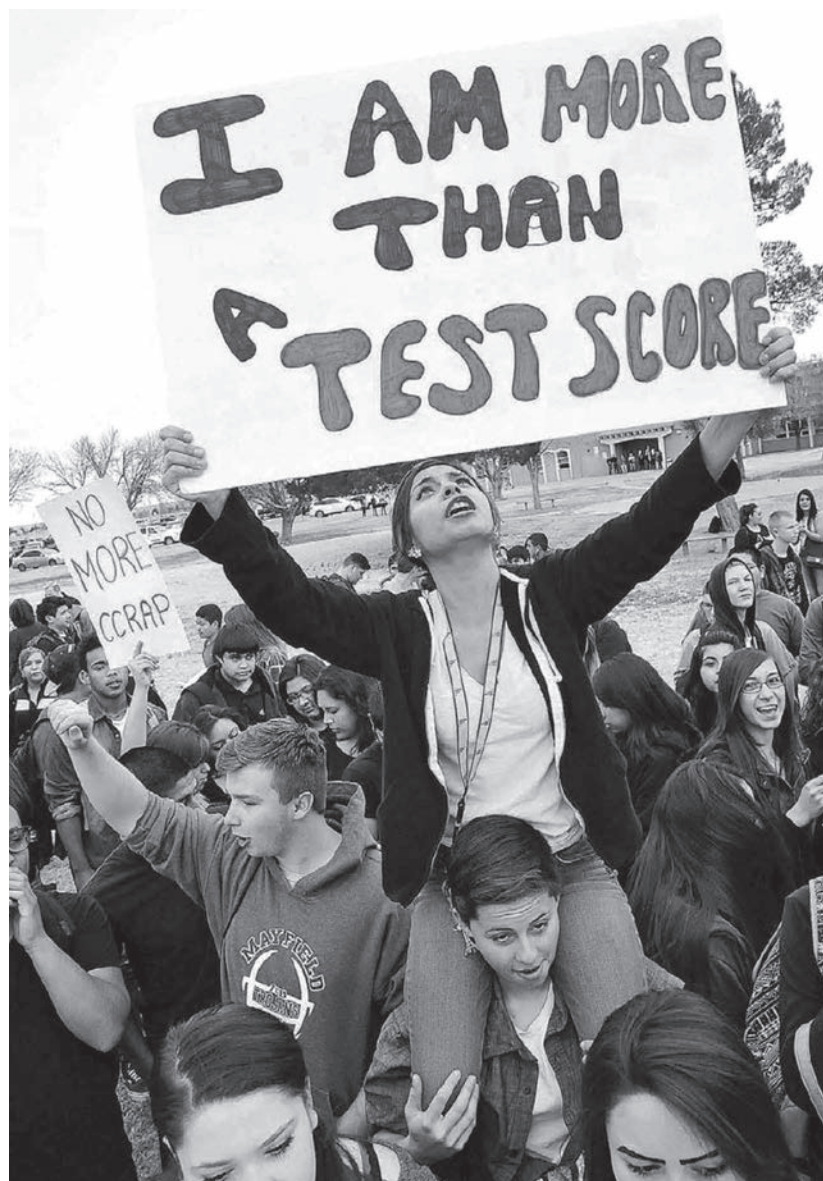
By Yari

For the past four years, public schools around the country have been beset by a plague called the “Common Core.” Released in 2012, it is supposed to determine what should be taught by teachers and learned by students at every grade level from kindergarten to eighth grade, and on key subjects up through high school. To enforce it, huge amounts of testing have been imposed, which will decide which students will go forward or be held back. The authorities also want this to determine teachers’ pay, and make it possible to fire educators based on students’ test scores. This scheme has been pushed by governments and education authorities from Obama’s White House down to local school boards. In the name of “standards,” it aims to regiment schools for the needs of capital, and to break teachers unions.

The Common Core is bad news for just about everyone involved in education: students, teachers, parents, even many school administrators are against it. It’s a bonanza for the textbook and testing monopolies, but it doesn’t advance education and instead dumbs it down to skills training. Elite private schools won’t touch it. The question is how to fight it. So far, the response of many educators has been “opt-out” initiatives where parents ask for their children to be exempted from the tests. Last year this caught on in a number of states, leading some politicians to change their tune. But what’s needed is a program to ditch the Common Core altogether. A year ago, New Mexico students pointed the way.

Thousands of students walked out of their respective high schools in New Mexico in March 2015 protesting against high-stakes testing. Threatened with suspensions and unexcused absences, students from a number of Albuquerque high schools, including Highland, South Valley, Rio Grande, Del Norte, Volcano Vista and Sandia, as well as Capital High in Santa Fe and schools in Las Cruces, Rio Rancho and elsewhere around the state organized the walk-out via social media. On the day of the exams they flooded school parking lots, streets and highways to defend their right to a public education and testing that reflects their school curriculum (*Albuquerque Journal*, 2 March and *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 3 March 2015).

They were objecting to the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) exam which has been made a graduation requirement. Signs read, “Testing is Not Teaching,” “We Have a Say in our Education,” and “PARCC is Stealing our Class Time.” Student protesters chanted, “No more PARCC!” and “More than a score!” in defiance of this latest attack on public education. Vanessa Alcala of South Valley Academy said, “We decided, in order to get awareness, we need to group up with other



High-school students in Las Cruces protest PARCC tests, March 2015.

schools.” And group up they did.

School officials told students that they should instead write letters to state education officials. A lot of good that would do. “We’ve written petitions, we’ve shown up at the Roundhouse [New Mexico’s state capitol where the legislature meets] to speak to them, and they haven’t listened yet. We still have the PARCC test. It’s going on right now, so we know they haven’t listened to us,” said Maya Quiñones, a senior at Albuquerque High School, on the day of the walkout. Hundreds of students walked out again on the second day of the testing.

As corporate America has shown us, those with big bucks care very little as to what is fair and unfair when it comes to their gains and benefits, especially at the expense of others. In this case, students’ futures and teachers’ livelihoods are now dependent upon an exam that isn’t given to teachers beforehand, so students and teachers cannot prepare for it. Teachers are at risk, since in New Mexico their evaluations and employment depend on student test scores.

New Mexico currently has one of the largest Common Core Program contracts in the United States, valued at over \$1 billion. The Pearson publishing and testing monopoly is behind the PARCC exam. They not only prepare the test, they publish the textbooks and classroom study material, and outsource the grading as well as (in some cases) teacher evaluations.

What the New Mexico students did is an important

first step. To defeat the regimentation, corporatization and privatization of public education, this mass walkout cannot remain an isolated incident, it is going to require the *national* leadership of teachers, students and workers.

Big \$\$\$ in the Education Industry

What’s a trillion-dollar business in the United States that corporate America can dig its grubby fingers into? *Public education*. After the capitalist economic crisis of 2008 when factories closed, banks went bankrupt and the stock market crashed, high-risk investors saw the need for a guaranteed cash flow as a backstop. Hence the push to climb aboard the money train that is public education. Suddenly hedge funds were financing charter schools. And, as noted before, all at the expense of students and teachers.

The “Common Core State Standards” testing regime centers on a national exam created by one David Coleman. Its key goal is preparation of the next generation of workers for a life as wage slaves. That means getting used to the “discipline” of institutional oppression. It also determines what is taught. Coleman famously remarked that “people really don’t give a shit about what you feel or what you think,” saying employers are interested in “market analyses” rather than a “compelling account of your childhood.” So much for teaching creative writing.

The ruling class (the bourgeoisie) obviously does not care to have a critically thinking working class that challenges exploitation. What the bosses want is a better training system of labor skills through public education. The new emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education in the classroom has led to cutting back liberal arts programs, particularly in inner-city schools. This directly impacts poor, black, brown and white working-class communities and families.

The working class and oppressed need high-quality technical and scientific education in the modern world. But the Common Core is not designed for educating future engineers and architects requiring complex and innovative thought. The corporate education reformers push bubble tests in order to churn out technicians who can follow check lists to keep the machines running.

The federal government has no rights to enforce Common Core testing or any education program. So instead the government offers schools money for implementing these tests through Obama’s Race to the Top program. And what schools are most in need of such funds? Not suburban “country club” schools, but impoverished urban schools with little funds whose students are overwhelmingly African American, Latino, Asian and working-class.

The push for corporate education “reform” started long before Barack Obama, who’s shown the public how much he cares about black and brown people by deporting over 2.5 million undocumented immigrants and referring to Baltimore protesters as “thugs.” In the 1980s, teacher unions were attacked and school budgets were cut left and right because “schools weren’t performing well” due to “bad teachers.” Anti-union rhetoric was popularized, reflecting ideologies corresponding to the needs of capital.

In 1992, Benno Schmidt, who happens to be the current head of the Board of Trustees at CUNY, resigned from Yale University to become a founder of Edison Schools to run public schools for private profit. Schmidt’s angle was for Edison to run whole school systems with government funds. But the schools eventually went bankrupt because there was little money to be made off of poor communities. Way to go, Benno!

Although the Edison plan failed, the money men on Wall Street figured out that grabbing parts of the huge education budget was profitable. So they came up with charter schools, which are privately managed using public money.



Students in Albuquerque’s South Valley walked over test mania, 3 March 2015.



Students occupy high school slated for closing in São Paulo, Brazil last November. They also refused to take high-stakes test. The schools stayed open.

Vendors were able to sell programs for all material and testing, thus “raising standards” and, of course, taking away from teachers. In order to go after teachers unions they came up with “merit pay”: make teachers’ salaries and job security depend on “productivity” (test scores) instead of a union contract. And now we have the Common Core, where a single company produces the script for scripted learning, publishes the texts, designs the tests, and then grades them. Hello, corporate dictatorship.

Even though this represents an existential threat, teachers union bureaucrats are afraid to take on the government and a ruling class that stands united on this issue. So the American Federation of Teachers, and its New York local, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), don’t oppose Common Core testing, they only suggest amendments to tweak it. Reform groups within the union, like the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE), push “opting out.” But this is problematic from a class standpoint: parents in poor working-class areas are reluctant to opt out because they worry it could hurt their child’s chance of getting into college. Many suburban middle-class families, on the other hand, opt out because they know top colleges pay little attention to those exams.

Cure for the Common Core: Mobilizing Our Power Against the State

Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW) and the Internationalist Group oppose the UFT’s support for the Common Core testing regime and stress that instead of impotently “opting out,” working people have the power to defeat the *international* assault on public education and teachers unions if educators, students, staff and parents work together. An article in *The Internationalist* (special issue, June 2012) reported that teachers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil repeatedly stopped work to prevent high-stakes exams from being carried out. This past December, a CSEW leaflet told how students in Brazil’s largest city, São Paulo, occupied schools slated for closing and refused to participate in high-stakes tests.

