

## Mobilize Worker/Immigrant Power to Shut Down the Democrat/Republican Deportation Machine!

# Trump Targets Millions of Immigrants for “Removal”

JUNE 24 – A wave of panic swept across the United States last week as immigrant families were hit with the prospect of being picked up in their homes or on the street, parents separated from their U.S.-born children and packed off to detention centers for immediate deportation. President Donald Trump intended to terrorize as he tweeted on June 17, “Next week ICE will begin the process of removing the millions of illegal aliens who have illicitly found their way into the United States. They will be removed as fast as they come in.”

As usual, Trump’s pronouncement was a political ploy, intended to whip up anti-immigrant and racist frenzy in conjunction with kicking off his reelection campaign for president with a rally the next day in Orlando, Florida. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) claimed they were taken by surprise. Even so, Trump’s bombastic announcement of “millions” of deportations sparked widespread fear among the 15 million undocumented immigrants (when you include their families) living in the U.S. Many were afraid to go to work or go shopping, while immigrant rights activists prepared to resist massive police dragnets.

The fears escalated when I.C.E. reported that it was immediately targeting “only” 12,870 individuals who are considered “at large” for missing court appearances, that the *migra* cops indeed planned to snatch people in their homes, and that it was set to begin before dawn on Sunday, June 23, with 2,000 families in ten U.S. cities. But on Saturday, Trump postponed the operation for two weeks, so he can stage a flag-waving military parade in Washington, D.C. on July 4. But if Democrats don’t come across with further gutting of immigrants’ and refugees’ rights, “deportations start!” he tweeted.

Trump’s lieutenant in this operation is acting head of I.C.E. Mark Morgan – the previous acting immigration top cop, Ronald Vitiello, was fired in April for having doubts about the “optics” of a campaign to raid immigrant homes, with parents dragged away from their crying children in front of angry neighbors. Their boss, “Homeland Security” chief Kirstjen Nielsen, also resigned in April as Trump vowed to “get tougher” on immigrants.



Mark Lambie/El Paso Times

Hundreds of refugees seeking asylum are locked up by U.S. Border Patrol under a bridge in El Paso, Texas.

Even now *migra* officials are wary of setting off an outpouring of anger and outrage rivaling the explosive reaction last summer to the policy of family separation and holding teenage immigrant youth in pens.

Trump’s terror plans could backfire. But for that to happen, we must act. The Internationalist Group calls on all defenders of immigrants’ and democratic rights to mobilize to *stop these raids*, flooding the streets to block the unmarked vans and snatch squads. We have called for *workers action to stop the deportations*. This should include walkouts by unions and mobilization in the streets together with millions of immigrant workers whose labor is key to whole sectors of the economy. But that means breaking with both the Democratic and Republican parties of capital which have fueled the monstrous deportation machine.

Trump’s terrorizing tweet came days after his announcement of a “deal” with Mexico

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Internationalist photo

Internationalist contingent at 30 June 2018 NYC march against family separations carried out by U.S. immigration police.

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# Immigrants...

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co on June 7, expanding a policy instituted in January in which more than 10,000 migrants fleeing war and terror in Central America have been sent by the U.S. to wait in Mexican border towns while their requests for asylum are processed, which can take months or even years. That “deal,” in turn, came on the heels of his threat to impose a 5% tariff on imported goods from Mexico, which was soon dropped after major manufacturers complained that they were in the process of moving production facilities to Mexico as a result of Trump’s trade war against China.

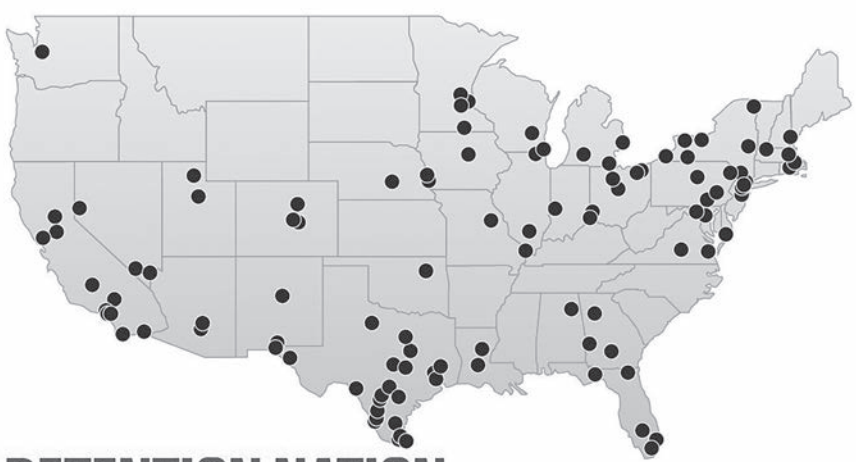
At the same time, tens of thousands of migrants – mostly Central Americans fleeing violence and economic devastation caused by U.S. imperialism – are suffering in wretched concentration camps in the U.S., including thousands of children kept in brutal conditions in private prisons. A scandal has erupted over a private detention facility for over 2,200 teenagers (13-17-year-olds) at the Homestead Air Base in Florida, where kids are prohibited from hugging or even touching each other, allowed only one hour outdoors per day and are placed under constant surveillance, even when they go to the bathroom. When people showed up with boxes of diapers and other sanitary products, the authorities refused to accept them.

Republicans and some Democrats bridle at calling the detention facilities by their right name, concentration camps, made infamous by Nazi Germany. Yet that is exactly what they are, and it’s not the first time in U.S. history. Outrage was sparked as the administration announced plans to hold immigrants at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Japanese Americans told how they were held there in World War II when it was a U.S. concentration camp, ordered by Democratic president Franklin D. Roosevelt. Another Democratic president, Barack Obama, also used Fort Sill in 2014 as a holding facility for Central American immigrants, as 7,700 children were held there and on other military bases in California and Texas.

Despite the formal suspension of the “family separation policy” that caused mass outrage and protest last year, the administration still sets up obstacles and delays in placing these kids with family members who want to take them in. But the abuse of children by the immigration system is nothing new. The American Civil Liberties Union recently exposed the brutal treatment of detained immigrant children under Obama, from 2009 to 2014, including beatings, stress positions, denial of medical care, death threats and sexual abuse.

For more than 50,000 adult and family

## Concentration Camps, U.S.A.



**DETENTION NATION**

Map from dabrownstein.com

**Location of 110 Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facilities (concentration camps). In addition, I.C.E. uses at least 600 other jails and processing centers to hold immigrants.**

Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez recently caught a lot of flak for tweeting that the “[Trump] administration has established concentration camps on the southern border of the United States for immigrants, where they are being brutalized with dehumanizing conditions and dying.” The official outrage machine kicked into high gear as denunciations of Ocasio-Cortez poured in from both sides of the aisle. Yet as even a *Bloomberg* (21 June) commentary noted, “AOC Wasn’t Wrong About Concentration Camps.”

The Internationalist Group has for years denounced the immigrant detention centers as concentration camps, demanding they be shut them down.

Even as she has repeatedly called for, and voted for, “border security,” Ocasio-Cortez is right that the U.S. has concentration camps. At the same time, AOC, like Bernie Sanders, holds up Democratic icon Franklin Delano Roosevelt as the model and inspiration for her politics. During World War II, FDR imprisoned some 120,000 Japanese Americans, both immigrants and U.S.-born, in what even he called “concentration camps,” which they certainly were. Learn these names: Tule Lake, Manzanar, Gila River – just a few of the dozens of camps where FDR locked up those of Japanese ancestry.

This was in fact part of a long tra-

deteenues, conditions are even more squalid and overcrowded. Immigrant detainees are given little to eat and little or no medical treatment as illnesses spread. In El Paso, detainees stand on toilets to make room for others in crowded cells. Trump administration officials

dition of U.S. capitalist “democracy,” which imprisoned the Navajos in the Bosque Redondo concentration camp in 1868, and drove Filipino independence fighters into concentration camps in the genocidal “pacification” campaign following U.S. imperialism’s conquest of the Philippines in 1898.

And some of the same World War II camps were later designated as detention centers for communists, leftists, civil rights activists and other “subversives” under the provisions of the 1950 McCarran Act. Fort Sill, which the Trump administration wants to use to hold immigrants, as the Obama administration already did, and which FDR used to imprison Japanese Americans, was one of those camps. Moreover, it was a Democratic-majority House and Senate that overwhelmingly passed the witch-hunting McCarran Act.

Today millions of people are rightly enraged at the images and descriptions of the concentration camps for migrants. Building up the Democratic Party and praising FDR, LBJ and the rest of its criminal leaders means chaining the oppressed to the machinery of their own oppression. It is not possible to wage a real fight to do away with this oppression without learning the lesson that you can’t fight it with the Democratic Party. ■

have argued in court that immigrant detainees do not have the right to soap, toothbrushes or blankets, since none of these items were specified by a 1997 law that required that detainees be kept in “safe and sanitary conditions.”

In Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known by his initials AMLO, upon taking office in January, formed a new police force, the National Guard. As ordered by Trump under the June 7 “deal,” some 6,000 National Guardsmen will be deployed to Mexico’s southern border to make it harder for Central Americans to enter the country. AMLO is doing the bidding of the U.S. president, saying that Mexico “will stick to a no-confrontation policy” with Trump. But Trump the imperialist bully continues to bash Mexico as he did in his 2016 election campaign.

**The United States is a police state for immigrants.** Subject to being arbitrarily picked up at home, at their workplaces, outside courthouses or on the street, often by plainclothes I.C.E. cops in unmarked

cars, immigrants must be wary as they would be under an authoritarian regime. As Trump stokes xenophobia (fear and hatred of foreigners), the rights of all are threatened by this unbridled exercise of police power. Constitutional rights to due process, against unreasonable search and seizure, against cruel and unusual punishment, etc. are supposed to apply to all. As with the phony “war on terror,” the war on immigrants targets everyone’s rights.

Even as fear stalks the land, there has also been defiance. Hundreds of thousands protested against family separation last year. But we are dealing with a regime that has no compunction about ripping up rights: protest alone will not stop it. **What is crucial is to bring to bear the power of a force that can stymie the deportation machine – the working class.** We need to mobilize the power of the workers movement in mass action nationwide to immobilize the “immigrant removal” system, and using the power that can halt the wheels of capitalism. **Raids and arrests must be met by mass protest, including labor/immigrant/student action to block the deportation cops.**

The U.S. has become deportation nation. But it’s not just since Republican immigrant-basher-in-chief Trump took over. Democrat Barack Obama earned the title of “deporter-in-chief” by expelling a record number of immigrants, over 8 million altogether, far more than Trump has been able to match. The “well-oiled deportation machine” Obama handed over to his successor is now going into high gear. And his failed 2013 immigration “reform” bill contained many of the measures intensifying repression of immigrants that Trump has implemented.

The immigration “crisis” is the direct result of the depredations of imperialist capitalism. The explosion in immigrant detentions began in the 1980s, with a flood of refugees fleeing the U.S.-sponsored dirty wars in Central America. It escalated after Bill Clinton pushed through the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 that destroyed much of Mexican agriculture, pushing millions of peasants to emigrate. Clinton’s Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 more than tripled the number of detainees, which went from about 5,000 to about 16,000 per day.

But it was Barack Obama who really created the detention juggernaut we have today. He expanded the system to some 200 centers crisscrossing the country, plus more than a thousand other facilities like county jails where immigrants are held. The children’s prisons were built by Obama and expanded in response to the influx of unaccompanied minors fleeing violence in Honduras and Guatemala in 2014. Detention is now a big business in the U.S., with most of the detention prisons being privately run, and hugely profitable.

While liberals, leftists, many immigrants and youth focus their ire on Trump, the stark fact is that the Democrats have done even more to militarize the border and victimize immigrants. The Internationalist Group calls for **mass worker/immigrant mobilization to stop deportations.** We call for **driving out the I.C.E. jails and shutting down the concentration camps for immigrants.** We say: **Let the refugees in! Full citizenship rights for all immigrants!** Above all, we fight to break with Democrats, Republicans and all capitalist parties, to build an **internationalist workers party** to bring down the racist rule of capital with socialist revolution. ■

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## Democrats, Republicans, Courts, Congress: Enemies of Full Right to Abortion

# Defeat Racist Abortion Bans With Class-Struggle Action

In a frenzied move to roll back women's rights by several decades, so far in 2019 nine states have passed new, draconian restrictions on abortion rights. Alabama leads the way with an almost complete ban. Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Ohio come in a close second with their "fetal heartbeat" laws, banning abortions at six weeks, before many women know that they are pregnant. Missouri follows with a ban on abortions after eight weeks, while Arkansas and Utah have enacted new restrictions on abortion after 18 weeks.

Any restriction on a woman's right to an abortion is an infringement on her basic right to control her own body, and these laws frequently don't even include exceptions for victims of rape or incest. Some of them don't even have exceptions to preserve the health of the mother. The supposed basis for the anti-abortion laws pushed by the "pro-life" bigots is the anti-materialist, religious doctrine that a fetus is a person, an "unborn child." In fact, these new restrictions have absolutely nothing to do with a moral reverence for "life", but rather display a pathological disregard for the well-being of women. Particularly poor and working-class women, because the availability of abortion is also a class question.

The new abortion bans and intensified drive to force women back into the dark ages before abortion was legal center on Republican "red states." They are intended to get the U.S. Supreme Court with its reinforced anti-abortion majority to rule on laws that gut the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision declaring abortion a woman's right. But even in predominantly Democratic "blue states" that have recently expanded access to abortion, the laws often come with restrictions. In New York, the 1970 law making obtaining or performing an abortion after 24 weeks a felony (except to save the life of the woman) was repealed. Importantly, the law defines a person as a "human being who has been born and is alive." But the new standard only allows third trimester abortion in cases where the fetus isn't viable or the life or health of the patient is at risk.

So a pregnant teenager who decides late in the game, perhaps after resisting weeks of pressure from parents, church, boyfriend or spouse, that she just isn't ready to be a mother – that she wants to continue her education, or embark on a career, or whatever – is out of luck. She will be forced to give birth to an unwanted child, unless she can find a medical professional to determine that it is necessary to preserve her mental health. And what would be considered proof? An attempted suicide perhaps?

In Rhode Island, similar restrictions exist and physicians are required to document the medical reasons for an abortion performed after 24 weeks or face loss of their medical license. In Maine, new legislation requires insurance companies to cover abortion, but there is a religious exemption.

As Marxists and defenders of women's

## For Free Abortion On Demand! Labor: Defend the Clinics!



Revolutionary Internationalist Youth and Marxist Student Union (CCSU) at May 30 Hartford, Connecticut Black Reproductive Freedom Rally.

rights, we have a fundamentally different standard. We say that the decision to give birth or not must be that of the woman alone, because it is her life and her future that will be irrevocably altered. The Internationalist Group calls for *free abortion on demand*. We also stand for *militant defense of abortion clinics*, including against "pro-life" terrorists who target the courageous doctors and nurses who perform this vital medical procedure. And we fight in the unions to defend this elemental right of women.

The anti-abortion "god squads" who besiege the clinics really don't give a damn about so-called "sanctity of life". Rather, they are obsessed with putting women in their place. "Keep 'em barefoot and pregnant, and in the kitchen," summed up such traditional views of women's role. Like the Nazis who took over from German conservatives the motto that women should be confined to "*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*" (children, kitchen, church). In this misogynist (woman-hating) view, women are destined to be baby factories and domestic servants. Ultimately, women's oppression is rooted in the nuclear family, the primary social unit of capitalist society.

There is another important social underpinning to the anti-abortion drive. The Internationalist Group has called to *defeat the racist abortion bans*. The history of white supremacist laws and actions to forcibly sterilize black women is notorious. And it's hard to miss that "pro-life" capitalist politicians, who have nothing to offer on maternal mortality rates or child poverty, furiously denounce Black Lives Matter protests against racist cop killings of African Americans and fulsomely support the legalized lynching known as the death penalty.

What is less often talked about in polite

society is how the push to illegalize abortion (and contraception, once they get going) is driven by racist fears that white women are not producing enough white babies. This theme is spouted in its crudest form by the Nazi fascists who variously chant "Jews will not replace us" and "they will not replace us." This "white replacement" myth is spread by anti-Muslim racists in Europe and was echoed by the Christchurch, New Zealand mass murderer who slaughtered 50 people at a mosque this past March.

But this theme has currency even in "respectable" bourgeois circles. The bible of the "family values" anti-abortion forces is the 1989 book by Ben Wattenberg, *The Birth Dearth*, which bemoaned the fact that, due to the availability of abortion and "the pill," fertility rates among white women were falling below the 2.1 children per woman "replacement level." Wattenberg, a "neoconservative" fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, complained in 2004 that "60 percent of aborted fetuses are white and if we could lower that number by even half, we could prevent the decline of the white race." This racist garbage came from someone who had a regular talk show on liberal PBS public TV.

Today, the Democratic Party is seeking to use the abortion bans in order to win women's votes in the 2020 elections. But, in fact, the Democrats are no defenders of women's fundamental right to abortion. Wattenberg was a former speech writer for liberal Democrats Hubert Humphrey and Washington senator Henry Jackson. Both were rabid anti-communists, and Wattenberg was close to the Social Democrats U.S.A. who later populated the Reagan administration. The current presidential frontrunner Joe Biden supported Democratic president Jimmy Carter's Hyde amendment ban-

ning Medicaid funds for abortions for poor women; said that *Roe v. Wade* "went too far" in legalizing abortion; and has called to "ban all post-viability abortions."

But even more telling is the record of feminist Democrats like Hillary Clinton. In the 1990s, when husband Bill was campaigning for the presidency, she declared that abortions should be "safe, legal, and rare." But when she was preparing to run for president herself in 2006, she sought "common ground" with "right-to-life" reactionaries, saying that abortion is a "tragic choice" that "either does not ever have to be exercised or only in very rare circumstances." Did you catch the "not ever"?

While anti-abortion zealots compete for first prize in callous disregard for women's lives, so-called allies in the Democratic Party simply abstain rather than putting up a fight. In the Alabama House of Representatives, Democrats chose to walk out rather than voting. In Louisiana, which recently passed a "six-week ban" with no exceptions for rape or incest, the bill was authored and signed by Democratic Governor John Bel Edwards. So much for the Democrats' "resistance".

Today in Alabama, doctors who perform an abortion can be sentenced to up to 99 years in prison for performing an abortion. In Georgia, once the law goes into effect next January, a woman can be charged with murder for terminating a pregnancy. Even in cases where the patients themselves are not charged with a crime, they can be called as witnesses against their providers. In addition to the harsh new penalties, there is also a web of existing TRAP laws (targeted regulation of abortion providers), designed to make operating a clinic prohibitively expensive, and creating a complicated labyrinth of bureaucracy for obtaining an abortion.

With the lives of women hanging in the balance, and the so called "resistance" capitulating to bigoted moralism, to go forward in the battle for abortion rights and women's liberation requires a *class* fight. As long as unions remain tied to the Democratic Party, with their half-hearted, weak-willed or outright hostile approach to abortion rights, labor will be unable to fight for the half of the working class that suffers the special oppression of being a woman worker.

There have been some small mobilizations on the part of workers to defend clinics and oppose attacks on abortion rights, such as the January 2016 picket initiated by Class Struggle Workers – Portland against a youth "right-to-life" rally. But this is only a small example of what is needed. Class-conscious workers must uncompromisingly fight to defend and advance abortion rights. Without mobilizing the might of the working class, led by an international revolutionary workers party, the liberation of women from their roles as cheap labor and incubators for the ruling class is impossible. ■



# For Class-Struggle Action to Defeat the Militarist Regime On the Road to a Workers and Peasants Government

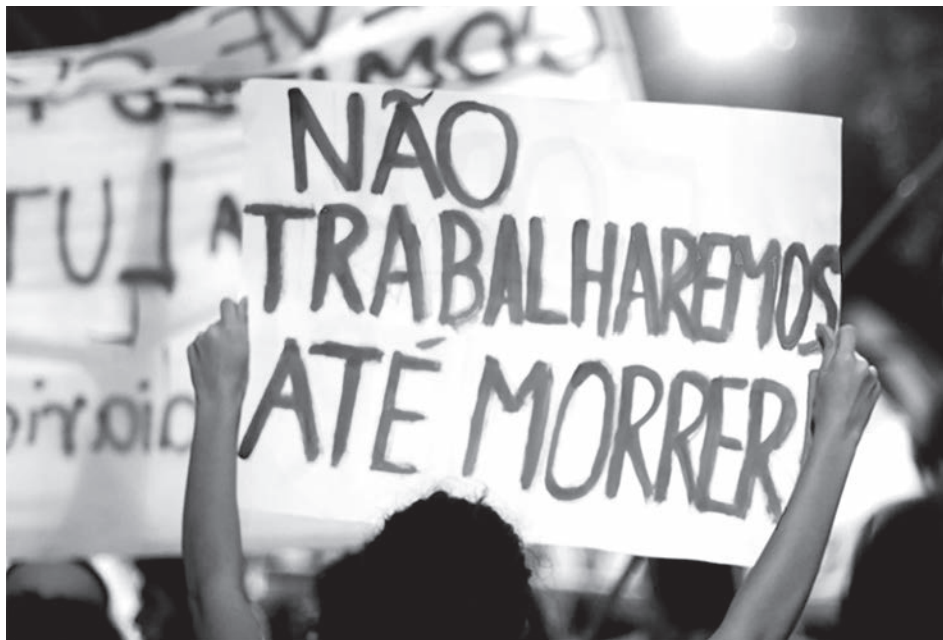
## Brazil: For a Militant General Strike Against the Pension “Reforms” of Bolsonaro and the Popular Front

*The following is a translation of a Vanguarda Operária leaflet distributed in Rio de Janeiro by our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil (Fourth Internationalist League of Brazil) at the recent June 14 nationwide general strike.*

After just 100 days in office, the militarist government of retired army captain Jair Messias Bolsonaro and his vice president, retired general Hamilton Mourão, is being challenged by broad sections of society. After the shock and paralysis of almost the entire left and the trade-union movement following the election last October, which many saw as the end of the world, finally there are the beginnings of social resistance. The massive mobilization of students and teachers on May 15 against the attacks on education led more than a million demonstrators into the streets. The response of the pro-Bolsonaro right wing on May 26 brought out barely half that, and was followed by a second mobilization on May 30 against the education cutbacks. Now we have the general strike of June 14 against the pension reform, which could surpass that of April 2017.