In Mexico, teachers in the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca and Guerrero refused to give standardized tests. In Michoacán they went a step further and posted union guards at the warehouses to make sure the test booklets never left. This fall, the militant National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (CNTE) boycotted a “punitive exam” of teachers’ knowledge. This is the

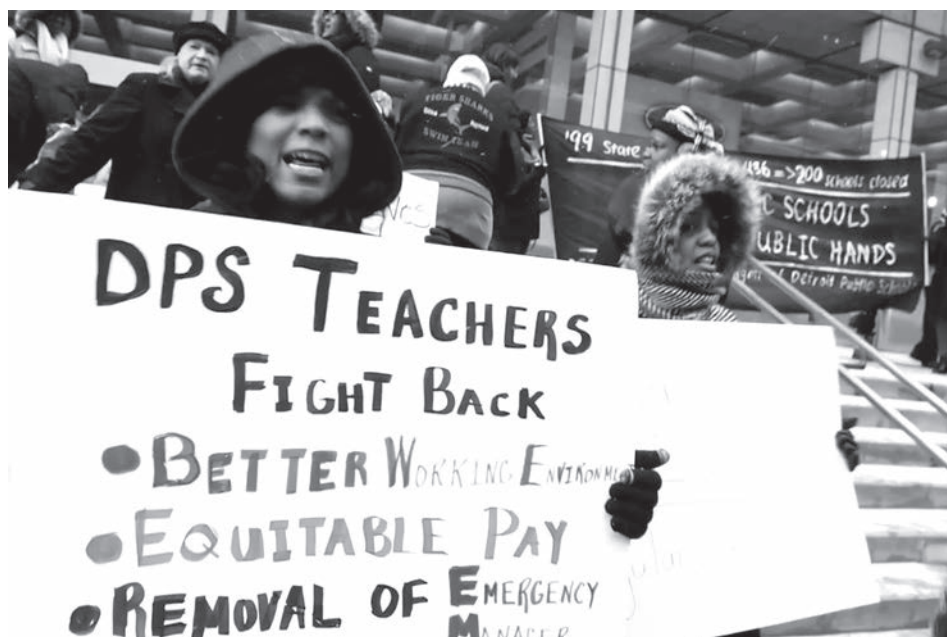
kind of mass mobilization that is required to smash the high-stakes testing and the privatization, corporatization and regimentation of public education. But it means going up against the capitalist state. In late February, the CNTE in Oaxaca struck and shut down classes for over a million students the day the government announced the firing of several thousand teachers.

We can do it here, and students can help take the lead. In the fall of 2014, we reported “Colorado Students Protest Censoring of History, Attacks on Teachers” (*Revolution* No. 11, December 2014). A few months later the New Mexico students walked out over PARCC. The state Public Education Department is still claiming that students are legally required to take the exams. But no doubt in response to the student unrest, and parent objections in school board meetings, last fall the Albuquerque Public Schools prepared an “an online ‘opt-out kit’ detailing how parents can pull their children from standardized testing” (Kim Burgess, “APS board supportive of testing exemptions,” *Albuquerque Journal*, 17 September).

In addition, the Albuquerque Teachers Federation filed a lawsuit against teacher evaluations connected to high-stakes PARCC tests that would count for a whopping 50% of teacher performance. In December, a partial injunction was granted against the system. The battle between the teachers union and the state comes to a head in April, when final court decisions are to be made. Meanwhile, PARCC tests are still currently in effect in New Mexico.

Capitalist attacks on public education are nothing new, and as history shows us, it is going to take more than an opt-out option to do away with the vicious attack on students and teachers. Specifically it will take a massive upsurge of students, parents, teachers unions and workers to defend against the capitalist onslaught. From New York City, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs stand with the students and teachers of New Mexico. The system that seeks to milk public education for profits is the same system that hikes CUNY tuition every year, militarizes our schools and has refused to negotiate a new contract for horribly low-paid adjuncts in six years.

As the rulers seek to remake public education to serve the whims of the bourgeoisie and the interests of capital, we vehemently insist that *free, quality public education from pre-K to post-grad* is the *right* of every person. To win and defend that right, we call on students, teachers and workers to wage a class fight for power! ■



Detroit teachers protest on steps of Cobo Hall while President Obama is inside ogling fancy cars, January 20.

Flint Water...

continued from page 3

sance High School walked out anyway, saying they were prepared to take the suspensions. Their complaints also included overcrowded classrooms.

Among those placed in grave danger in the Flint water crisis are black families, as well as white workers and many Latinos. There are an estimated 1,000 undocumented immigrants living in the Flint area, mainly from Mexico. According to a January 25 story on the Fusion network, a number of immigrants report that they have been denied the free bottled water as officials demanded driver’s licenses or state IDs, which they don’t have. Many immigrants are also extra-cautious in answering the door when Red Cross workers knock, knowing that this January the Obama administration carried out deportations of 2,000 people who had fled the violence in Central America.

Democrats and Republicans: Partners in Crime

Now the Democrats are trying to capitalize on the Flint crisis. Both Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders have visited the city, and on March 6 the two Democratic presidential primary candidates will hold a debate there. But the Democratic Party is also culpable. The regional director of Obama’s EPA sharply rebuked the Flint mayor when he wrote her last June asking for information about lead in the city’s water. He was informed in so many words that he would be told when they were good and ready, and not before. The EPA administrator has now resigned.

Neither the Democratic nor the Republican parties of the bourgeoisie work for the oppressed and the working people. Their job is to protect the interests of the capitalist class – the same class that poisoned people in Flint and that implements austerity measures that hit the children of the working class hardest, consigning them to under-funded schools, subjecting them to regimented and scripted education and with little prospect of good jobs. The CUNY Internationalist Clubs salute Flint residents and Detroit teachers for their courageous actions in confronting the state government. At the same time, we recognize that the problems they face go much deeper.

The use of state-appointed managers in Michigan cities is certainly a racist measure

by the Republican-controlled state government. This is overwhelmingly directed at cities and towns with African American majorities, from Detroit and Flint to Benton Harbor. But these cities have been devastated by the collapse of Midwestern industry, which has been facilitated by the North American Free Trade Agreement but at bottom reflects decaying capitalism. Austerity policies have been implemented by *both* the major capitalist parties, Democrats and Republicans alike, under Barack Obama and Bill Clinton as well as George Bush and Rick Snyder.

We need to mobilize working people, the poor and oppressed against this system which is not only exploiting but literally poisoning us. The unions, which once were strong in Flint and Detroit, are a shadow of their former selves, crippled by a sellout bureaucracy that is beholden to the bosses, and didn’t lift a finger against the closing of the auto factories. But they are still the mass organizations of the workers. UAW Locals 598 and 599 in Flint have denounced the water crisis, helped distribute bottled water and called for demonstrations. But much more is needed.

The hard-hit population of Flint must not stand alone. The unions should take the lead in kicking out the “emergency managers” and their dictatorial control. Beyond such basic issues of democratic rights, the central issue in Flint is *which class is in power*. The civil rights movement made some legal gains, but the capitalist ruling class continues to segregate us in barrios and ghettos, creating inequality with its exploitation, and denying human needs such as water. Around the world, capitalist monopolies are seeking to privatize this basic resource, “branding” water and cutting off supplies to the poor of this necessity of life.

We can only conclude that the parties of capital, who are responsible for this disaster, must be ousted by the working people who produce all the wealth but receive crumbs in exchange. As Marxists, we call for the working class and oppressed people to take the lead in driving out the parties and the class that not only “manage” the crisis but created it in the first place. We need a workers party to lead the class struggle for socialist revolution, here and internationally, to uproot the capitalist system that keeps on oppressing us and poisoning our futures. ■

Like what you’re reading? Get in touch:
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“Million Student March”: Pressuring Democrats Is a Dead End Getting an Education Seems Almost Impossible? It’s the Capitalist System!

The following leaflet by the CUNY Internationalist Clubs was distributed at the November 12 “Million Student March” at Hunter College.

A year ago, tens of thousands of young people (and many not-so-young) of all races were in the streets night after night protesting racist police killings. Those protests came to an abrupt stop last December. This is the case even though cops are killing civilians at an even higher rate (1,020 in 2015, as of November 9) – remember Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Sandra Bland in Texas and so many others? Why has the “movement” died out? Liberal organizers would not take on the whole apparatus of racist repression, and there is no solution to cop terror under capitalism.

Now we have the Million Student March targeting the high cost of tuition, student debt and low-wage jobs. The issues are real. These are burning questions for millions of young people struggling to get an education, free themselves of debt servitude and make a living in the middle of a continuing economic depression. The official demands – tuition-free public college, cancellation of all student debt, \$15 minimum wage for campus workers – are supportable in themselves. But why is this coming up now? Because election season has begun – for elections a year from now! – and this latest would-be movement is designed to pressure the Democrats.

Look at the context: at the beginning of the year, President Obama calls to make community college free, sort of. In May, Vermont senator Bernie Sanders, the de facto Democrat who calls himself a “democratic socialist,” introduces a bill for free undergraduate tuition at public colleges while liberal Massachusetts senator Elizabeth Warren puts forward resolutions calling for eliminating student debt. In August, Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton introduces a trillion-dollar plan to “help” undergrads pay for tuition (including by working more, and getting “realistic” contributions from their families!).

The truth is, the Million Student March organizers are acting as student auxiliaries of the Sanders campaign, to put heat on Clinton and get students to vote for the Dems in 2016, like many did in 2008 for Obama.

But like the endless racist police killings of African American men, and women, and Latinos, the root cause of endless tuition hikes, the burden of unpayable student debt, the low-wage, dead-end jobs that don’t even pay the bills is the capitalist system. Revolutionaries demand that college be free, and that the private colleges should be taken over and made public with no tuition there. The Internationalist Clubs at the City University of New York say:

“We fight for free, integrated higher education for all; for open admissions with no tuition and living stipends so working-class students can afford to study.... We say abolish the Board of Trustees. CUNY should be run by democratically elected committees of students, teachers and workers.”

But we also tell the hard truth: that capitalism is decaying, and it will take hardcore



Contingent of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs at November 12 Hunter College rally of Million Student March.

struggle, based on the power of the working class and leading to a revolution, to get this. Pressuring the Democrats is a dead end.

Education is a class issue. There is a virulent assault on public education underway by all sectors of the ruling class, including the same Democrats who are talking free tuition in their campaign rhetoric. Notably Obama who has spearheaded the attack on teachers unions, and Clinton and their big business backers. Hillary Clinton was on the board of the poverty-wage giant Walmart, and has founded \$5-a-day sweatshops in Haiti. And she isn’t about to drive a stake into the heart of the student loan vampires, because those are the same Wall Street bankers and hedge fund operators who have funded her (and Obama).

CUNY makes a lot of noise about how it’s oh-so-affordable, that with federal Pell grants and state TAP funds 58% of its students don’t pay tuition, that its tuition is lower than most state colleges, that its students have less debt than others. First off, it fudges its figures. It claims that 2010 Hunter College grads only have \$7,500 in student debt. But a *New York Times* student loan calculator says average student debt at Hunter is almost double that, \$13,000. And while many poor students are able to get tuition aid, and well-off middle-class families may be able to afford the tuition, who can’t? Students from working-class families, and the 250,000 attending CUNY part-time because they have to work full-time at jobs are not eligible for that aid.

So why do we say the Million Student March is an auxiliary of the Sanders campaign? Just look who its supporters are (<http://studentmarch.org/who-supports-millionstudentmarch/>): College Students for Bernie, Millennials for Bernie, Seattle Colleges for Bernie Sanders, Students for Bernie Sanders at Northeastern, Pitt, Binghamton, University of Oregon. And then there are Socialist Alternative (SAIt) and Young Democratic Socialists, two social-democratic outfits that most blatantly sidle up to Sanders (although many on the left are playing the same game, just pretending to keep a little more distance from their favorite Democrat).

The Million Student March demands bear

a striking resemblance not only to the economic populism pushed by Sanders but to specific planks from his platform. The chances of this being a coincidence are nil. The organizers’ strategy is clearly to pressure, coax, lobby and beg the Democrats. A real fight for free tuition must be a struggle against the capitalist government and its “two-headed property party” of Democrats and Republicans.

The assault on public education? In fact, it’s led by the Democratic Party from the White House on down. Not only that, Obama’s vice president Joe Biden “has played a consistent and pivotal role in the financial industry’s four-decade campaign to make it harder for students to shield themselves and their families from creditors” and was “one of the key proponents” of 2005 legislation that prevents private student debt from being “discharged, rescheduled or renegotiated as other debt can be in bankruptcy court” (*International Business Times*, 15 September).