This is a class war. As the emblematic poster proclaimed, “We Will Not Work Until We Die!” It should be made clear that Bolsonaro’s pension reform is a deadly threat to millions of workers. The proposed constitutional amendment (PEC) 06/2019 defines a minimum retirement age of 65 for men and 62 for women. A worker or a worker would have to contribute for 40 years into the social security fund to receive full retirement benefits. The welfare assistance for the poorest workers will be reduced to a miserable R\$ 400 (US\$105) a month after the age of 60. In addition, they want to introduce a pension fund “capitalization” system that would eliminate employer and government contribution and create individual savings accounts, deducted from wages and handed over to the banks to manage (and profit from).

It’s time to play hardball. Yet the trade-union bureaucracy is doing everything to limit the impact of the protests. Already on May 15 and 30, the National Union of Students (UNE), controlled since the 1990s by PCdoB,<sup>1</sup> blocked any attempt to expand the demands to go beyond narrow sectoral demands. Now the Força Sindical (Union Power) federation is participating in the “general strike,” but its chief, Paulinho, who is a parliamentary deputy of the (“center-right”) Centrão coalition,



“We Will Not Work Until We Die!” Protest against pension “reform” in Brazil.

wants to negotiate the pension reform with Bolsonaro. For his part, the president of the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT – United Workers Federation), Vagner Freitas, insists that June 14 “is a day to stay at home,” to “fold our arms,” that the “unemployed or discouraged workers should not consume or leave home” in order to “send a message to the government.”

However, *the bonapartist regime of Bolsonaro and Mourão, based on the military apparatus, is not about to yield to negotiations or messages.* To counteract the sabotage of the union tops and to land a decisive blow against the regime, to stop social security “reform” and to roll back the labor “reform,” we must turn the walkout into *a real general strike – the entire economy must be brought to a standstill.* Since the strike was called by all the union federations (CUT, Força Sindical, Nova Central, CTB, Intersindical, Conlutas, CGTB, CSB and UGT), there should be *solid pickets that no one will dare to cross:* a strike is a collective action, not an individual decision – anyone who does not abide by the decision is a traitor, a strikebreaker. There should be *flying pickets* (mobile strike brigades) to shut down any company or business that opens its doors and to *block traffic*

at strategic points.

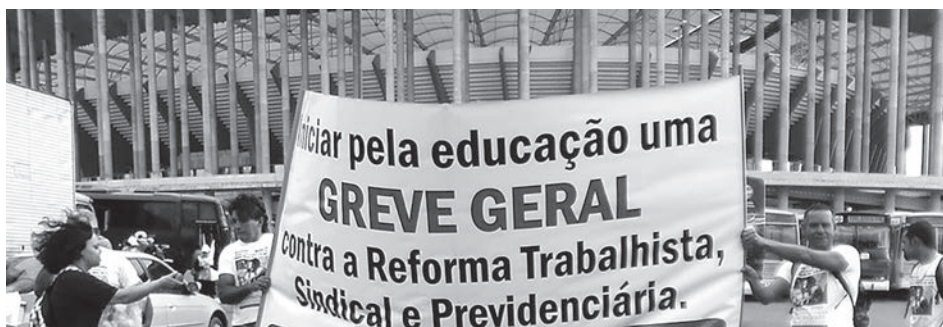
Specifically, in the city of Rio de Janeiro, it is necessary to *shut down the metro* (subway) *and buses*, to *block the Central do Brasil* rail station and *massively mobilize* health workers, teachers, students, parents, slum dwellers and all those affected by the blows of the federal and state governments to *surround the Palace of Laranjeiras* (seat of the governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro), occupied by the assassin of black people, Wilson Witzel. In the Baixada Fluminense region outside the city of Rio, workers should *occupy the Petrobras oil refinery in the city of Duque de Caxias* and in Volta Redonda they should *stop production in the CSN steel company.* However, even militant street mobilizations will not be enough to inflict a serious defeat on the regime: *a class-struggle political offensive against all the wings of the bourgeoisie* is needed, not only against the racists like Bolsonaro, Mourão and Witzel, but also against the bourgeois popular front that opened the door for them.

It is the task of the revolutionary Marxists, Trotskyists, to explain to working people that the attacks are not simply a ploy of this particularly reactionary government, but the result of a capital-

ist system in an advanced state of decay. The global economic crisis that started in 2007-08 is continuing. Banks need the injection of pension funds because they are bankrupt, the fall in the rate of profit gives rise to one speculative bubble after another. Therefore, *every capitalist government will attack the retirement system.* We mustn’t forget that *it was Lula* (Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, who was president of Brazil from 2003 to 2011) *with his bourgeois popular front government led by the Workers Party (PT), which in 2003 legislated the “pension reform”* that imposed on public employees a retirement age of 60 years for men and 55 for women. This provoked the split of the PT legislators who soon formed the PSOL (Party of Socialism and Freedom), a knock-off PT.

We of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, section of the League for the Fourth International, call for the release of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and the dropping of all charges against him. The Lava Jato<sup>2</sup> case is an utter fraud, pushed by a judicial and police apparatus trained by U.S. imperialism, which is eager to get its hands on the Brazilian oil industry. The recent revelations by *Intercept Brazil* of talks between Judge Sérgio Moro and the federal attorney general Deltan Dallagnol, coordinator of the Lava Jato task force, on the urgency of keeping the former president isolated during the elections, provides one more proof that the whole trial against him is a political revenge of the bourgeois right wing. However, we do not give any political support to Lula or to the PT’s popular front of class collaboration.

This collaboration, which binds the workers’ movement to sectors of the bourgeoisie, thereby blocking a revolutionary mobilization, is still in force today, even after Dilma Rousseff’s resignation from the presidency in the impeachment orchestrated by that nest of corruption and thievery which is the federal congress, and after the frame-up trial and imprisonment of Lula. Today, PT leaders seek to avoid at all costs a confrontation that could produce the fall of the current government. They reject calls for impeachment, Rousseff says, because they do not want to stoop to the level of the “coup plotters.” This is only a ploy. The fact is that the PT does not want to have the



LQB calls for a general strike to defend education and oppose labor, union and social security “reforms” of the popular front government, May 2016.

<sup>1</sup> Partido Comunista do Brasil, an ex-Maoist social-democratic party that was part of the popular-front governments led by the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers Party),

<sup>2</sup> Lava Jato (Jet Wash), the name of a car wash where payoffs were made in the corruption case against officials of Petrobras, the formerly state-owned oil company. This case was then used by right-wing judges and politicians to go after the PT and its bourgeois allies in the popular-front government. See “For Class Struggle Against the Bonapartist Threat in Brazil,” *The Internationalist* No. 43, May-June 2016.

*continued on page 23*



# France: “Yellow Vest” Revolt and the Struggle for Socialist Revolution

**For Workers Action  
Against Police Repression!**

**Mobilize the Power of the  
Working Class to Defeat the  
Capitalist Austerity Drive!**

**Build a Multi-Ethnic  
Workers Party on the  
Program of Lenin and  
Trotsky**

*The following article is translated from L'Internationaliste No. 10, French-language publication of the League for the Fourth International.*

It is now more than six months since the first demonstrations of the “Gilets jaunes” (Yellow Vests) in France. Thousands of people are still demonstrating, although the bourgeois media have been waiting – with ill-disguised impatience – ever since the movement began for it to ebb and then die. Ferocious repression has reduced the demonstrations to a hard core, and an unrelenting media propaganda campaign has eroded initial high public support, but the guerrilla warfare is far from ended. The cop attacks are the most massive and brutal since May 1968. Yet bourgeois media around the world – so quick to denounce “violence” against coup-plotting racist bourgeois in Venezuela – cover up the police terror in France.

The social polarization was thrown into sharp focus by the responses to the fire that damaged the Parisian cathedral of Notre Dame in April. While French president Macron used this as one more pretext to appeal for national unity, many yellow vests were rightly enraged that French firms, many state-subsidized, could nonchalantly offer hundreds of millions of euros for repairs as a charitable act while social services are cut to the bone. Since taking office in May 2017, Macron has introduced new anti-worker labor laws, begun the privatization of the SNCF state rail system, slashed thousands of jobs in the public sector and created new barriers



**Yellow Vest demonstration in Paris, November 2018. Sign says: “Macron, get lost!”**

to access to the universities. He canceled the wealth tax while increasing taxes on pensions and cutting rent subsidies.

The increased taxes on fuel, which especially hit working people, was the drop that made the glass overflow, setting off the Yellow Vest revolt. Across Europe, social unrest following the financial crash in 2008 has taken the form of a variety of populist movements and parties. These have mobilized large sections of the petty bourgeoisie as well as workers, youth and others hard-hit by the global economic crisis. Some have had a rightist-nationalist character, targeting immigrants and shading into fascist parties like the Lega in Italy and outright fascists like the National Rally (formerly National Front) in France. Others have tended to the left, such as SYRIZA in Greece, or Podemos in Spain. But the vicious austerity has continued as none have posed a *class opposition to the capitalist system*.

The Yellow Vests are another of these populist movements which have come and gone in recent years. Rather than a structured political formation, in France it has been more of a loose “*mouvance*,” or milieu, reflecting the fact that it embraces both leftists and rightists, and many who fled the mainstream capitalist parties. Such multi-class movements – whether of the “left,” right or center – are bourgeois in character, and thus cannot lead a revolutionary struggle to bring down capitalism. The fact that they have channeled popular protest against inequality and austerity is history’s punishment for the lack of a revolutionary leadership of the working

class. To go forward it is necessary to mobilize the proletariat to *overturn the class axis* of the struggle.

The government is certainly doing its best to prepare the terrain. The police-state measures culminated in tear-gas and water-cannon attacks on trade-union contingents as well as yellow vests and others in Paris on May Day. But the lead-up to the sudden and unexpected emergence of the Yellow Vests was a series of defeats of the organized workers movement centrally due to the fact that the trade-union bureaucracies continue to function as the labor lieutenants of capital in sabotaging struggles. While the CFDT (Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail) and Force Ouvrière “dialogue” with Macron over his anti-labor “reforms,” the reputedly more militant CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail, once linked to the Communist Party) only offers token one-day mobilizations. The so-called “far left” (the NPA – New Anticapitalist Party) and L.O. (Lutte Ouvrière [Worker Struggle]) in turn acts as the “left” flank of these bureaucracies.

The situation cries out for a workers leadership that goes beyond simple trade-unionism, on a program to unite the entire working class and rally the pensioners, the youth, the unemployed and immigrants in hard class struggle. The Yellow Vests began as a movement of the provinces against the glittering élite of the capital. But while disrupting traffic and some commercial transport, they lack the social power of the organized working class. To bring down Macron, the investment banker who fancies himself a pint-size Napoléon (or even the supreme god Jupiter), it is necessary to join together with the besieged working-class and immigrant suburbs, headed up by the “heavy battalions” of industrial workers and led by a multiethnic revolutionary workers party. To that end, a Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard would put forward a series of transitional demands leading to a workers government.

## **A Heterogeneous Populist Movement**

Adopting as their symbol the yellow warning jacket that is mandatory for all French motorists, some 300,000 people came out on November 17 and set up more than 2,000 road blocks in what was initially a rebellion against the gasoline tax hike. It soon became a diffuse revolt spurred on by the insufferable arrogance of French President Emmanuel Macron. In December, Macron announced that the fuel tax increase would be postponed, along with a few other trivial concessions, and he would begin a “listening tour” through the country. After some months of a staged monologue, in April Macron announced the next round of capitalist attacks, barely camouflaged, saying his reforms “should be preserved, pursued and intensified”.

The Yellow Vest movement has vented the widespread anger and outrage of millions of people against rising prices and taxes. The “eco-tax” which drove up gasoline prices meant a new burden for wide sections of the population. As in recent protests against the 2017 gasolinazo in Mexico, the May 2018 truckers revolt in Brazil and the near-insurrection in Haiti in July, the tax hikes aimed at cutting fuel consumption were ordered by international financial agencies. Macron’s claims to be concerned with the environment are downright insulting. In fact, given the deliberate running down of public transport, the shrinking number of government offices, social services, hospitals, schools, shops, etc., people living outside the central cities need their cars more than ever.

This was indeed an explosion of *la France profonde*, the “deep France” of the provinces. The provinces have been written off as nests of reaction since the days of the Jacobins and the Paris Commune. Today, they are where the fascist RN gets its highest electoral scores. Like every cliché, this



**The self-described “Jupiterian” president on an inspection tour of Paris accompanied by his cops, 2 December 2018.**



has some elements of truth, but only some. A study of some of the first yellow vests protestors published in *Le Monde* (11 December 2018) showed that, sociologically, this is a working-class and lower-middle-class movement. There were higher proportions of white-collar employees and self-employed, but many barely make the minimum wage. The median age was 45 years, slightly older than the French average, reflecting the fact that a quarter were retirees.

This is thus not a reedition of the Poujadist movement of the 1950, a reactionary movement which represented the declining traditional middle class, mainly shopkeepers. But it is also not the organized working class: 64% said that trade unions had no place in the movement. One-third said they were “neither left nor right” (often a reactionary line) and for almost half (47%), this was the first political activity.

From the beginning, the Yellow Vests thus banned not only political parties, but even any form of concrete collective decision-making and delegating authority. They did not want any “spokesmen” (or women), although the bourgeois media ended up singling out a few individuals. One the one hand, there were truck drivers Eric Drouet and Maxime Nicolle, suspected of fascist sympathies. And on the other, the black Caribbean French woman, Priscillia Ludosky. But Nicolle and Ludosky made a point of demonstrating together in Paris and then at Bourges in January. Seeking consensus, the movement simply piled up demands, no matter how contradictory. In the end, political polarization was averted by avoiding actual political debate and decision-making.

A list of 42 demands emerged at a national meeting in Commercy in December. These included reimposing the tax on the wealthy, raising the minimum wage, jobs for the unemployed and better pensions, lower class sizes, full retirement at 60, or at 55 for those engaged in heavy physical labor, stopping the closures of local train lines, post offices and schools, etc. In short, a list of all good things which could have been compiled via opinion poll. Many could even be supported by an agile fascist demagogue. Demands like higher taxes on McDonalds and Google, and forbidding the sale of dams and airports, could have a French nationalist slant. Some called for better treatment of refugees, but also for rapid expulsion of those whose cases are rejected.

There was above all a great deal of sentiment for deciding political matters via referendums. This is a pseudo-democratic, and ultimately anti-democratic, procedure in which the bourgeois state manipulates the population by offering it carefully selected and limited alternatives. Such plebiscitary rule was favored by Napoleon III and De Gaulle. But within the movement itself there was and is no mechanism for deciding which views have a majority, or for eventually repudiating any of them, or of deciding strategy for that matter. The movement has remained splintered into hundreds of local groups, and attempts to organize a slate for the European Parliament elections collapsed.

While their anger is directed against bankers and capitalist politicians, the protesters’ consciousness is by no means revolutionary and not even implicitly “anti-capitalist,” as some on the left would have it. In this respect, it resembles

the Spanish *Indignados* of 2011 and the Nuit Debout (“Up All Night”) movement which occupied public squares, mainly in Paris, in 2016. These movements had a large number of fairly privileged middle-class youth (even if their studies had left them jobless), with a limited number of young workers and still less of immigrant workers. The yellow vests, on the other hand, are lower-middle-class or working-class and less articulate, and thus far less attractive to any journalists who are not simply regurgitating the government line about the Yellow Vest being mere thugs.

Like the Yellow Vests, Nuit Debout also did not exclude fascists or reactionaries and had a lot of talk about rewriting the constitution. It was however much more closely associated with the “La France Insoumise” (France Unbowed – LFI) movement which issued from the social-democratic Parti de Gauche as a personal vehicle for Jean-Luc Mélenchon on an explicitly nationalist/populist basis. And what with waving the French tricolor, singing the national anthem (the Marseillaise), and making anti-immigrant remarks, it’s not surprising that the yellow vests have never really taken root in Paris, other major cities and the banlieues, having nothing to offer the immigrant population.

### Lessons of the Defeat in Rail

In 2016, the “socialist” government of French president François Hollande and his prime minister Manuel Valls came up with the El Khomri law, named after its minister of labor, which made it easier for the bosses to lay off workers and reduce overtime and severance payments. Hollande rammed through the law, preventing a vote in parliament, even though it meant the self-destruction of the Socialist Party (in the service of capital). Yet it met stiff resistance from the working class. Strikes in a number of sectors, such as the ports, were effective, and pickets quite successfully blocked gas refineries and depots. Although Philippe Martinez, the head of the CGT, was portrayed as an unreasonable intransigent, what he actually said was, “As long as the government refuses to discuss, the mobilization will continue” (*Le Figaro*, 25 May 2016).

But what was there to discuss? A genuine struggle – i.e. a real and not a token general strike – would have meant taking control out of the hands of the venal bureaucrats, going beyond the local initiatives in individual workplaces to create organized forms embodying the struggle: elected strike committees to unite all the unionists, now split into different unions, as well as non-union workers, mass picket lines to spread the strike and defend the strikers; and national coordinating committees, linking Paris with mobilizations in provincial cities.

The El Khomri law was only a first step for the French bourgeoisie. Two years later, as one of his first acts, Macron went after the rail workers. In *Le Monde* (27 February 2018), one pundit advised him that dismantling the SNCF should “be presented as a battle... a heroic combat against the trade-union hydra,” as British prime minister Thatcher did against the miners union in the ’80s. Macron’s prime minister Édouard Philippe stressed his “determination,” another advisor commented, “It’s not 1995 anymore.” He was referring to the wave of public sector strikes that December which foiled

## Stop the Repression Against the Yellow Vests!



**CRS riot police charge Yellow Vests demonstrators near the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, January 12. Free them all, wipe all charges off the books!**

Since the beginning of the Yellow Vests protests in November 2018, the government of Emmanuel Macron has responded with massive repression on a scale not seen in decades. Over the course of six months of demonstrations, 12,107 demonstrators were picked up for questioning, of whom 10,718 were held in police custody, i.e., jailed (*Canal+*, 15 May). Some 1,500 were detained on a single day (December 8), an all-time record, far surpassing the numbers of those arrested in the police-state round-ups during the 2017 G20 summit in Hamburg.

In addition, according to revelations in the *Canard Enchaîné* (17 and 24 April), Paris hospitals were repeatedly ordered to turn over the names of those injured in the police attacks.

More than 2,000 yellow vests have been tried, found guilty and sentenced, the vast majority in immediate trials. Of those, around 800 were sentenced to prison time. Meanwhile, thousands have been injured in the vicious police onslaught, including more than 280 who received head injuries, mostly from rubber bullets and grenades, while two dozen were hit in the eye, losing their sight, and five had their hands severed. Naturally, no police have been charged.

This orgy of cop violence and repression and is a threat to all, and to fundamental democratic rights. *We demand that all charges against Yellow Vests protesters be dropped, that all those arrested be released from jail or police custody, and that all convictions be wiped off the books!*

government attempts to cut pensions.

The comparison with the British miners, who were finally quelled by wiping out the entire coal mining industry, underlines the key role played by rail workers in France for decades. In the 1986-87 rail strikes, with the trade union bureaucrats, including the CGT, widely discredited, *coordinations* (strike coordinating committees) sprung up in key rail hubs, such as Rouen. Many members of the “far left” played an active role then in uniting the struggle, going around the labor federation bureaucrats. But by 1995, such committees hardly existed, and the erstwhile leftists active in them were being assimilated into the union bureaucracies. In the 2000s, despite isolated attempts to revive them in some Paris terminals, these mass anti-bureaucratic *coordinations* were a distant memory.

Confronted with Macron’s plans as early as February 2018, the bureaucrats dithered, wasting time with endless “negotiations” although the government had already laid down its draft privatization law, and they scheduled a referendum in May. In addition to the usual impotent “days of action,” the bureaucrats finally settled on the losing tactic of “two out of five,” i.e., rotating two-day strikes followed by three days of work. These dragged on, demobilizing the railway workers, angering commuters and ensuring that there would

be no junction with the students protesting Macron’s social selection schemes for higher education. Nor would there be common struggle with other public employees called out on their own “days of action” which occasionally overlapped with those of the railway workers.