What about the fight for a big raise in the minimum wage for campus workers? \$15 an hour would be an improvement for some, but it is way less than what people actually need in order to make ends meet in New York City. On Tuesday, there was a big “Fight for \$15” march in Foley Square. Signs said “Vote for \$15.” How? The message is to vote for the Democrats. Other signs said, “Thank You Governor Cuomo,” and the lead speaker was ... Democrat Cuomo, the same one who wants to make it easier to fire teachers, who has slashed CUNY’s budget and who sabotaged the New York State Dream Act for undocumented students.

And student debt? At CUNY, quite a few undergrads go into debt (despite the university’s boastful subway ads), while grad students are frequently drowning in it. Nationwide the figures are staggering: \$1.9 trillion in outstanding education-related loans (surpassing credit-card debt), of which 23% is “seriously delinquent” (*USA Today*, 23 August).

Definitely this debt should all be cancelled – but how is that going to happen? Certainly not through supporting the Democrats! The idea that the capitalists would agree to student debt being cancelled is obviously unrealistic: for them, massive

indebtedness is another wonderful way to subjugate us to their merciless profit system, all the more so when we’re talking trillions. A real fight against that debt poses the need to sweep away the profit system itself – in other words, the need for workers revolution.

All too many “leftists” avoid stating such facts, trumpeting the Million Student March but keeping quiet about the need to oppose the Democratic Party. It’s a classic case of what Marxists call opportunism – go with the flow to try to get some temporary advantage. Some, like Socialist Alternative, enthuse endlessly over “Bernie,” helping him spread the lie that he is some kind of “socialist.” Others (like the International Socialist Organization) ask Sanders to please run as an “independent” on the slate of the Greens or some similar capitalist mini-party.

Then we have the Revolutionary Student Coordinating Committee (RSCC) and groups it influences such as Students Without Borders (SWB). RSCC put out a leaflet for the November 12 march whose title says “WE DEMAND A TUITION FREEZE...” Wait a minute – freeze, not abolish, tuition? This is well to the right of the official march demand for tuition-free public college (which, to hedge all bets, is included in the RSCC leaflet’s fine print). RSCC leaflets shy away from attacking Sanders, Clinton and the Democrats – in accordance with the Maoist “mass line” (watering your ostensible politics down in pursuit of coalitions with liberals).

This is summed up in vapid populist ditties about “CUNY for the People,” which could come from one of those CUNY subway ads. Meanwhile Hunter SWB spreads dangerous illusions in the administration, demanding that it pursue “more aggressive tactics” against “harassment on campuses.” Hello?! The Hunter administration used just this kind of argument as an excuse to turn the campus into a mini police state, putting in turnstiles “against crime” (even though its own “public safety” reports showed virtually no violent crimes on campus). They did this during a wave of student protest, in order to seal the campus off and subject it to more complete police control.

Reformists like SAIt pose the issue of starvation wages as a photo op for Democrats, revolutionaries emphasize that it must be waged as a class struggle against the capitalists and their politics aimed at keeping the workers and oppressed chained to the system of exploitation. Talking about unity when they want to “unite” with bourgeois politicians is a hallmark of every kind of social-democratic and Stalinist politics. Any serious struggle requires above all political clarity, the need to take a clear stand: for or against the parties, politicians and institutions of this racist capitalist system.

We Marxists would back real reforms that made a dent in this misery, but we tell the truth: the ruthless rule of the capitalist class, which subordinates everything to its profits, cannot be reformed away. Seeking to evade such central class questions, or posing “student issues” as somehow separate from

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From Ferguson to NYC, Only Revolution Can Bring Justice

Mizzou Football Team Takes a Stand With Mass Protests Against Racism

By Cora and Steph

The University of Missouri (popularly known as Mizzou) got national attention last November 2015 when its football team went on strike in support of students protesting racism on campus. The protestors were enraged by the university administration's dismissive response to recent racist incidents, and demanded, among other things, the resignation of university president Tim Wolfe. When a grad student began a hunger strike, the football team released a statement in support of the student protestors, stating that they would not participate in any football activities until Wolfe resigned or was removed from office.

The courageous action by the athletes could have cost the university \$1 million for just one missed game. Since universities, including public universities, are first of all a big business, this finally got the attention of the "curators" who oversee this "institution of higher learning" on behalf of capital. The day after he had vowed to stay, Wolfe resigned. But while the team's stand grabbed headlines, it was a product of several months of intensified protests at Mizzou, as well as of the upheaval in nearby Ferguson over the cop murder of Michael Brown.

In a society so deeply rooted in the oppression of African Americans, this victory alone can hardly be expected put an end to racism at Mizzou. The university administration, representing the interests of the ruling class, is incapable of dealing with this. Nor has the U.S. government done anything to end the racist police terror that has sparked waves of protest in recent years. The Ferguson protests in 2014, in which hundreds faced off against a militarily armed police force and National Guard, illustrated full well that for the government "black lives don't matter." The capitalist state responds to an anguished and outraged black population with brutal force, while killer cops face no consequences for cold-blooded murders of young men and children.

A particularly clear example of the

bourgeoisie's control over higher education, President Wolfe was a business executive, brought in to cut costs at the university. A former board member said of Wolfe that he had "thoughtfully transformed our strategic planning process in a way that focuses our limited resources on priorities while reducing or eliminating waste and redundancies." Apparently, "waste and redundancies" included funding for the University of Missouri Press, as well as health insurance for graduate teaching and research assistants, which Wolfe tried to cancel before facing heavy backlash from students and faculty.

Protests against the administration took on a new dimension when the graduate students who had been organizing to win back their healthcare joined forces with students speaking up against racism on campus and the "knee-jerk" response from administrators. This was touched off by a Facebook post made by student government president Payton Head, who expressed frustration at the bigotry he regularly encounters at school, including an incident in which a group of people driving by on a pickup truck repeatedly hurled the n-word at him.

Some weeks later, a meeting of Mizzou's Legion of Black Collegians was interrupted by a drunken white student using the same racial slur. While Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin issued a statement calling for "diversity training," students were unsatisfied. On October 10, a small group of protestors blocked president Wolfe's car during the homecoming parade, Wolfe



Founding members of Concerned Student 1950 speak to supporters at University of Missouri on November 9, the day after university president resigned after weeks of protests over racism.

reportedly "smiled and laughed," and police forcibly removed the protestors as the car continued to move, striking graduate student activist Jonathan Butler.

The protest group named itself Concerned Student 1950, a reference to the year in which the university accepted its first black student. The group then issued a list of demands, among them: Tim Wolfe's resignation and a public apology; appointment of future presidents and chancellors by students, faculty and staff; an increase in the percentage of black faculty and staff to 10%; and a 10-year plan to "increase retention rates for marginalized students, sustain diversity curriculum and training, and promote a more safe and inclusive campus."

Racist incidents at the university continued. On October 24, a swastika was found smeared in feces on one of the school's dormitories. The "too little, too late" response of the administration prompted further outcry and indignation. Following this, Wolfe met with members

of Concerned Student 1950, but agreed to none of their demands. Student activist Butler announced that he would begin a hunger strike. In his letter to the U.M. curators, Butler linked Wolfe's stance on racism to the threatened cutoff of grad students' health insurance, and the removal of Planned Parenthood services from campus. He stated his intent to stop consuming food of any kind "until either Wolfe is removed from office or my internal organs fail and my life is lost."

Still, mass student protests and the possibility of a graduate student's death were not enough to shake the academic bourgeoisie in its ivory tower. Wolfe said that he "sincerely hope[d] that Mr. Butler [would] consider a different method of advocating for this cause." Wolfe issued an apology a few days later, acknowledging the existence of racism at the school. It wasn't until the school's football team took action that the administration was

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Mizzou Tigers football team struck over racism, declaring they would not practice or play until university president resigned, 8 November 2015.



Lebron James tweeted this photo of the entire Miami Heat basketball team in hoodies protesting the murder of Trayvon Martin, March 2012.

Michael B. Thomas/Getty Images

Daniel Brenner/New York Times

Visiting the Early Soviet Photography and Film Exhibit

By Abram

A rewarding part of becoming a Marxist is experiencing some of the cultural life of our movement. This might include learning the words to “Which Side Are You On?” at a party, going to a concert where the Skarroñeros perform songs in Spanish about Mumia Abu-Jamal or the 1906 strike by Mexican miners at Cananea, a film outing, or our museum trips to see the work of leftist New York artists of the 1930s and the Museo del Barrio’s exhibit on the Puerto Rican radicals of the Young Lords Party in the late ’60s-early ’70s.

On February 7, Club members went to see “The Power of Pictures: Early Soviet Photography, Early Soviet Film.” This exhibit, showcasing a little studied aspect of the “stunning creativity” unleashed by the Russian Revolution, was shown at New York’s Jewish Museum. As a poster introducing the exhibit stated, in early Soviet Russia “a large number of the most prominent photographers, photojournalists, and filmmakers were Jewish; as members of a recently emancipated minority, they welcomed the arrival of the Soviet Union, with its promise of a new, egalitarian world.” (As a side note, it was satisfying to think how these facts about Jewish pioneers of revolutionary art would stick in the craw of today’s witch-hunters at CUNY, who try to smear leftists as anti-Jewish for exposing Israel’s oppression of the Palestinian people.) Some of us noted parallels to the Harlem Renaissance, which arose under the combined impact of African Americans’ mass migration out of the Jim Crow South plus the appeal of the Revolution to radical black artists and authors (many of them gay) like Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, who sought to combine artistic innovation with communist politics.

The early period of Soviet photography was one of ground-breaking artistic experimentation and technical innovations that would have a deep and lasting impact throughout the world.



Hunter Internationalist Club visits the exhibit at the Jewish Museum.

This included startling new angles and vantage points, new ways of cropping and combining images, and other techniques that brought out the power of photography as an art form. Some of these were used in new revolutionary magazines exclusively devoted to photography, while others were included in striking posters for films like Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin*, on the sailors’ revolt during Russia’s 1905 revolution.

One of the best parts of the exhibit consisted of early Soviet films – virtually unknown today – that were projected in a separate room. Some of us watched *The House on Trubnaya* by Boris Barnet (1928), which provides vivid material for Marxist discussions about women’s liberation, the difference between the peasantry and the urban working class, and the material basis for the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Moving to Moscow from the countryside, the film’s protagonist, a young woman named Parasha, is bewildered by city life, even sitting with her prize duck in the path of an oncoming trolley car. Soon she finds

herself shut into domestic servitude as a cleaning lady for some odious specimens of the new privileged strata that arose in the mid-1920s. It is when an idealistic woman Bolshevik recruits her to the domestic workers’ union that Parasha is drawn into social and political life and starts to experience self-confidence and pride as a woman worker.

Besieged by 14 capitalist powers, devastated by World War I and years of civil war, the Soviet workers state needed to extend the revolution internationally. Instead, in the mid-20s a nationalist and conservative caste of privileged bureaucrats usurped political power under the anti-Marxist banner of “socialism in one country.” As the introductory poster for the

exhibit noted, “The period of intense innovation was brief. By 1932, as Joseph Stalin consolidated power, independent styles were no longer tolerated; the avant-garde itself became suspect.” The stultifying doctrines of so-called “socialist realism” were imposed in photography and film as well as other arts, together with the most abject sycophancy towards Stalin at the same time as his policies led to terrible defeats for the workers in one country after another.

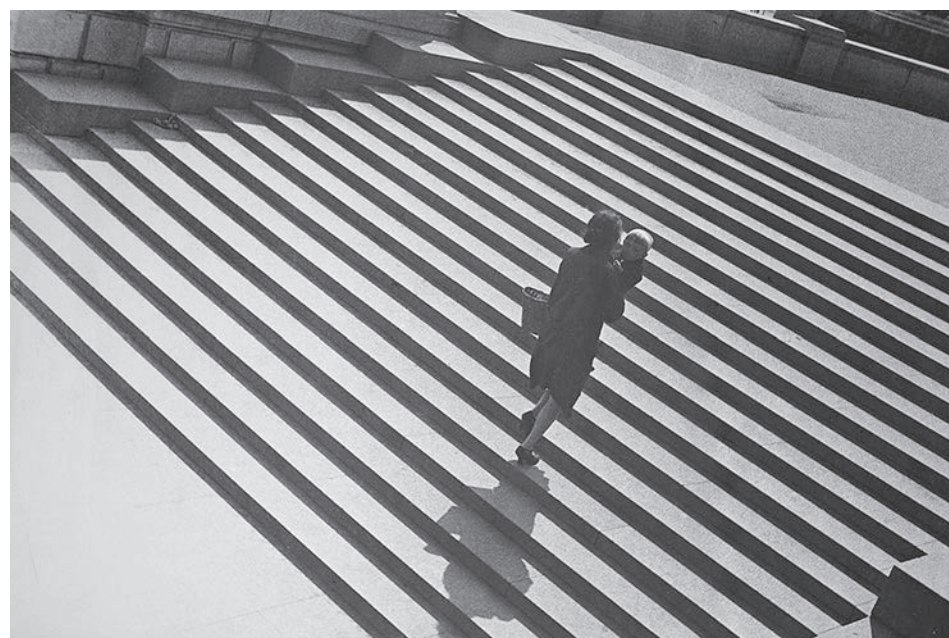
Eventually photography was used as a weapon not to raise proletarian consciousness but to further the Stalin school of falsification, in the effort to blot out the most elemental facts about the October Revolution and those who made it. (This is extensively documented in David King’s *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin’s Russia* [1997].) But the early years of the Soviet republic stand as a testament to the liberating creative power of the Bolshevik Revolution. ■



Photograph by Arkady Shaikhet of workers installing glass globe mounted on the Central Telegraph Office, Moscow (1928).



Posters advertising Sergei Eisenstein’s film *Battleship Potemkin*.



Aleksandr Rodchenko’s photograph “Stairs” (1929).

Internationalist photo

Jewish Museum

Jewish Museum



Long history of protests against racism by sports figures. Left: When world heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali (second from left in front row) was found guilty of draft evasion and stripped of his title for refusing to fight in U.S. imperialism's Vietnam War, top athletes supported him, including basketball greats Bill Russell (left) and Kareem Abdul Jabbar (right) and football legend Jim Brown (at microphone), June 1967. Right: In the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, top sprinters Tommy Smith (center) and John Carlos held up black-gloved fists in black power salute during playing of U.S. anthem. Australian runner Peter Norman solidarized with their protest, wearing anti-racism badge and criticizing his government's "White Australia" immigration policies.

Mizzou...

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forced to do more than spout empty words.

On November 7, one player posted a photo to Twitter with text that read: "The athletes of color on the University of Missouri football team truly believe 'Injustice Anywhere is a threat to Justice Everywhere.' We will no longer participate in any football related activities until President Tim Wolfe resigns or is removed due to his negligence toward marginalized students' experiences. WE ARE UNITED!!!!!" Their coach, Gary Pinkel, supported their decision. So did white players on the team.

There is precedent for such activism in sports. Because of the huge popularity of professional sports, players are in a unique position to make influential statements in the face of injustice with far-reaching impact. At the same time, and in part because of their influence, outspokenness can be very risky for athletes, and can mean the end of their careers. A legendary example is boxing great Muhammad Ali. Ali refused to fight in the Vietnam war, famously declaring "I ain't got no quarrel with the Viet Cong. No Viet Cong ever called me n---r."

This statement, succinctly and pre-

cisely cutting to the heart of the racist imperialist war, sent a powerful message. However, the bourgeois state is not one to take such criticisms lying down, especially when they come from influential figures like Ali. As the reward for his courageous statement, he was arrested, tried and found guilty of draft evasion, and stripped of his boxing title. Eventually the ruling was overturned by the Supreme Court, but not before his peak athletic years had passed. Ali's defiant statement was followed by sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos giving the black power salute of raised fists on the victory stand at the 1968 Olympics. For this grave and defiant gesture they were thrown off the U.S. team, expelled from the Olympic Village and received death threats at home.

In recent years we have seen a surge in sports protest, beginning with the protests over the racist murder of Trayvon Martin by a Florida vigilante in 2012. At the time, players of the Miami Heat photographed themselves wearing hoodies, like Trayvon wore the night he was shot, returning home after buying candy. T-shirts reading "I Can't Breathe," Eric Garner's last words as he was choked to death by the NYPD, have notably been worn by the Chicago Bulls' Derrick Rose, the Cleveland Cavaliers' LeBron James

and Kyrie Irving, the LA Lakers' Kobe Bryant, the Detroit Lions' Reggie Bush, and the Brooklyn Nets' Kevin Garnett, among others.

There has also been racist blowback. When the St. Louis Rams ran onto the field before a game with their arms raised in tribute to Michael Brown, they drew virulent criticism from the St. Louis Police Officers Association, who called the gesture "tasteless, offensive and inflammatory." They demanded disciplinary action for the players, and reminded them that "it is not the violent thugs burning down buildings that buy their advertiser's products. It's cops and the good people of St. Louis and other NFL towns that do." Spoken as true defenders of racist American capitalism.

Cleveland Browns player Andrew Hawkins received a similar response from Cleveland Police Union president Jeff Follmer when he wore a shirt that said "Justice for Tamir Rice and John Crawford." Follmer called this "pathetic" and insisted that the Cleveland police were owed an apology. The CPU defends the officers who shot and killed 12-year-old Tamir Rice and 22-year-old John Crawford (shot down in a Walmart store in a Dayton, Ohio suburb). Fortunately, neither the Rams nor Browns players have received disciplinary retaliation for their actions.

The students and athletes at Mizzou are not alone in their outrage. The growing sense of racial injustice across the country has inspired protest at many other universities as well. In November, Ithaca College students demonstrated against their own college president for turning a blind eye to racism, notably an incident in which a black alumna on a panel was referred to repeatedly as a "savage" by a fellow panelist (the chief executive of an investment firm) and the moderator (a former NBC news cor-

respondent). At Claremont McKenna College and Yale, protest and heated debate have risen up in response to racist Halloween costumes.

But calling on university administrators to control racism, as some protesters do, whether in the form of "sensitivity training" or speech codes, only means confidence in and regulation by representatives of the capitalist class, which is racist to the core. Students are right to slam attempts to whitewash threatening incidents, and to demand the removal of racist administrators. However, as Marxists we understand that racist attitudes reflect the material reality of black oppression, and allying with the capitalist class only leads to repression and more oppression. That is why the struggle must be broadened to combat racial and class exclusion from the universities.

African American students at Mizzou spoke of their acute fear of violence as a small (7%) minority on campus. To increase black enrollment, particularly among low-income and working-class families, it is necessary to fight for open admissions, abolition of tuition and living stipends for all students – things that the bourgeoisie will never grant willingly. For this very reason, the fight must not be limited to the universities, and it cannot be won by students alone. The demand for open admissions was won at the City University of New York by struggle of black, Latino and white students and the support of labor. But then it was gutted by the introduction of ever-rising tuition and exclusionary testing.

Ultimately, to wrest higher education away from the hands of white bourgeois elites will take a social, and more precisely a socialist revolution. Racism is shot through American society, and is inextricable from the rule of capital. We can't uproot the former without bringing down the latter. To accomplish this, students must ally themselves with the revolutionary power of the working class, to sweep away the entire system, ending class, race and all forms of social oppression. Only then will we see justice for Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, John Crawford, Walter Scott, Sandra Bland, and countless others. *Only revolution can bring justice!* ■



From Ayotzinapa and Missouri to NYC, fight the racist bourgeoisie – Only revolution can bring justice. CUNY Internationalist Clubs in 24 October 2015 march against police terror.

Revolutionary Workers Party Needed to Defeat Capitalism's Onslaught

No, Bernie Sanders Is Not a Socialist

By Jacob and Abram

Almost a hundred years have passed since Russian revolutionary leader V.I. Lenin wrote that Karl Marx grasped the “essence of capitalist democracy splendidly when, in analyzing the experience of the [Paris] Commune, he said that the oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class shall represent and repress them” (*State and Revolution*, 1917).

In the United States this decision narrows down to which leader of the governmental “party of property” – Democrat or Republican – will become the CEO and commander-in-chief of U.S. imperialism. In 2008, large numbers of young people jumped on Barack Obama’s “Hope and Change” bandwagon. But soon they were kicked to the curb by growing inequality, unending economic hardship, racist repression and war. Disappointed Obama voters fueled the short-lived Occupy Movement in 2011. Some have since moved to the left, generally in still vaguely defined terms. For the Democrats, roping the millennial youth back into the fold is a priority.

The candidate long seen as a foregone conclusion prepackaged for coronation, Hillary Clinton, is viewed by many young people as a wholly owned subsidiary of Wall Street. This is true, as it was for Goldman Sachs’ chosen candidate Barack Obama eight years ago. So it’s hard to sell brand Hillary to many who pulled the lever for Barack one or two elections ago and can’t stomach more of the same. Meanwhile, visceral hatred of the very idea of a black man in the White House has pushed the Republican Party ever further into open racist demagoguery, misogyny and seemingly insane threats against immigrants, Muslims and other “enemies.” This road show of hate is now headed up by the luridly vile billionaire sicko Donald Trump.

But you can’t fight Trump with Democrats. In capitalism’s electoral circus, the two-headed beast of Democratic/Republican domination has rarely seemed so ravenous.

It has never been more important to explain, patiently but urgently, that continuing to subordinate ourselves to the capitalist parties means defeat for the most fundamental needs and interests of working people, youth and the oppressed. The only way to defend ourselves against the onslaught of capitalist reaction is by fighting for the working class to free itself from capitalist politics, pursuing its own independent class politics through a revolutionary workers party.

Enter Bernie Sanders

As the revolutionary Marxists at the City University of New York, Internationalist Club activists are often asked “So what’s the deal with Bernie Sanders – isn’t he some kind of socialist?” The short answer is “No.” For starters, not only does Sanders not advocate, he *opposes* actual socialist policies like the expropriation of the means of production owned by the capitalist class, let alone the revolutionary seizure of power by the working class necessary to carry this out. His trademark slogan of a “political revolution” is ad-speak for: “By means of the existing rotten political structures of U.S. capitalism, make Bernie Sanders the candidate of the ruling, Democratic Party.” And Bernie means business when it comes to backing capitalism. All you have to do is look at his actual record, which we’ll do in a minute.

But first, what about Sanders’ sallies of rhetoric against the “billionaire class”? In capitalist society, power is held by the class that owns capital – the *capitalist* class – which as a whole lives from the exploitation of the working class. This elementary socialist truth is worlds away from Sanders’ sound bites about a supposedly distinct “billionaire class” – which leaves a whole lot of millionaires, like Bernie’s colleagues in the Senate, as supposedly potential allies. Like “the 99% vs. the 1%” rhetoric popularized by Occupy, this populist lingo obscures what Marx and Engels rightly called the fundamental and irreconcilable class antagonisms between the bourgeoisie (capitalist class) and the proletariat

(working class).

“Well, what do you expect – Bernie is running to be the Democratic presidential candidate!” those “feeling the Bern” might respond. *Exactly*. Bernie Sanders is a capitalist politician who, while labeling himself “independent,” has been part of the Democratic caucus throughout his career in the U.S. Senate. In recent debates in which Sanders tried to court the African American vote (after his early debacles facing Black Lives Matter protesters), he vied with Hillary Clinton over who is most supportive of Obama’s legacy. This is only logical for a candidate running for nomination as Obama’s successor – as the presidential candidate of the current ruling party of U.S. imperialism, the Democrats.