Eventually, the trade union federation Solidaires (SUD), with support from the NPA, and L.O. supporters in the CGT began agitating for “renewable” strikes at each site; on at least one occasion the CGT tops called the cops against attempts to organize such a strike. But while more militant, this tactic evaded the need for the wider mobilization needed in a class confrontation of this magnitude, as well as the need for actual strike committees across the different union federations and an alternative leadership. Once again, the government plan was rammed through.

Today short-term labor contracts of less than a month duration outnumber unlimited contracts by 4.5 million to 1 million. Only half of those “disposable” workers on short-term contracts are even eligible for unemployment benefits. The official unemployment is over 9%, and the median monthly take-home pay (after taxes) is €1,700, a little over US\$20,000 a year. The government now threatens to lay off 120,000 public employees, because it believes it has now broken the back of trade-union resistance. But the fight is not over.



## Missed Rendezvous

Last November 17, CGT general secretary Martinez reacted to the Yellow Vest movement by declaring that it was “impossible to imagine the CGT marching together with the National Front,” further accusing it of being merely an anti-tax mobilization manipulated by the bosses. But if Martinez really believed this to be a movement dominated by the fascists, he should have proposed active opposition, rather than simply washing its hands of the matter. In point of fact, oil refinery workers went on a national strike on November 22 in annual wage negotiations. So in the Bouches-du-Rhône department, there were strikers at a Total refinery standing on the other side of the road from the yellow vests – a perfect opportunity for fraternization. The CGT bureaucracy hastened to settle the contract.

On December 5, Macron demanded that “political forces, trade-union forces and employers launch a clear and explicit call for calm and respect for the republican framework.” The CGT, CFDT, FO, FSU (one of the teachers federations) and several other trade union federations met to draw up a communique condemning “all forms of violence in the expression of demands” and congratulated the government on “opening the door to dialogue.” As a concrete manifestation of this betrayal, on December 7, after a meeting with the Transport Minister, the CGT and FO canceled the unlimited strike of truck drivers which was supposed to start three days later.

Finally, on February 5, after a certain amount of fraternization on the ground and pressure from the ranks, the CGT tops agreed to call a one-day general strike and to joint demonstrations with the yellow vests (many of whom, however, due to their precarious financial situation, only demonstrate on Saturdays). While the demonstrations were large enough, the strike itself was poorly followed: it was too little, too late, and not repeated. As Trotsky wrote of this tactic:

“The general strike is, by its very essence, a revolutionary means of struggle. In a general strike the proletariat assembles itself as a class against its class enemy. The use of the general strike is absolutely incompatible with the politics of the Popular Front which signifies alliance with the bourgeoisie, that is to say, the submission of the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. The miserable bureaucrats of the Socialist and Communist parties as well as of the trade unions consider the proletariat as a simple auxiliary instrument in their combinations behind the scenes with the bourgeoisie. They propose that the workers pay for a simple demonstration with sacrifices which cannot have any meaning in the workers’ eyes unless it is a question of a decisive struggle. As if the masses of millions of workers could make turns to the right and to the left at will, according to parliamentary combinations!”

—L.D. Trotsky, “The Decisive Hour in France” (December 1938)

While the trade unions (after a half-hearted struggle) have been repeatedly defeated, class struggle in France has never depended on the strength of trade union organization alone. As Macron promises new tax gifts to his base in the upper middle class, there will be yet more cuts in public services. Meanwhile, despite huge

# The Opportunist Left Hitched to the Yellow Vests

Translated from L’Internationaliste No. 10 (May 2019)

When the Yellow Vests burst upon the scene, it was a godsend for the bulk of the demoralized French “far left.” With the liquidation of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire and creation of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste in 2009, the majority of its founders breathed a sigh of relief at being able to jettison the words “communist” and “revolutionary.”

But it was the first step towards disintegration. Soon whole chunks of the NPA left for the greener pastures of the Parti de Gauche (Left Party), which in turn moved from a form of social democracy to bourgeois national-populism as La France Insoumise (LFI, France Unbowed). The LFI’s electoral fortunes ebb and flow depending on whether or not its *líder máximo* Jean-Luc Mélenchon is running for president or not.

For some years now, the majority of the NPA was convinced that the relationship of forces had decisively shifted to the detriment of the working class. For these slavish followers of the “dynamic,” this meant that very little can be done today. The NPA played no independent role in the 2016 struggles over the El Khomri labor “reform” law, simply tailing after “Nuit Debout” (Up All Night, the populist movement that occupied city squares to protest the law). Its only real national activity in 2017 was the campaign of the NPA’s presidential candidate, Philippe Poutou.

Thus former LCR presidential candidate Olivier (“I was never a Trotskyist”) Besancenot was absolutely thrilled by the Yellow Vests: “I have never known mobilizations like these, thousands of people who want to go to the center of Paris, the Champs-Élysées, just like I imagine peasants did in their time to rebel against the lord, by going to his castle to demand accountability.” The task before the NPA was thus, according to Besancenot, “to support this movement so that it has the most anti-capitalist expression possible” – a low bar indeed.

The anarchists at least want to do something, even if it’s mainly street theater

subsidies, companies like General Electric are laying off hundreds more workers.

Against this capitalist offensive, broad workers counter-offensive is called for. The fact that important parts of the petty bourgeoisie have mobilized against Macron’s brutal measures, and that they are resisting repression, is extremely positive, but they have neither the social power nor the coherent class interest to prevail. Militant workers must take up the struggle to oust the bureaucrats and repudiate their defeatist class-collaborationist policies. By reaching out to the Yellow Vests, a revolutionary class-struggle leadership could win many of them to the revolutionary struggle.

A real strategy to confront this capitalist war on working people would involve striking key industries to demand that **temporary contracts be converted into full-time positions; to shorten the**

– skirmishing with the cops, breaking a few windows – and often counterproductive. The various pseudo-Trotskyist currents, in contrast, have schooled themselves in what Lenin’s Bolsheviks called *khvostism*, or tailism, the art of chasing after whatever “movement” is currently in vogue. Besancenot’s comments are a prime example. He continued:

“Therefore, the only possible, credible political perspective for the social movement and the Left is for this movement to win, to be politicized, and to develop a form of political representation for itself. This movement must create a political foundation for a new social and political constellation of forces.”

So, once again, “the movement,” taken *en bloc*, will somehow develop so as to save the “left.”

With Besancenot spouting clichés about 1789 and the peasant revolts of the Middle Ages, we recall that the NPA likewise hailed the “Bonnets Rouges” (red caps) truckers revolt in 2013-14. While drawing in some misguided workers and taking the name of Breton peasant rebels of the 17th century, this protest against the eco-tax was manipulated by various local capitalist firms. The NPA thus found itself being the alleged “independent workers pole” at a rally at Quimper in November 2013 together with the bourgeois right wing, some fascists and Catholic bishops. Older cadres no doubt recalled the “good old days” in 1981 when they backed the Polish capitalist-restorationists of Solidarność in collaboration with a similar political spectrum.

Going into 2019, it was already clear that the Yellow Vests had not really succeeded in capitalizing on the widespread sympathy they initially enjoyed to unleash more massive struggles. The NPA didn’t agitate for a real general strike. Instead, it endorsed CGT leader Philippe Martinez’s one-day alibi action, while meekly trying to push it slightly to the left.

So, too, did Lutte Ouvrière, although coming from a different direction. L.O. reacted to the initial protests by criticizing Martinez for his hands-off stance, saying this was ceding leadership to the rightists.

**workweek with no loss in pay**, dividing up the available work to provide jobs for the unemployed; to **index wages against inflation**; to **occupy the banks, opening their books for inspection by workers commissions** to determine where the money has gone; and to **impose workers control on refineries and rail hubs**. In the context of such a program for mobilizing working-class power on the road to socialist revolution, the **call for a general strike**, an appeal directed both to the unions and rank-and-file workers as in May 1968 in France, is indeed necessary.

But that would sharply pose the question of which class rules, of “who is the master of the house,” as Trotsky put it in the 1930s. That underscores the vital need to cohere the nucleus of a revolutionary workers party, a Trotskyist party to lead the struggle for international socialist revolution. ■

It reported cases of fraternization between trade unionists and yellow vests and called for “imposing workers demands.” But L.O. did not mean by this that the working class should be mobilized to fight for power, drawing sections of the petty bourgeoisie behind it.

Rather, as usual, L.O. put forward a series of minimal economic demands: raise wages, make the capitalists pay, etc. In an editorial, *Lutte Ouvrière* (5 February), offered up a straight reformist program:

“When the state wants to build something, a rail line, for example, it requisitions the land and expropriates individual property owners in the name of the general interest. But requisitioning the factories that corporations want to close and which have been showered with public funds is taboo. It’s a taboo that workers have an interest in doing away with, since demanding an accounting from the capitalist class, checking what it has done with the billions it has raked in from exploitation, is a necessity.”

And so on and so forth. When the editorial goes to say that we must “call the capitalist class into question, contest its decisions and its power,” this might sound very radical to the uninitiated, but it does not mean actually overthrowing this bourgeoisie. On the contrary, L.O. is calling on the capitalist state to requisition the factories. Similarly, behind L.O.’s perennial utopian call on the government to ban layoffs lies a vision of “welfare state” capitalism.

## Enter the Trotskyist Fraction

The Trotskyist Fraction (FT) as an international current – represented in France by a faction inside the NPA, the Revolutionary Communist Current (CCR) – seeks to strike a golden mean between the passivity of L.O. and the rank opportunism of the NPA leadership. Even now, in a major declaration (May 13), “Class Struggles and New Political Phenomena Around the World,” the right-centrist FT proclaims the Yellow Vests to be no less than “the world’s most important process of class struggle today.” It even declared France to be in a “pre-revolutionary” situation:

“This absolutely subversive attitude [of the Yellow Vests], in contrast to the tame demonstrations characteristic of the routine actions of the labor federations or the left, was reflected in the decision to launch the November 24 demonstration on the Champs-Élysées, even though the government had banned it. A new milestone was reached with the ‘revolutionary day’ on December 1, which shook Paris and many cities in the region, while the executive was completely overwhelmed by the effort to maintain order.”

–“The Yellow Vests and the Pre-Revolutionary Elements of the Situation,” *Révolution permanente*, 2 December 2018

Served up with some Gramsci sauce and a pinch of “crisis of hegemony,” the idea that these protests involving some tens of thousands of mainly petty-bourgeois protesters somehow equals or portends a revolutionary situation is ludicrous. The FT cannot point to anything resembling the



merest seed of dual power. In reality, these pseudo-Trotskyists have the same outlook as the bourgeois press, who see in street-fighting between demonstrators and the cops and Le Fouquet's (an elite restaurant) going up in flames the beginning of end times. The FT lacks a *class* criterion.