Supporting Democrats Is the Opposite of Socialist Politics

What, then, is this creature called the Democratic Party? Only the willfully blind and hopelessly naive, or those pretending to be, can see it is a formless container waiting to be filled with increasingly “progressive” content. Along such lines, an article in the *Independent* (March 2016) titled “Occupy the Party” claims the Democratic Party is “a terrain that the movement can occupy,” a “site of struggle over the horizons of U.S. politics.” Not a few former Occupy Wall Street activists emit this kind of vapid self-justification as they sign on as “Sandernistas,” retooling their “we are unstoppable, another world is possible” razzmatazz for the purpose.

The Democratic Party is and has always been a machine for subjugating the working people and oppressed to the capitalist class, going back to the party’s origins as the party of slavery, then Jim Crow. Its crimes include boundless oppression against the peoples of Latin America, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, imperialism’s genocidal war against the people of Vietnam... In more recent years, Hillary’s husband Bill Clinton signed the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, which destroyed the livelihood of millions of rural and urban poor people in Mexico (while shuttering factories in the U.S.). That same year he signed the Violent Crime Control Act, expanding prisons and ramping up police forces. In 1996 “Bill and Hill” pushed through the “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act,” which threw millions of women off public assistance in line with their vow to “end welfare as we know it.”

Two decades later, Obama has kept true to the Democratic tradition. His legacy is endless, and endlessly multiplying, wars abroad, unending racist police repression, economic



Reuters



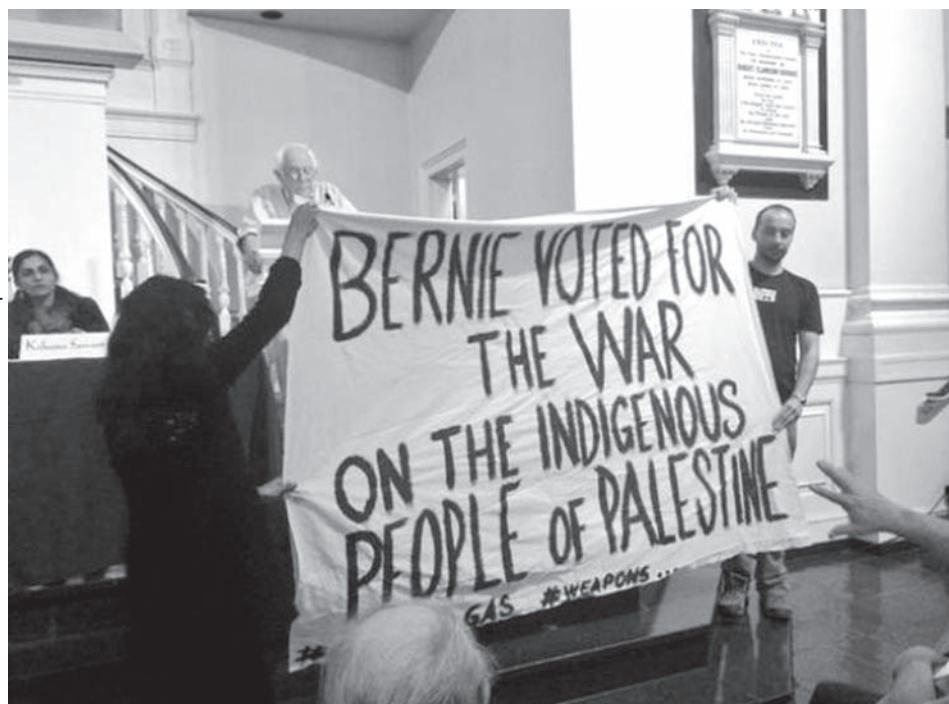
Corriere della Sera

Bernie and the drones: Bernie Sanders, running for the Democratic nomination for U.S. president, vows to continue Obama’s policy of “targeted killing” (assassination) by killer drones in the Middle East. Socialist? Not hardly.

hardship and deepening inequality “at home.” “Friend of labor”? In 2012 he sent the Coast Guard to escort ships loading grain from a scab terminal in Longview, Washington. In 2014, Obama signed an executive order forcing Philadelphia mass transit workers back to work in as they walked out against pay cuts deriving from the Obamacare tax on union health plans. Under the aegis of President Obama, the U.S. has also deported close to three million immigrants, an all-time record. He also plans to increase the deployment of killer drones overseas by 50% in the next four years.

And Sanders? He’s all for the drones. To be sure, some of the economic measures Sanders calls for are not at all to Wall Street’s taste, but they go no further than standard-issue populism. Denmark and other Scandinavian countries he praises have always been thoroughly capitalist, with some more “welfare state” measures thrown in due to the strength of the labor movement there, together with historical efforts to ward off the appeal of the Russian Revolution. Though he succeeded in seducing much of the “left” with claims to stand against war and government surveillance, the duplicity is obvious. Sanders claims to champion civil liberties, yet he co-sponsored the USA Freedom Act, which restored several provisions of the then-expiring USA PATRIOT Act.

Sanders has also backed U.S. military interventions in Somalia, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, voted to fund the Iraq war, and vociferously supports Obama’s policies in the Middle East, while backing Israel’s murderous aggression against the people of Gaza. In contrast, Marxists call for the *defeat* of U.S. imperialism and its predatory wars. (See “Democrat Sanders Aboard the ‘War on Terror’ Bandwagon,” *The Internationalist* No. 42, January-February 2016.) Sanders calls on U.S. client state Saudi Arabia, which beheaded an average of one person every two days last year, to head the war against Islamic State.



Palestinian activists display some uncomfortable truths during talk by Bernie Sanders following climate march, 21 September 2014.

palestineamerica.com



Red-white-and-blue social democrats: ISO's *Socialist Worker* (February 2016) sports patriotic bunting in sidling up to Bernie Sanders.

So what, we are often asked, does it mean when Sanders calls himself a “democratic socialist”? Sanders’ sometime label does not even mean “social democrat” like mass reformist parties in Europe historically based on the labor movement. Those arose through a break from the openly capitalist parties, but for the last hundred years have upheld the rule of capital. Social-democratic reformism historically claimed you could segue into socialism from existing capitalist politico-legal structures. Sanders’ moniker boils down to Democrat with a big D using more leftist-tinged words in the quest to get disillusioned youth and workers to support the party of Clinton and big business. Former Vermont governor and then chairman of the national Democratic Party Howard Dean said it like this back in 2005:

“Bernie can call himself anything he wants. He is basically a liberal Democrat, and he is a Democrat that – he runs as an Independent because he doesn’t like the structure and the money that gets involved.... The bottom line is that Bernie Sanders votes with the Democrats 98 percent of the time.”

“OK, so maybe Bernie isn’t much of a socialist,” some admit, “but why do you have to criticize him so much?” Because anyone who actually fights for socialism must oppose capitalist politicians down the line. This goes back to Karl Marx, who insisted: “our politics must be working-class politics. The workers’ party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party; it must be independent and have its goal and its own policy” (“Ap-ropos of Working-Class Political Action,” September 1871). Supporting Democratic politicians is the *opposite* of socialist politics, the most basic principle of which is the political independence of the working class.

ISO: Sanders = “Socialism in the Air”

This brings us to those “tagtails” who chase after the Democrats. Outside the main entrance to Hunter College in February, students were approached by newspaper sellers hawking a paper with a red-white-and-blue cover, adorned with election-style ribbons sporting little fists. “Socialism In the Air,” it blared (see photo). Inside, an article titled “The frantic push to smear the socialist.” Welcome to the land of “socialist” opportunism – it’s *Socialist Worker* (February 2016), newspaper of the International Socialist Organization! One guess who the “socialist” is in this rosy patriotic scenario. That’s right – Bernie Sanders.

One of the most cynical things about this all is that the ISO claims it does not support Sanders, indignantly chastising those supposed “ultra-leftists” who point out that this claim is rather akin to Sanders’ claims not to be a Democrat. They play the game, but want to keep a smidgeon of distance from the name.

Faux-radical organizations such as the ISO and Socialist Alternative (SAIt) have welcomed Sanders’ campaign as “a breath of fresh air,” and a “political revolution” that can shake “the foundation of [the] corporate controlled two party system,” respectively. Why? Because they want to snap up some left-leaning youth who, desperately looking for respite from reactionary Republicans and the Wall Street candidates of the Democratic Party, have been drawn to the Sanders campaign. These two groups (who actually are social-democratic reformists) do so in slightly different ways, providing further object lessons in what socialism is not. (See “Bernie Sanders and the Pressure Politics of the Opportunist Left,” *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015.)

In the name of allegedly smart and ever more flexible tactics, SAIt has sunk deeper and deeper into the morass of Bernie fandom. There is a certain inexorable logic here: if you think you’re going to hit the big time by enthusing about a candidate for the Democratic nomination, seeming less than whole-hearted about it can only be perceived as an obstacle to getting the job done. As for Sanders’ support for U.S. imperialism, SAIt’s newspaper headlined that “Sanders’ Foreign Falls Short: Socialism Means Internationalism,” yet while his “mistaken” foreign policy “reveals his political limitations,” they wrote, this supposedly “does not negate the enormously progressive aspects of his campaign.”

The ISO, too, has written up blandishments about Sanders, but judges it inopportune to *openly* support his campaign: They want to have their cake and eat it too, claiming him as a fellow “socialist” and basking in the warm sensation that his campaign means “socialism is in the air” while keeping an escape clause open to deny they could ever support a Democrat. Instead, they suggested that he should have “run for president like Ralph Nader as an independent” (*Socialist Worker*, 5 May 2015). Like SAIt, the ISO backed Ralph Nader, an anti-immigrant capitalist politician, in 2000 and 2004. It has also repeatedly run on the ticket of the Greens, a minor party but no less bourgeois than a multitude of “third parties” that have come and gone throughout the history of capitalist politics in the United States.

Following the opportunist logic of seeking a cut of today’s popularity, at the expense of basic socialist principles they pretend to uphold, these “‘Feel the Bern’ socialists” penned paeans to Obama too, back in the day – before young people felt burned by the realities of his presidency. The ISO celebrated Obama’s election in 2008 and plastered Hunter College with posters with his signature slogan, saying “yes we can.” That year and the next they repeatedly referred to him as “a breath of fresh air” (see “ISO: ‘Fresh Air Fiends’ of Class Collaboration,” December 2015). SAIt joined the ISO in hailing Obama’s 2009 budget – including the biggest-ever U.S. military budget – calling it “a break from the political policies of the last 30 years” (*Socialist Alternative*, 11 March 2009). For the leaders of such organizations, for whom anything goes in the latest political get-rich-quick scheme, it is always too late to learn.

Workers Revolution Is What We’re Fighting For

Those who have been led, falsely, to believe that the effects of capitalist class rule can be voted away may imagine that if Bernie Sanders were elected to administer the capitalist state, it could or would come to represent the “people.” Yet the political

function of Bernie Sanders’ campaign is not to sharpen the struggle against capitalist reaction but to blur consciousness and lead those increasingly fed up with the status quo back into supporting the Democratic Party of war, racism and police terror. The self-proclaimed “socialists” hailing him are culpable for helping promote the con.

As Friedrich Engels wrote in *The Origin of Family, Property and the State*, the capitalist state is the “means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class,” an “instrument for exploiting wage-labor by capital.” Though these words were written in 1884, they ring just as true today. The “democratic socialists” can maunder through their utopian paracosm (fantasy world), and hold hands with the bourgeoisie for as long as they like; but here in the real world, power does not voluntarily diminish itself, and the working class must confront its antithesis, the capitalist class.

Engels and his comrade Karl Marx warned that the politics of class reconciliation were deadly for the interests of the exploited and oppressed. Gains, or even the defense of those previously won, can only come about through sharp struggle against the bourgeois rulers, all of them. For the founders of modern socialism – communism – this meant revolutionary struggle by the working class. Today in the United States and internationally, workers revolution is what we’re fighting for. ■

What We Said at “Women Rise Up” Forum

“Liberation Can Only Be Forged Through Socialist Revolution”

by Yari

Early in the fall semester, Internationalist Club activists attended the “Women Rise Up” forum at the CUNY Graduate Center, organized by the People’s Power Assembly (associated with the reformist Workers World Party). Headlining the September 22 event were guest speakers Bree Newsome, who scaled a thirty-foot pole in Columbia, South Carolina to tear down the Confederate flag waving above the grounds of the South Carolina Statehouse; Jennicet Gutiérrez, an undocumented transgender Latina activist who interrupted President Obama’s Pride Month speech at the White House to demand the immediate release of transgender immigrants in detention centers; and Marilyn Zuniga, who was fired from her job as a third-grade teacher in Orange, NJ for allowing her students to write get-well letters to imprisoned black radical journalist and former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Zuniga, Gutiérrez and Newsome spoke on behalf of their goals as activists and educators, exposing the whitewashing of American history and its oppressive institutions. One of their themes was the work they described as needed in order to uplift black and brown communities that have few to no resources. After the panelists presented their speeches to an eagerly listening audience, a number of people, including those from several organizations in attendance, lined up to ask their own questions.

Members of the Internationalist Club lauded the bravery of the panelists, each of whom took a striking stand against important aspects of this society’s racist repression. They also sought to ascertain the speakers’ political program, and to put forward the program of the Club:

“On behalf of the Internationalist Club at Hunter College, we thank you and commend your valiant actions as marginalized

Million Student...

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broader social struggles, can only help the Democratic Party of U.S. imperialism subordinate yet another generation to the needs of the capitalist system. That is the cause of high tuition, low wages and “indentured studenthood.” Only the multiracial, international working class has the power to put an end to it – through socialist revolution.

How workers power can win real struggles was just shown by the immigrant warehouse workers at B&H Photo, who organized against blatantly racist bosses and voted in a union on November 4. Their struggle was inspired by the victorious organizing campaign waged by the Hot and Crusty bakery workers just seven blocks from Hunter College. The Internationalist Club has been highly active in each of these struggles, and both groups of workers will continue to need active solidarity in the coming period. (Let us know if you’d like to get involved!)

Many young people today are coming to the conclusion that capitalism is a blind alley, and expressing interest in socialist ideas. Combining militant activism in the class struggle with serious study of Marxism, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs are working to win thoughtful and militant-minded youth to the fight for international socialist revolution. Join us! ■

women, as women systematically forced to the periphery. Your actions hold weight in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed, a liberation that can only be forged through a global socialist revolution – a workers revolution.

“Oppression is systemic, it’s institutionalized – it has always been economically beneficial for the capitalist system to oppress and exploit. To tackle oppression we have to get at the root. For revolutionaries, this root is capitalism, and it is our duty to uproot this system, to quite literally shut the system down through a workers revolution. “We ask, how do you aim to tackle oppression on a systemic level? And what kind of system do you all believe we should be fighting for?”

“Donald Trump was mentioned earlier, and he is often used as the epitome of racism. What do you have to say about the Democratic Party in regards to racism and oppression?”

Newsome, Gutiérrez and Zuniga had varying responses, ranging from the reformist reallocation and “transference of funds to the educational system,” to general comments on the need to smash capitalism, to identity politics.

As revolutionary Marxists, we of the Internationalist Club emphasize the need for class politics – politics of the working class – to smash oppressive institutions and for the first time make justice a reality for black people, immigrants, gays, lesbians and transgender people, teachers and youth alike: all the exploited and oppressed. This requires taking on the fight against capitalism’s Democratic Party. The formation of a revolutionary workers party, with a lucid political program, is crucial to revolution and the uprooting of capitalism. Radical actions are needed now more than ever. But actions to raise social awareness *must* go hand in hand with raising *class consciousness* that is based on the power of the proletariat. ■

Revolution



B&H warehouse workers at October 18 demo.

B&H Workers...

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allowed to evacuate until they had gone through a “security check” – one by one!

The unionization campaign took off under the direct inspiration of immigrant workers’ 2012 struggle at the Hot and Crusty bakery/restaurant in Manhattan (see article, page 1). The brother of one of the B&H employees worked at a cleaners’ next door to Hot and Crusty and put him in touch with organizers from the Laundry Workers Center, which led the struggle there. Through many months of intensive organizing, the workers prepared to vote in the United Steel Workers as the union to represent them.

On October 11, the campaign went public at a midtown Manhattan march and rally. It was a sight to see. Workers, family members and supporters lined up outside a West 34th Street subway station, carrying cardboard boxes emblazoned with slogans such as “dignity,” “equality,” “solidarity,” “equal wages,” “lunch break” and “the right to evacuate during a fire” – which is a real issue. Forming two huge lines, they practiced chants as they prepared to march to the B&H retail store on Ninth Avenue.

The CUNY Internationalist Clubs brought a loud and enthusiastic contingent from Hunter College and other campuses. Many of our newer members had never seen, much less been involved in a union organizing drive. Since the Clubs’ task is to “educate, agitate and organize” students to join the fight for workers revolution, we figured it was time to put our training into practice.

With over 300 workers and family members in attendance, and a spirit of determination and excitement, this was a demonstration of working-class militancy that many of us had never witnessed before. Tourists stared as marchers filled the sidewalk, chanting newly coined slogans like “*Unión, fuerza, solidaridad*” (Union, power, solidarity) together with demands as basic as “*Uno, dos, tres, queremos nuestros breaks*” (One, two, three, we want our breaks). Gathering in front of the B&H store, the crowd chanted “What do we want? Union! When do we want it? Now” and “*Arriba trabajador, abajo explotador*.” On the last slogan the crowd would raise signs and boxes high on “Up” and lower them toward the sidewalk on “down.”

The B&H bosses were clearly upset – and scared. They looked on with alarm as these largely “undocumented” workers, whom they had humiliated and silenced for so long, rallied in proud-defiance. Comrades of the Internationalist Group and Class Struggle Education Workers were among the speakers at the rally, highlighting the link between immigrant workers’ unionization fight and our call for full citizenship rights

for all immigrants. With the media increasingly fixated on capitalism’s electoral circus, comrades explained that unchaining the power of the working class in defense of all the oppressed requires a decisive break from the parties, politicians and institutions of the capitalist rulers. As a slogan popularized during the Hot and Crusty struggle states: “*Jugar con reglas del patrón es segura pérdida*” (If you play by the bosses’ rules, you will surely lose).

Landslide Victory

On the heels of that demonstration, the United Steel Workers (USW) filed for representation of the B&H warehouse on October 13. Two days later, in an egregious act of retaliation, the bosses at the Navy Yard warehouse ordered 150 workers to leave the premises for refusing to sign an anti-union document. The move backfired completely when, upon hearing of the incident, the workers at Evergreen walked off the job. As this drama unfolded, we were at our weekly study group watching *Bread and Roses*, a film about immigrant janitors in Los Angeles who waged a successful unionization campaign in 1990. Hearing the news from B&H, we dispatched a large team to Brooklyn to show our support.

Crowds of workers were gathered outside the Navy Yards and in a park near the Evergreen location. Workers told of the union-busting “consultants” the company had brought in, how a worker’s cell phone was grabbed as he was filming the mass firing threat, and how they were summarily ordered off the premises. One after another, they spoke of their outrage and determination. An Internationalist Group speaker told the Navy Yards gathering:

“The bosses are afraid of you, because you are not afraid of them; because with the union, with the strength, with the unity and militancy of the workers, with workers’ consciousness, you will win, and you will give an example to all the working class of this city. *¡Adelante, compañeros!*”

Soon we found out that the Evergreen workers’ walkout had forced the company to reverse – and even “apologize” for – its threat to fire the Navy Yard workers. This was the power of working-class solidarity in action.

Three days later, on October 18, the workers and their supporters marched on the B&H Midtown store once again, chanting, “On Thursday [October 13], we showed that we are not afraid!” and “*¡Unión, fuerza, solidaridad!*” We felt as though we were participating in something historic. Here were hundreds of immigrant workers showing their bosses’ intimidation back in their faces. A Hunter Club member who is from an immigrant family herself and works in a minimum-wage job recalls:

“The workers at the rally were not afraid at all. There was no fear in them. When they were giving their speeches, they said ‘We are definitely going to win’ and ‘We’re not going to stop.’ Before this, I never assumed immigrant workers who could be deported would try to organize in this fashion, get their boxes and stand in front of the store and keep chanting. It takes a lot of courage to do that, and to have their families right next to them. Seeing that level of organization from people who are so vulnerable really inspired me.”

Through intensive organizing at Hunter College, we were able to organize a sizeable contingent to attend another rally outside the B&H Midtown store on November 1, where

the workers held a symbolic vote for the union. This shook the bosses yet again. The real union vote came on the morning of November 4 at the Navy Yards and Evergreen locations. We were there outside before the crack of dawn to show support and staff a table with coffee, donuts and Mexican *pan dulce* (sweet bread) for the workers who were about to assert their collective will and vote for unionization. We sang “Which Side are You On?” and some new songs in Spanish written for the occasion. As we noted in our chants and speeches, “*La lucha obrera no tiene fronteras*” (The workers’ struggle has no borders).

The workers lined up in columns and marched in to vote, chanting “*¡Vamos a ganar!*” (We’re going to win). We caught a glimpse of both the past and the future. Their discipline and militancy were reminiscent of some of the great workers’ movements of the past. Yet we were also able to see what possibilities the future holds. Their victory could inspire other immigrant workers, just as they were inspired by the fight at Hot and Crusty.

Hours later in a vacant lot at the Navy Yards, comrades waited with organizers from the union and Laundry Workers Center for the votes to be counted. Shortly after noon, the news came that the union had won by a vote of 200 to 88, with approximately 80% participation. In a very real sense this was a historic victory, showing the enormous potential for class struggle by doubly and triply oppressed immigrant workers here in capitalism’s “belly of the beast” (see “V-I-C-T-O-R-Y! B&H Workers in Big Win for Labor and Immigrant Rights,” *The Internationalist* No. 41, November-December 2015). Two days later at a Brooklyn social hall, we joined workers and their families celebrating the victory with music, dancing, speeches (including a poem by one of the warehouse workers) and a team of silk-screen artists who made striking t-shirts with slogans from the workers’ rallies.

La lucha continúa

The struggle has continued since that time. Winning the unionization vote was an important first step, but the fight for a union contract has only begun. The warehouse workers elected a negotiating team, and the first negotiating session was held on February 4. In the wake of the unionization victory, managers are reportedly less prone to hurl threats and insults than before, but events confirm that B&H is far from giving up its hard-line tactics.

Winning a first union contract at B&H may well require some hard class struggle – and even the most “favorable” contract is just a reflection of the relation of forces between the owners and the workers. Labor leaders who support the Democratic Party are also fond of phrases about a “fair” or “just” contract. Revolutionaries have a very different understanding: we support every struggle to improve workers’ pay and conditions, but we tell the truth that no contract can make exploitation – the source of profits – “fair.” To end the whole system of capitalist exploitation requires the workers taking power in a socialist revolution and establishing their own class rule here and around the world. What we have learned in the B&H struggle will help us bring this lesson to many more young people over the next months and years.

UPDATE: At B&H, the momentum of the warehouse workers’ vote last November spread to workers in the basement of the company’s mid-Manhattan store. Following the example of their *compañeros*, these workers launched their own unionization campaign. Early in the morning of February 23, Inter-

nationalist comrades joined other supporters of the workers’ struggle to greet B&H store workers with coffee, music and solidarity as they prepared to march in to vote for the Steel Workers union. Here too the unionization victory was a landslide: 46-14 for the union.