When a few days later Macron retreated, postponing the fuel tax hike, the FT called to "Intensify the Mobilization to Win Even More!" (*Révolution Permanente*, 14 December). In a genuinely pre-revolutionary situation, to simply demand "more" concessions would be a sellout, when the task is to form workers councils to fight for power. The actual activity of the CCR, meanwhile, has been rather mundane: campaigning to get unions to support the Yellow Vests, promoting fraternization on the ground in various cities, trying to get anti-racist groups to unite with yellow vests in protesting police repression. Not exactly *Ten Days that Shook the World*.

Even as the FT discovered allegedly "pre-revolutionary elements" of the Yellow Vests revolt, it had to admit the "inconsistent character of the social and economic demands raised by the movement. Some are clearly progressive, like increasing the minimum wage or canceling some indirect taxes, while others are much more ambiguous, like calls for a reduction in 'employer contributions'." And in the midst of all of this "revolutionary" turmoil, the CCR, copying L.O., urged the bourgeois state to ban layoffs rather than calling on workers to occupy the plants.

Instead, in a December 20 article on the "Citizens Initiative Referendum" popular with the yellow vests, the FT calls for "a radical democratic transformation" inspired by the French Revolution. This is openly presented in Menshevik fashion as a first step towards a (later) socialist revolution. In this they are continuing the tradition of their progenitor, Nahuel Moreno, who rejected ("updated") Trotsky's revolutionary Transitional Program in favor of "radical democratic" demands.

The "Trotskyist" Fraction may balk at Moreno's call for a "democratic revolution" and "February revolutions everywhere," but it shares the "democratist" methodology. And this in a situation where the overriding need is to split the populist "movement" along class lines. Moreover, a fight for genuine democratic rights – like *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*, and for *the sons and daughters of immigrants*<sup>1</sup> – would split the Yellow Vests, with their substantial component of racist/nationalist and fascist RN voters and activists.

The FT has tried to cover its tailism of radicalized petty bourgeois with an appeal to Trotsky, citing his 1934 call for a "single assembly." This is the French version of their hobby horse, calling for *constituent assemblies* everywhere, while conflating this with the Paris Commune's institution of legislators who are paid a worker's wage and can be recalled at any time. This is all hopelessly (and deliberately) mixed up together in the service of an opportunist program of tailing after the democratic illusions of the masses.

Thus unlike the Bolsheviks, who called for a constituent assembly to dem-

onstrate that only workers power could resolve the democratic tasks, the FT believes that such a body in a semi-colonial country like Brazil can actually implement not only anti-imperialist measures, but also agrarian revolution and even a pro-working-class program. And in France such a "radical democratic slogan" can be used to "fight together" with the masses who want to "change the political system but don't agree with revolution" ("A Assembleia Constituinte dentro do programa transicional dos revolucionários," *Esquerda Diário*, 16 March 2016).

As we have noted:

"The situation in France in the mid-1930s was very different, and Trotsky did not call for a constituent assembly there, contrary to Morenoite mythology. So what did his June 1934 'Program for Action in France' advocate? At the time, right-wing reactionaries and fascists were pushing the country toward an authoritarian 'strong state' regime, reflecting a general trend throughout Europe symbolized by Hitler's seizure of power the year before and the February 1934 defeat of an uprising of the Vienna workers by the clerical-fascist Dollfuss regime in Austria. Trotsky's central slogan in the face of this bonapartist threat was not for a bourgeois-democratic constituent assembly, as the Morenoites suggest, but rather 'Down with the Bourgeois "Authoritarian State"! For Workers and Peasants Power!' As part of the fight for a 'workers and peasants commune,' Trotsky vowed to defend bourgeois democracy against fascist and royalist attacks. In that context, he called for abolition of various anti-democratic aspects of the French Third Republic, including the Senate, elected by limited suffrage, and the presidency, a focal point for militaristic and reactionary forces, and proposed a 'single assembly' that would 'combine legislative and executive powers'."

–"Trotskyism vs. 'Constituent Assembly' Mania," *The Internationalist* No. 27, May-June 2008

## International Marxist Tendency

While the Menshevik strategy of the FT has a Morenoite genealogy, the convergence with the deep-entrists of Alan Woods' social-democratic International Marxist Tendency (IMT)<sup>2</sup> is remarkable. The IMT (formerly La Riposte in France, when it was part of the PCF and then Mélechon's Parti de Gauche) likewise spent much of November-December breathlessly following an imaginary "revolution" in France. This is in keeping with Woods' proclivity to discover revolutionary situations somewhere on the planet at least once and often twice a year.

Of the Yellow Vests, the IMT wrote: "a movement of this sort is characteristic of the beginning of a revolution" (*Révolution*, 20 November 2018). A couple of weeks later we read that France is "On the Eve of a Revolutionary Situation" (*Révolution*, 7 December 2018). But in this imaginary revolutionary situation, what are their

<sup>2</sup> The IMT is one of two wings of the former Militant tendency led by Ted Grant, which entered the British Labour Party in the 1940s and, in the case of the IMT, never left. The Grantites turned Trotsky's tactic of episodic and limited "entrism" into leftward-moving centrist currents into a long-term strategy of burying themselves in Labourite reformism, thus liquidating the Trotskyist fight for an independent Bolshevik vanguard.

# The ICL Against Asylum for Refugees in Quebec

Quebec is now governed by the right-wing nationalists of the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), whose prime minister François Legault has announced his intention to reduce immigration by 20% this year, one way or another. Canada has currently suspended the expulsion of Syrian and Haitian refugees – a diplomatic maneuver by this minor imperialist power rather than a humanitarian act. But this angered the CAQ: Quebec has a veto on overall immigration, but not on the entry of refugees. In January, Legault asked Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau to pay more than \$300 million to cover the costs of asylum seekers. He had already complained that the border was a "sieve." In other words, he does not want refugees, French-speaking or otherwise.

But according to *République Ouvrière* (No. 3, Winter/Spring 2019), the newspaper of the "Ligue Trotskyste" in Québec and Canada, part of the centrist International Communist League (ICL), "Legault's anti-immigrant measures, including the recent cancellation of 18,000 immigration applications, are an integral part of his racist attacks to divide workers. This poison must be fought in the working class. However, the struggle for Quebec to have its independent state cannot be separated from the struggle to control its borders. Thus, Legault's current demand that immigration, which is now under federal jurisdiction, be brought back under the jurisdiction of Quebec is legitimate from this standpoint" [English translation in *Workers Vanguard*, 31 May 2019].

**Thus the ICL openly supports the "legitimate" right of a bourgeois government to turn back refugees in order to control the borders of an independent state, which, moreover, does not**

**even exist!** Since the CAQ is not (or is no longer) in favor of separation, Legault's application is not in fact a preparation for an independent Quebec. Even if this were so, genuine Marxists assume no responsibility for the organization of the repressive apparatus of the bourgeoisie when they support the call for independence. The ICL, on the other hand, quite simply supports Quebec's "nation-building." This is a betrayal of the internationalist principles of communism.

Although the ICL fulminates against the European Union, its U.S. newspaper, *Workers Vanguard* (30 October 2015), declared: "Marxists do not take a position on refugee 'burden sharing' between capitalist governments." On this occasion, they were justifying why they did not oppose the "Dublin III" regulation, which requires that asylum-seeking refugees be processed in the first EU country they enter. This "administrative" rule is in fact a refugee expulsion measure, which stipulates that those who go to Northern Europe are to be "transferred" to Greece or Italy where they will be imprisoned prior to being deported. **Genuine revolutionary Marxists must clearly oppose Dublin III, just as we oppose deportations of immigrants and refugees in general.**

Having failed to conduct a real examination of the roots of its betrayal in Haiti, where it supported the invasion of U.S. imperialist troops and occupation of the black republic (dispatched to impose "order" after the devastating earthquake in 2010), the ICL was doomed to repeat it. That is what it is now doing, aligning with the most retrograde elements of the bourgeoisie, including fascists and racists, while hyperventilating around the dangers of "open borders" and "unlimited mass migration." A nightmare that it shares with the Trumps and Legaults of the world. ■

demands? The IMT calls on "Yellow Vests and unions" to demand "Tax the rich, not the poor!" and "Raise wages and pensions! For early legislative elections!" (*Révolution*, 23 November 2018). Not exactly a call for revolutionary action, is it?

As is almost invariably the case when Trotskyoid opportunists are tailing one or another non-proletarian force, Lenin's 1916 remarks on the Easter Uprising in Dublin ("Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will never live to see it") are pressed into service. They were cited by both the Trotskyist Faction and by the IMT with reference to the Yellow Vests, and almost simultaneously. But let's check out what Lenin actually wrote:

"The socialist revolution in Europe cannot be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements. Inevitably, sections of the petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will participate in it – without such participation, mass struggle is impossible, without it no revolution is possible – and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors. But objectively they will attack capital, and the class-

conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat, expressing this objective truth of a variegated and discordant, motley and outwardly fragmented, mass struggle, will be able to unite and direct it, capture power, seize the banks, expropriate the trusts which all hate (though for different reasons!), and introduce other dictatorial measures which in their totality will amount to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the victory of socialism, which, however, will by no means immediately 'purge' itself of petty-bourgeois slag."

– "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up"

Lenin's Bolshevik clarion call for proletarian leadership directed towards the overthrow and expropriation of the bourgeoisie is a sharp rebuke to the latter-day Menshevik electoralists of the so-called "Trotskyist Fraction" and "International Marxist Tendency." While the opportunists seek to hitch their trailer to the Yellow Vests, Leninists seek to split this amorphous movement along class lines and line up the toiling masses among them with a workers movement fighting to take power, and to win the best elements to Trotskyism, the revolutionary Marxism of our day. ■



# As DSA Grows, SAlt Splinters, ISO Implodes Left Reformists In Existential Crisis

Buffeted by social and political crises that make the phrase “capitalist decay” palpable on a daily basis, the United States is already neck-deep in the muck of the next presidential campaign. With Republicans firmly congealed around that embodiment of vileness, Donald Trump, by June no less than 24 Democratic hopefuls had entered the field for the 2020 nomination. While most “progressives” would vote for anything, including maybe even an actual donkey, if it won the Democratic nomination to oppose Trump, Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaign has once again drawn the hopes and illusions of the majority of self-identified leftists.

As in 2016, the political and social function of Sanders’ campaign is to renew and refurbish the subjugation of workers, youth and the oppressed to U.S. imperialism’s Democratic Party. Crossing yet another “t,” in early March he signed a “loyalty pledge” demanded by the Democratic National Committee to run as a Democrat and govern as one if elected. And once again, the reformist left jumps to do its part in presenting this bourgeois politician, running for the nomination of the oldest capitalist party in the world, as a “socialist.” What does this mean? As a headline summarizing comments by the senator from Vermont put it: “Bernie Sanders: ‘Democratic Socialist’ Is Just a Synonym for New Deal Liberal” (*New York* magazine, 23 April).