Yet once again vindictive owners lashed out, firing seven cleaning department workers. These workers were not part of the sector that voted for the union, but had requested a meeting with the company’s human resources department and expressed interest in the benefits of unionization. All supporters of labor rights must demand these workers’ immediate reinstatement. This is an integral part of the fight to consolidate the victories the B&H workers have won so far and carry them forward over the next period. We invite students at CUNY and elsewhere to join us in helping these courageous workers win these struggles. ■

Big Short...

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from CDSs were not a few small fish, as in the movie, but top hedge fund operators. Like John Paulson, who personally made over \$4 billion by betting that the housing bubble would burst. Today Paulson is one of the largest holders of Puerto Rico’s debt. And once again it is the workers who pay – the teachers, electrical workers and other public employees whose pensions are held in hock.

As for the government, whether Democrats or Republicans are in office, the state exists to serve the banks and other capitalists. In this system there can be no justice for the working class. In the end only a workers revolution can bring the great finance tycoons to justice, and lay the basis for a society in which exploitation isn’t law and fulfilling human needs is the point. ■

As Karl Marx explained, capitalism’s own technological development leads to a falling rate of profit. Faced with an “insufficient” rate of return on investment in production since the late 1980s, capitalists have “invested” in stock market speculation, housing bubbles, etc. When these burst they just sit on the cash. Capitalism’s answer historically has been the destruction of capital through massive shutdowns involving mass unemployment, or imperialist war, or both. (See “World Capitalism Plunges,” *The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009).

As we wrote at the height of the fleeting “Occupy Wall Street” movement:

“The present economic depression came after years of frenetic financial speculation, as one ‘bubble’ after another burst, the last being the housing bubble. This occurs repeatedly under capitalism after periods of a sharply increased rate of exploitation. As employers drive down the cost of labor they accumulate vast hordes of money for which they find no productive investment as the rate of profit falls. So instead they turn to speculation, eventually leading to a crash. This is what happened in the Gilded Age leading to the stock market panic of 1893, it happened in the Roaring Twenties culminating in the 1929 crash, and now it has happened again.... Greed, corruption, income inequality, mass unemployment, racism, imperialist wars – all of these are part and parcel of capitalism, and cannot be eliminated short of a revolution overthrowing the profit system.”

– from “Expropriate Wall Street Through Socialist Revolution,” *Revolution* No. 9, November 2011

A Year After Police Murder of Mike Brown in Ferguson

CUNY Internationalist Speakout Against Racist Repression

Revolution photo



Speakout called by Hunter Internationalist Club on September 2 brought out dozens of students, workers to protest racist police terror.

By CUNY Internationalist Clubs

"A year since Ferguson, racist terror continues," declared the call for a Speak-Out Against Racist Repression that CUNY Internationalists organized outside Hunter College on September 2. Approximately 80 students and workers participated in the protest, which highlighted the case of Sandra Bland, whose death in police custody embodies this ongoing repression. Pulled over by a police officer in Prairie View, Texas, the African American education worker and activist refused to bend to intimidation and was violently arrested. Three days later, she was found hanged in her holding cell. Authorities attempted to pass it off as suicide, but Bland's family has denounced the attempted cover-up, noting her excitement over getting a new job at her alma mater as well as her well-known activism against police brutality. Having stopped and jailed Sandra Bland for "driving while back," lynch-law terror cut short her life on July 13, 2015.

Participants in the Hunter Speak-Out held placards and enthusiastically joined in chants like "From Ferguson to New York, Stop Racist Terror" and "Sandra Bland, Michael Brown – Shut the Whole System Down." In addition to

Sandra Bland, signs featured names and faces of many others targeted by racist repression and police violence, among them Eric Garner, Mike Brown, Tamir Rice, Rekia Boyd, Samuel DuBose and Amadou Diallo. Other carefully made posters showed faces and names of transgender women, mainly African American and Latina, who have been murdered this year, including London Chanel, Taja Gabrielle DeJesus and Ashton O'Hara. Placards declared solidarity with the abducted teachers college students of Ayotzinapa, Mexico; upheld the defense of immigrant rights in the face of Donald Trump's hate campaign and Barack Obama's record-level deportations; and stated opposition to Democrats, Republicans and all capitalist politicians. Internationalist speakers called for building a revolutionary workers party, linking this to appeals to "uproot racism" and achieve women's liberation through socialist revolution.

Students, immigrant workers and adjunct professors spoke with fervor and clarity on the topic of racist repression. One new Club member, speaking from her personal experiences, said:

"The thing that scares me the most is that it's coming from the NYPD, from people we're told are there to protect us. But

they're not, they're against us, and they kill us every single day. And we have to watch them kill us on YouTube and on Facebook every single day, and there's no justice! Hearing [Eric Garner] say 'I can't breathe' eleven times, and still nothing. You all watch them die. No justice."

When she ended her speech with "Only Revolution Can Bring Justice!" – a chant the Internationalist Club has brought to protests throughout the recent period – the crowd took up the call, and the feeling in the air was electric.

Parents of the 43 abducted Ayotzinapa students sent a special statement to the Hunter rally. Police and army troops "disappeared" their sons in the southern state of Guerrero on the night of September 26-27, 2014. The parents, who had just addressed a mass meeting on their struggle organized by the Grupo Internacionalista at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, sent "greetings to the struggle of the teachers, students and workers of CUNY...in their fight against the privatization of education and against the racist murders orchestrated by the same bourgeoisie that at the international level has carried out [these] attacks. From Ferguson to Ayotzinapa, it's the same struggle!"

At the Speak-Out, an immigrant worker from Mexico linked the message of internationalism to the recent 75th anniversary of Leon Trotsky's assassination in Mexico City. "Trotsky told us that the revolution must be international, because the capitalist system extends its claws internationally. In the country I come from, the oppressed people are living on the border with that monster. They have a wall against us, but we must build a bridge uniting the working class of all countries to defeat imperialism and the 'national' bourgeoisie." That is the only way to eradicate racism and all forms of oppression, he said.

Workers from the taxi and food industries (including the Hunter cafeteria) participated in the Speak-Out, together with low-paid adjuncts and others who spoke

about the need to link labor struggles to the fight against racism. Several speakers demarcated the contrast between revolutionary class politics and liberal "identity politics," stressing the importance of mobilizing the enormous potential power of the working class in the fight against oppression. As examples pointing to this, they cited this year's May Day, when the dock workers union (ILWU Local 10) shut down the port of Oakland, California and marched on City Hall to protest police terror, and union activists marched in Portland, Oregon in the "Labor Against Racist Police Murder" contingent.

Many speakers at the Hunter protest addressed the inseparable connection between capitalism and racism in the United States. A rally organizer emphasized that racial oppression is "fundamental to the nature of this capitalist state, born in the blood of black slaves and the genocide of native peoples."

"That is its legacy in the United States of America: human lives in exchange for profit. The police were not created to protect human lives, but to enforce this ruthless equation, to act as the armed fist of the capitalist state. The origins of modern-day police forces lie in the slave patrols of the South. The first uniformed police force was established in 1783 in Charleston, South Carolina to control the local slave population."

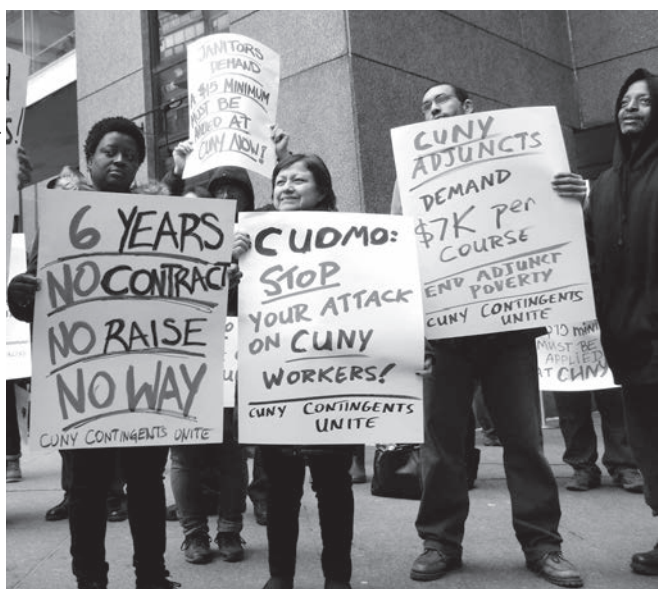
In his classic *State and Revolution*, she noted, Lenin defines the state as an organ of class rule that "legalizes and perpetuates oppression." She stressed: "We can't afford to indulge in illusions of pressuring capitalist politicians to the left"; any real fight against poverty, war and racism means breaking from "subjugation to the Democratic Party," whether its candidate be Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders. "We need a revolution. That's the only way we're going to end this racist violence."

The Internationalist Clubs are active at Hunter, the Graduate Center and elsewhere in the CUNY system. For more information, write: cunyinternationalists@gmail.com.

Internationalist photo



Protesters at rally read letter of solidarity from parents of 43 kidnapped Ayotzinapa students in Mexico.



CUNY workers and students protest poverty pay, lack of raise for over six years.

\$15 at CUNY...

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speeches were greeted with loud cheers, as were those of students who emphasized that “the workers’ fight is our fight too” while tuition, the cost of living and economic hardships make it hard just to stay in school.

A new Internationalist Club member, who recently transferred from a school upstate, said that of course SUNY workers should get \$15 and more, but given the cost of living in New York City it is outrageous to deny that to workers at CUNY. “We will not stand for Cuomo and other capitalist politicians trying to divide and conquer SUNY workers and CUNY workers,” said a CCU speaker. “Unite workers at CUNY and SUNY!” chanted the crowd.

In addition to signs calling for the \$15 minimum to be applied at CUNY now, demanding “*Igualdad ahora*” (equality now) for CUNY workers, and denouncing Cuomo’s attack, some posters read, “This Is Not a Photo Op for Politicians.” This was a reference to the way union bureaucrats and reformist left groups have turned protests against low pay into media events for capitalist politicians. In contrast, revolutionaries fight to mobilize the class power of the workers.

Even with regard to SUNY, Cuomo’s ballyhooed executive action does *not* raise the minimum wage to \$15 now. Instead, “wages at SUNY affiliates in New York City will rise annually, peaking at \$15 at the end of 2018, while increases outside the city will come slower, eventually reaching \$15 in July 2021” (*New York Times*, 4 January). This recalls what we have called the “\$15 Later” law passed in Seattle after efforts by local Democrats and city council member Kshama Sawant of the reformist Socialist Alternative group (best known today as boosters for Bernie Sanders, who is seeking to be the presidential candidate of U.S. imperialism’s ruling party, the Democrats).²

Unchain Workers Power

What’s behind Cuomo’s seeming vendetta – which includes vetoing a “maintenance of effort” bill key to CUNY funding – against the City University? It’s all a result of “feuding” between Cuomo and NYC mayor Bill de Blasio, opines *Politico* (“CUNY feels the effects of a worsening relationship with Cuomo,” February 23). In other words, they say the big-business poli-

² See “Don’t Fall for Democrats’ Campaign Promises – Fight Low-Wage Slavery, Mobilize Workers’ Power” and “Seattle’s ‘\$15 Later’ Law – A ‘Historic Victory’? Hardly” (June 2014, www.internationalist.org/fightlowwageslavery1406.html).

ticians are playing political games with workers’ livelihood.

The drama of the dueling Dems might lead some to forget that when Cuomo ran for reelection two years ago, he was the beneficiary of “a full-court press by... Mayor Bill de Blasio, a fellow Democrat who lobbied on the governor’s behalf” (*New York Times*, 1 June 2014). This included helping to put Cuomo – who revels in blatantly bashing public employee unions – on the ballot line of the “Working Families Party,” a

vehicle for union bureaucrats to round up votes for the Democratic Party.

An Internationalist sign at the February 10 rally read: “Cuomo, de Blasio, Clinton, Sanders, Obama, Democratic Party = Fake Promises, Real Exploitation, War & Police Terror.” Another said: “Smash the Taylor Law – CUNY Workers Have the Right to Strike!” This refers to the infamous New York State law making it illegal for public employees to withhold their labor, which Democrats and Republicans alike imposed against striking transit workers in 2005, and which CUNY threatens to use against its workers today.

“How long have we been without a contract?” asked a CSEW speaker. “Too long!” shouted workers in the crowd. Asking what’s behind this, the speaker said: “The unions can’t defend the workers’ interests if they’re snuggling up to the bosses’ politicians.” He pointed to the need for a new leadership committed to the unions breaking from the Democrats and all capitalist parties. Instead, the workers need their own party, whose goal is the working class taking power in its own hands. As an Internationalist Club speaker said, “We are for winning a minimum wage of at least \$15 now, and more, but we know that exploitation and oppression cannot and will not end until the workers carry out a socialist revolution here and around the world.”

One of the rally’s highlights was Internationalist Club activist Stephanie’s reading of verses from a song called “Workers of the World, Awaken.” A rally organizer introduced her by noting: “This was written by Joe Hill, the revolutionary songwriter of the Industrial Workers of the World, who was executed on a frame-up charge in 1915, by the same capitalist injustice system that framed up [former Black Panther and radical journalist] Mumia Abu-Jamal and has kept him in prison today for more than three decades.” The crowd in front of Hunter West cheered loudly in response to Joe Hill’s verses:

“If the workers take a notion, they can stop all speeding trains;
Every ship upon the ocean they can tie with mighty chains.
“Every wheel in the creation, every mine and every mill,
Fleets and armies of the nation will at their command stand still.
“Join the union, fellow workers, men and women, side by side;
We will crush the greedy shirkers like a sweeping, surging tide;
“For united we are standing, but divided we will fall;
“Let this be our understanding – ‘All for one and one for all’.” ■

Who Makes Less Than \$15/Hour at CUNY?

An example of workers at CUNY who make far less than \$15 an hour is the Internationalist Club activist and cafeteria worker who makes \$9 an hour – the current minimum wage in New York State – working 20 hours/week, and was a key organizer of the protest. As for full-time cafeteria employees, such as line, cashier, grill, prep and other workers, base rates are well below \$15/hour for them as well. CUNY may try to hide behind the food-service and other contractors that issue the workers’ paychecks, but contracting out is just a scam and we hold CUNY responsible for that miserable pay.

What about workers directly employed by the City University, many of whom are on the state payroll? “Thousands of CUNY workers earn less than \$15 an hour,” reported DC37’s *Public Employee Press* (December 2015). Who are they? Like many other things about CUNY, it takes some digging to find crucial facts and details about this.

A “workforce demographics” report that CUNY issued in 2014 lists more than 7,500 “hourly classified staff.” This includes 6,871 College Assistants (mainly office workers),

most of whom make \$10.99 an hour. It also includes over 200 custodial (janitorial) and 219 “Information Systems” workers, as well as stage and theater, nursing, disability accommodation and other employees.

There are also 1,768 CUNY administrative, clerical, office/secretarial and Employment Opportunity Center office assistants; library and Continuing Ed assistants, mail/message workers, and many others. Many workers in these categories earn considerably less than \$15 an hour, often as low as \$9, \$10 or \$11. Then there are approximately 80 Research Foundation workers represented by the PSC earning less than \$15 an hour.

The PSC paper (*Clarion*, December 2015) quoted a custodial assistant who still makes about \$14 an hour after 30 years at Queens College. Being “lucky enough” to make a bit more can mean “just \$15.97 an hour after three decades on the job,” workers at Hunter told us. Poverty pay, lousy conditions and daily disrespect is what capitalism offers workers at the largest urban public university in the United States.

“We Will Not Stop Fighting”

The following message was sent to the February 10 Hunter rally by an Internationalist Club activist.

I cannot be with you in person today, because I am at work on another CUNY campus. So I wanted to send this message to today’s rally.

I have been a worker at the Hunter College cafeteria for over two years during my college career. The time I have spent as a worker and student taught me first-hand of the brutality of the system. During the time I was only a student, I already felt overworked and stressed, but at least I had the time to go into the computer lab to type some essays, or go into the library and sit for a few hours to thoroughly read and enjoy the books assigned by well-intentioned professors.

But while I was reading Chaucer or trying to decipher Shakespeare, in the forefront of my mind the pressures of college and life expenses loomed over me constantly like a rash I couldn’t ignore. Anybody who has had to deal with the financial aid department may be able to relate to the irrationality that is this bureaucracy. I had a few scares with financial aid, which would give me a difficult time with claims that I wasn’t a citizen, when I was, or demand yet another proof of my parents’ income. Most semesters, I was months into school before I received a single check from financial aid. But books needed to be bought now, Metrocard fares were continuously going up at a rate faster than anybody could have imagined. How was I going to pay for all of this, when my immigrant working-class parents could only contribute so little?

I had to become resourceful, and would look up every book to see if any CUNY or public library had it. I remember feverish nights, scanning hundreds of pages from books that I had to return in an hour’s time, since I couldn’t afford to spend \$200 to buy them. Many times I went without the assigned book at all.

I had to be religiously attentive in class, and work even harder to do well. Without a computer at home, I practically lived in the library.

Then I had a real scare, when TAP [Tuition Assistance Program] decided to not reimburse me one semester, and I was left with over a thousand dollars due for tuition. That semester was one of my worst, I was teetering with nervousness all the time, thinking how I was going to approach my parents about this. I thought my college career was over, and in fact it almost was. My kind parents tentatively accumulated the funds for me near the end of the semester and I was able to make that scary red mark on CUNYFirst go away.

My anger should have been directed towards this capitalist state, where the working class has to struggle and hustle so hard just to be educated, just to make ends meet. Where we are worked like slaves and paid poverty wages, and expected to grin because “at least you have a job”! The threat of unemployment is used as a tactic to keep the working class laboring away in silence.

Well, I say, we shall not be silent any longer! We as CUNY students and workers need to stand together to tell Governor Cuomo we will not sit and take this slap in the face against CUNY workers. CUNY is filled with hard-working students and workers, who use the money to further their education, and pay their sky-rocketing high rent. We deserve much better than to be paid 9, 10 or 11 dollars an hour. These are not livable wages, rather they are a mockery of us as New York City residents. Let us all stand in solidarity and have our voices heard. Governor Cuomo, CUNY workers deserve at least \$15 minimum wage, and we deserve it NOW. As we all know, even that is far below the cost of living. We will not stop fighting until we get it. And we will not stop fighting until the working class is the one that makes these decisions. ■

\$15 Minimum Must Be Applied at CUNY Now

Workers, Students Protest Cuomo Attack

With great fanfare, and a lot of nerve, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo struck a pose as a “friend of labor” on January 4, announcing a measure to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for workers at the State University of New York (SUNY) – at the same time as he kicked workers at the City University of New York in the teeth by *excluding* them from the \$15 minimum. The Democratic governor’s announcement was the latest in a long series of attacks on CUNY.

Talking with campus workers at Hunter College and other CUNY schools, activists from the Internationalist Club and Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW) found widespread indignation, and a desire to do something about it. Many expressed the view that being excluded from the \$15 minimum is “the straw that broke the camel’s back,” after more than six years without a new union contract and desperately needed raises. In late January, CUNY management declared an “impasse” in labor negotiations with the Professional Staff Congress (PSC – CUNY faculty/staff union), a maneuver aimed at getting the state to dictate a terrible contract.

Janitorial and maintenance workers at Hunter College responded strongly when we proposed holding a public event protesting Cuomo’s attack on CUNY workers. So did cafeteria workers, who fought successfully to defend their health benefits in 2009 (see “Hunter Cafeteria Struggle – Workers and Students Unite,” *Revolution* No. 7, April 2010). We also found interest among low-paid office and technical workers, who like the janitorial and maintenance workers are members of one of NYC’s biggest unions, DC37 (District Council 37 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees). Cafeteria workers are part of



Janitorial, maintenance and cafeteria workers joined with students on February 10 to protest New York governor Cuomo’s exclusion of City University workers from \$15/hr. minimum wage.

UNITE HERE, a merger of the old garment workers union and the Hotel and Restaurant Employees.

The CSEW activists included leading members of CUNY Contingents Unite (CCU), a group within the PSC that works to advance the interests of adjuncts and the other “contingent” employees that are the majority of the academic workforce. Adjuncts are fed up with the poverty pay, non-existent or tenuous benefits and lack of job security characteristic of CUNY’s two-tier labor system. Last semester, CCU members at Hunter helped found an “Adjunct/Worker/Student Committee in Favor of a Strike at CUNY.”

“We Can’t Survive on Poverty Pay”

Given the strong response among campus workers, we began organizing for an outdoor meeting on February 10 outside the West building at Hunter, to protest Cuomo’s exclusion of CUNY workers and demand “\$15 minimum must be applied at CUNY now.” Working with rank-and-file members of DC37 and UNITE HERE, CSEW and Internationalist activists widely distributed and posted a flier for the protest.

Students joining in this activity were struck by the enthusiasm of campus workers, like the immigrant woman janitor who greeted a team taping fliers inside a broom closet, saying: “You are the only ones who stand up for us.” Activists new to the struggle got a quick introduction to whole parts of the campus that remain “unseen” to head-in-the-clouds, nose-in-the-air academics (including many supposed leftists). Without those who work there, the university could not function for a single minute.

“It’s really a slap in the face to say SUNY will get a \$15 minimum but CUNY workers won’t,” stated the flier for the February 10 protest. “Why are we being singled out for this exclusion? We can’t survive on poverty pay. And as anyone paying rent and other bills in NYC knows, even \$15/hour doesn’t match the cost of living.”¹ As for CUNY chancellor Milliken, his rent is \$19,500 a month, but he

¹ As the flier noted: “An MIT study found that a worker supporting a child (such as a single mother) in Manhattan needs at least \$27.44 per hour just to cover food, rent, transportation, child care and other basic necessities. And that presumes the person is working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year (i.e., no vacation), which many are not, at least not at one job.” (See <http://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/36061>.)

doesn’t pay it – we do, together with all his other perks and his salary of \$675,000 (which would amount to about \$325 an hour if he worked a 40-hour week).

“Not a Photo Op for Politicians”

Organized contingents of janitorial, maintenance and cafeteria workers were the core of the rally on February 10, together with Internationalist Club members and other students. Hunter PSC chapter chair Jeremy Glick endorsed the protest, which was joined by Fitz Reid, president of DC 37 Local 768 (health care employees), as well as Hot and Crusty Workers Association president Mahoma López. (As reported elsewhere in this issue of *Revolution*, Mahoma was recently fired from his job at Bröd Kitchen, formerly Hot and Crusty, as part of a union-busting drive at the bakery on 63rd and 2nd, just seven blocks from Hunter.)

About 60 loud and spirited protesters participated. Others who approached were deterred by the hefty presence of uniformed police who marched in formation into the protest site, where they staffed metal barriers and challenged anyone who stopped for a moment, “Are you going in here? Either go in or move along.” A number told us they were afraid they could be fired if they participated.

Workers who did attend showed they were not intimidated, enthusiastically chanting “Cuomo, stop attacking CUNY workers,” “Workers yes, bosses no, poverty wages have got to go,” “Workers power, union power” and other slogans. A number spoke to the crowd, denouncing poverty wages, Cuomo’s “discrimination against CUNY workers,” and the idea that those who keep the university going every day, year after year, somehow don’t deserve at least \$15 an hour. Their

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Democrats play politics with workers’ livelihoods. Workers must rely on own power to combat poverty pay.