Indeed, together with fellow star of Democratic (Party) “socialism,” Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Sanders takes every opportunity to present his positions as the continuity of Franklin D. Roosevelt. FDR’s New Deal politically and militarily rearmed U.S. imperialism in the midst of the social upheaval of the Great Depression. It brought about the so-called “New Deal coalition” that for generations cemented Democratic hegemony over labor, African Americans and many urban whites plus the left, subordinating their struggles to this main party of U.S. imperialist capitalism.

## DSA Growth Posed Existential Challenge

Sanders’ last campaign, together with revulsion at the election of Trump, led to the mushrooming of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). This long-stagnant social-democratic pressure group on and in the Democratic Party rocketed from an official 6,500 (actually much less) to a formal membership of over 50,000 members, largely “millennials.” This posed an existential challenge to reformist socialist groups like the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and Socialist Alternative (SAlt) which occupied political space a bit to the left of liberal Democrats.

These organizations, together with the ephemeral “DSA left” and a range of smaller groups, joined in hailing the surge of “Democratic (Party) socialism” as the birth of a “new socialist movement.” Last



**Kansas congressional candidate James Thompson with “democratic socialists” Senator Bernie Sanders and future Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in Wichita, July 2018. One calls to “abolish I.C.E.” the others don’t, but they all are for “secure borders.” And they all run for office in the Democratic Party of imperialist war, racist repression and mass deportations.**

year, their excitement boiled over with the primary victory and subsequent election to Congress of DSA member Ocasio-Cortez. As we wrote in August 2018:

“The influx of new members, they insisted, was radicalizing the DSA in a process that would push it away from and eventually out of the Democratic Party. The scientific Marxist term for this is: bullshit. As shown by the Ocasio-Cortez campaign ... the DSA and its new members are moving further *into* the Democratic Party. And this, in turn, helps push the fake-left groups cheering them on further to the right, as they seek ever deeper unity with the mainstream social democrats.”

—“Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to the Rescue of the Democratic Party,” *The Internationalist* No. 53, September-October 2018

The rise of Ocasio-Cortez (“AOC”) and the accompanying non-stop media hype “have deepened the dilemmas that Bernie Sanders’ ‘political revolution’ posed for the opportunist left,” our article noted. “Pushed and pulled to be more and more ‘Democratic’ and less and less ‘socialist,’ they’re scrambling to figure out how best to enthuse ... but still justify their own existence.” While claiming to have something in common with Leninism and even Trotskyism, groups like SAlt and the ISO “gush over the DSA’s growth and ‘successes,’ rightly seeing themselves as part of a social-democratic confraternity. But grabbing a piece of the action won’t be so easy.” It was clear that SAlt, like the ISO, “faces more internal turmoil as it inevitably confronts the question: ‘All the way with the DSA?’”

In fact, the ensuing period has been one of growing crisis for reformist groups nominally to the left of the DSA. The one that most unabashedly threw itself into the Sanders campaign, Socialist Alternative, has dwindled and split, losing a huge chunk

of its membership and a whole series of locals. More circumspect, the International Socialist Organization hailed the bourgeois politicians Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez as fellow socialists while hovering at the edge of formally endorsing them, leading to extensive public debates. Its political travails fueled an organizational crisis that terminally catalyzed in a #MeToo-type scandal early this year. Its implosion took place in a matter of weeks – amid a torrent of convulsive soul-searching – and on March 29 the ISO, which for many years described itself as the largest group on the U.S. left, declared its own dissolution.

In common with a number of other reformist outfits, including the Workers World Party (which has been decimated in a three-way split) in the U.S., the ISO and SAlt have been devoured by their own opportunism.

## SAlt, CWI In Crisis

Socialist Alternative, affiliated with the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) long led by British pseudo-Trotskyist Peter Taaffe, has since its inception in the 1980s centered its activity on one low-level reformist campaign after another. It made a splash in November 2013 when SAlt member Kshama Sawant was elected to the Seattle City Council on a program of liberal/populist reforms. Sawant spearheaded a single-issue campaign that led to the city passing a law in 2014 that would, over several years, phase in a minimum wage of \$15 an hour. The group expanded rapidly, boasting of building new branches in “dozens of cities.” Sawant’s deepening alliances with local Democrats paved the way for her voting last year to support the new chief of police.<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 2015, when Bernie Sanders announced his candidacy for the

<sup>1</sup> See “SAlt’s Sawant Backs Seattle’s Top Cop,” *The Internationalist* No. 53, September-October 2018.

2016 Democratic presidential nomination, SAlt’s leadership thought positioning themselves early and enthusiastically as Bernie’s “socialist” best builders would be their ticket to the big time.<sup>2</sup> Jumping in with both feet, the group quickly sank up to its eyebrows in outright bourgeois politics, coming up with one supposedly clever “tactical” pretext after another to justify it all.

Launching what came to be known as SAlt’s “Bern turn,” they formed a “#Movement4Bernie,” parroting Sanders’ populist slogan about a “political revolution against the billionaire class.” The fact that it was all about recycling New Deal rhetoric to renew and refurbish the Democratic Party (as Sanders explicitly proclaimed), was on display when SAlt’s Sawant gave Sanders “a socialist welcome” to Seattle at a Democratic campaign event in August 2015 commemorating Roosevelt’s establishment of Social Security and Lyndon Johnson’s establishment of Medicare.

The fig leaf SAlt used to justify its support to Sanders’ capitalist campaign was its claim that it would push him to run as an independent if he did not win the Democratic nomination. But as he said all along he would do, Sanders gave his support to Hillary Clinton in the general election. Building Sanders’ campaign with ever-expanding pretexts and rationalizations, SAlt succeeded in helping him rope new and younger forces into the Democratic Party.

What SAlt’s political acrobatics did not succeed in doing was pole-vaulting them into the big time as the group’s leadership had imagined. With the Democratic Socialists of America growing by leaps and bounds, cheered on by much of the bourgeois media, SAlt’s frantic boosterism looked downright pathetic. If this is what “socialism” meant, why not join with those who were bigger and better at the game? Soon enough, whole branches of the organization decamped further to the right, toward the DSA or the Greens.

As SAlt threw itself into campaigning for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other DSA Democrats last fall, a section of its leadership and membership, headed by former national secretary Philip Locker and former Sawant campaign manager Ramy Khalil, took the next logical step and took off for the DSA. (They now call themselves the “Reform & Revolution Caucus”!) In contrast, a number of left dissidents were drawing opposite conclusions, as their fight to uphold the political independence of the working class led them to fuse with the Internationalist Group and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, Taaffe’s CWI is in a deep crisis. With Taaffe and other leaders of the International Secretariat accusing the Irish section of capitulation to identity politics and petty-bourgeois feminism, only a minority of the International Executive Committee has supported the faction formed by Taaffe.

<sup>2</sup> See “Bernie Sanders and the Pressure Politics of the Opportunist Left” (June 2015), reprinted in the Internationalist Group pamphlet *DSA: Fronting for the Democrats*, February 2018.

<sup>3</sup> See “An Open Letter to Socialist Alternative Oppositionists, Past and Present” and “Class Struggle Education League Fuses with Internationalist Group,” *The Internationalist* No. 52, May-June 2018; “Socialist Alternative Is No Place for Revolutionaries,” *The Internationalist* No. 54, November-December 2018; and “Spokane Marxist Group and Marxist Student Group Fuse with Revolutionary Internationalist Youth,” *Revolution* No. 16, May 2019.



Opposition groupings emerged, including one referred to by the Taaffeite minority as the “Non-Faction Faction,” and the Spanish and Portuguese sections have now reportedly walked out. Further turmoil and divisions are clearly on the agenda. For the CWI as for its U.S. supporters, the fruits of opportunism are proving increasingly bitter.

Yet as the crisis of reformist left organizations has escalated, some former members have responded by joining in cobbling together, undifferentiated “broad socialist” groupings (Philly Socialists, Marxist Center, etc.) dedicated to maintaining “unity” by evading clear lines of demarcation on contentious issues. Former ISO branches have reappeared as Chicago Socialists, Madison Socialists, Central Ohio Revolutionary Socialists, etc. For some activists this involves what they call “base-building” – a low-level social work based on the paternalistic idea that the oppressed will only be drawn to socialist groups that “do something concrete for them” (like fixing brake lights) right now. Others have sought to revive the anti-Leninist doctrines of Karl Kautsky, the “pope” of the social-democratic Second International that blew to pieces when its parties supported their “own” bourgeoisies in the first imperialist world war.

But in any case, such amorphous groupings, whatever their particular “points of agreement,” are based on rejection of the revolutionary communism of Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks, and thus *cannot* lead the class struggle forward.

## Behind the ISO’s Collapse

Amidst the crisis of much of the left, the most spectacular occurrence of the recent period has been the collapse of the International Socialist Organization, culminating in its dissolution in late March. This was an anguishing experience for hundreds of its former members. Although the final act of the ISO’s demise was marked in particular by its embrace of #MeToo, its collapse is fundamentally due to its overall opportunist politics and the predicament it found itself in as the burgeoning DSA occupied its hoped-for political space. The post mortems by various left groups skirt or downplay the political issues and underlying causes of the ISO’s political self-immolation. This is natural enough for analyses coming from other sectors of the left that largely share the ex-ISO’s tailist approach and social-democratic program. Many clearly hope to cash in on its collapse without challenging its former members’ basic outlook (which does no favors to any among them seeking a revolutionary way forward).

The ISO claimed to be a Marxist organization and on occasion, when convenient, even to have something to do with Trotskyism. During and after its implosion, a range of commentators and some former members attributed its demise to “Leninism” and/or Lenin’s organizational principle of “democratic centralism.” But mistaking the label for the contents is never a good idea, least of all in politics. The actual politics of the ISO were far indeed from revolutionary Marxism and Leninism, and entirely counterposed to the program and outlook of Trotsky and the Fourth International he founded as the world party of socialist revolution.

Instead, the approach and method of the ISO was to position itself a step to the left of mainstream liberalism and try to nudge the liberals, and the “movements”

of the day they dominated, in that direction. Its members were trained in the idea that this meant “reaching people where they’re at” since going through the experience of the movement *du jour* would wind up radicalizing them. As for Trotsky’s call to “speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter,” this, for the ISO, was a hallmark of much-reviled “sectarians.”

Paternalist justifications for adapting to existing consciousness are the stock in trade for left groups that, like the ISO, have spread illusions in everything from SYRIZA in Greece to the “Arab Spring” – but in the United States, it means above all tailing and reinforcing illusions in the Democratic Party. The ISO’s formula for recruiting liberal youth was that socialists are the most “consistent” liberals on every issue, whereas liberal Democrats are “unreliable” and inconsistent. The fundamental Marxist conception of the *class line* was profoundly alien to this view of politics as a continuum in which socialism is the most consistently “progressive” variant of bourgeois liberalism.

Maintaining illusions in the Democratic Party, and the subordination of the workers and oppressed to it, is the daily bread of the leaders of the labor movement as well as almost all other social movements in this country. The Democratic Party is the keystone of liberal *imperialist* politics, and over the recent period the ISO echoed its propaganda themes from the “Syrian revolution” to “Russiagate.” This was prepared by the entire political tradition of the ISO rooted in Cold War “Third Camp socialism.”

## As the Niche Dwindled

All of this meant that the rapid growth of the DSA and the identification of Bernie Sanders, AOC & Co. with “socialism” deprived the ISO of the political niche it had long occupied. Entirely imbued with tailism, the ISO itself could not help but contribute to this process. Always hoping to get in on the action, its praise of the Democratic “socialists” instead helped cut away the basis for its own existence.

Issue after issue of the ISO’s *Socialist Worker* hailed Sanders, AOC et al. as putting “socialism in the air,” chimed in with the willfully deceptive claim that these imperialist Democrats are socialists (while giving some tips on how to do it better), and breathlessly applauded their electoral advances – while pretending for the record

not to actually “endorse” them.

The pretense was less than paper-thin, and could not hold. It didn’t. Our August 2018 article on Ocasio-Cortez and Democratic “socialism” described in detail the roiling public controversy among ISO leaders over how to relate to this “movement” of and into the Democratic Party. The ISO might well be facing a “hemorrhage of members, perhaps a split,” we wrote. “Whatever, things certainly aren’t looking good for the ISO.” We can scarcely be accused of overstating matters.

A telling glimpse of what things looked like on the ground as the denouement approached is provided by events at the City University of New York’s Brooklyn College in early March. This was the location that Bernie Sanders chose to launch his new campaign, for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination. “Remembering his roots and connection to the borough, Sanders chose his alma mater as the first stop” on his campaign trail, the college’s website proclaimed on March 2, after “huge crowds turned out” for the rally that day.

The ISO’s student group on campus was “Brooklyn College Socialists,” devoted to promoting the organization’s standard-issue liberal/reformist themes. Its recruitment event at the beginning of the Spring 2019 semester was “Are You a Socialist Too?” and featured a picture of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. What, then, would be their response when Bernie Sanders’ March 2 rally, on their very own campus, was announced? It could only have seemed natural when they hosted a “Banner Making for Bernie” event the day before the rally, then bedecked their Facebook page with photos of themselves “mingling” at the campaign launch accompanied by the hashtag “#bcfeelingthebern.”

## The Final Conference

The beginning of the end was the ISO national convention in February that ousted virtually the entire long-time leadership centered on Ahmed Shawki and Sharon Smith along with other veterans like Paul D’Amato and Lance Selfa. A subterranean revolt had been brewing for some time, as accumulated grievances against this ingrown, domineering circle grew increasingly bitter. A “Steering Committee Majority” faction was put together to oust the old guard, which found itself reduced to a small minority. We have little reason

to doubt the overall charge of bureaucratism directed against them: the fact that the organization had been run by a clique was perfectly obvious even from the outside.

Reformist parties are necessarily bureaucratic, subordinating the membership to what is acceptable to bourgeois “allies” while suppressing any stirrings of a radical challenge. As the ISO veered from one opportunist campaign to another, pumping up ever-new predictions of success (and churning through members at a rapid rate), the leadership doubtless feared that some might take the opportunism “too far,” at the same time as it could not tolerate even the possibility of any real political balance-sheet.

Genuinely revolutionary organizations must be self-financing; a working-class party depends on the hard-earned material support of its members. One of the characteristics of opportunist organizations around the world is their dependence on government subsidies, parliamentary paychecks and/or private-sector bourgeois largesse. While no one in the ISO apparatus was making a mint, its leadership was intertwined with and to a large degree financially dependent on the Center for Economic Research and Social Change, largely funded by liberal bourgeois foundations. This material and political reality could only mean that talk of accountability to the ranks would be pie in the sky.

Sundry social democrats posthumously dissecting the ISO’s debacle try to pin the blame on “Leninism.” As they know and is patently obvious, what the ISO actually did and stood for in real life bore no resemblance to Bolshevism. As for “democratic centralism” as put forward by Lenin, this is the organizational form for advancing a *revolutionary program*. Counterposed to the bureaucratic machinations of social-democratic and Stalinist parties, it corresponds to the needs of a proletarian vanguard party that can lead the workers, at the head of all the oppressed, to power.

To serve the goal of overthrowing capitalism, such a party requires genuine internal democracy and debate to defend, develop and sharpen the revolutionary program, and correct its course when needed; it requires centralism, unity and discipline in action to bring that program into the class struggle and lead the combat against the class enemies of the proletariat and the oppressed. The ISO’s continual tailing of bourgeois liberalism and existing (bourgeois) consciousness could only stand in the way of a real struggle against oppression. Its reformist politics and evasion of sharp political demarcation (as well as genuine internal struggle) were antithetical to the task faced by genuine Marxists: forging revolutionary cadres able to fight the oppression and reactionary backwardness bred by capitalist society, and to win the working class to this fight.

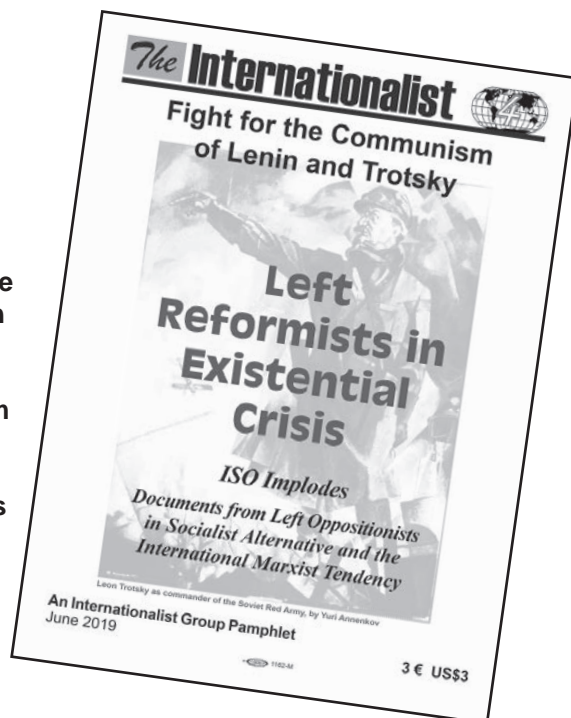
For Leninist revolutionaries, the struggle for black liberation and the emancipation of women, and against all forms of social oppression, is the task and responsibility of the *entire party* and all its members. As part of this task, a genuinely revolutionary party must give sustained, special attention to developing women, African American and Latino leading cadres, all the more so as in this country born of slavery, the “black question” is key to virtually every aspect of politics and strategic to socialist revolution. In contrast, for reformist parties faced with demands to take issues of special oppression seriously, the

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# In France and Italy: Port Workers Boycott Saudi Military Cargo Bound for War in Yemen

GENOA, Italy, June 22 – In a series of dramatic displays of workers’ power, port workers in La Havre, France and Genoa, Italy have struck a blow for international proletarian solidarity. In recent weeks they have successfully refused to load military cargo on Saudi ships intended for U.S.-backed Saudi and Gulf emirate forces waging a murderous war on the Houthi population of Yemen.

Early last month, the Saudi ship *Bahri Yanbu* was scheduled to load eight cannons produced by the French state company Nexter. But on May 8 dock workers of the CGT labor federation in Le Havre refused to load it. Defying French president Emmanuel Macron and the courts, which upheld arms sales to Saudi Arabia against a legal challenge, the port workers forced the ship to anchor 30 kilometers from the port and finally set sail without its deadly cargo.

The same *Bahri Yanbu* showed up in Genoa on May 20. Alerted by the French dockers, port workers here refused to load electrical generators for military use produced by the Italian company Teknel. Train workers and truck drivers working inside the port acted in solidarity with the action mainly coordinated by the Collettivo Autonomo Lavoratori Portuali (CALP, Autonomous Port Workers Collective). There was also a rally of various anti-war groups and letters of solidarity from other unions. The ship left after two days without its military cargo.

On May 28, a second Saudi ship, the *Bahri Tabuk*, attempted to dock in Marseille to take on arms cargo. However, the local CGT dock workers federation issued a statement declaring that “we fight against imperialism,” and that port workers in the region “will not load any arms, any munitions.”

Then on June 20, a third Saudi ship, the *Bahri Jazan*, was slated to pick up the same generators from Genoa a month after the first, failed attempt. Once again, the CALP mobilized and the ship was forced to leave the port without its cargo. At a rally in front of the building of the port administration in Genoa on June 19, a CALP spokesman announced that the authorities had backed down and promised that the military cargo would not be loaded. The CALP said it would be on the lookout to make sure that this was the case.

The Nucleo Internazionalista d’Italia attended the rally in solidarity with the dock action. The Nid’I is a section of the League for the Fourth International, which calls for the defense of the Houthi rebels against the U.S.-Saudi-emirates coalition. The LFI has also called for and helped build workers strike action against imperialist war.

In the Genoa port action, the Nid’I carried a sign calling for “Workers Mobilization! Stop the Imperialist Arms Sowing Death in Yemen! Close the Ports to Weapons, Open the Ports for Shipwreck Victims! Stop the Salvini Decree!” Another sign declared, “Stop the Racist Anti-Worker Salvini Decree! Stop the Anti-Immigrant Offensive! Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!”

Italian interior minister Matteo Salvini, the leader of the fascistic Lega party, last year ordered Italian ports closed to ships that rescued refugees from drowning in the Mediterranean. In May, the Genoa Camara del Lavoro (local labor body) issued a statement opposing war cargo and demanding “that the ports be open to receive refugees and migrants.”

There is a history of workers strikes against imperialist wars. Veteran Genoa port worker Luigi Cianci pointed out:

“During the Vietnam War we prevented

American ships from anchoring and in 1971 we organized a ship of aid for the Vietnamese population. We did the same thing during the Gulf War.... The war in Yemen is one of the largest humanitarian catastrophes in recent years with frightening numbers: 60,000 killed, 90,000 children who died because of malnutrition, a million people affected by the cholera epidemic. We explained these things to our co-workers and everybody agreed on the boycott.”

—Diritti Globale, 22 June

Port workers in France also have a history of opposing imperialism, especially French imperialism. In 1925, under the impact of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, French port workers refused to ship arms to suppress a rebellion by independence fighters in the Rif area of the French colony of Morocco. Later, the port workers of Marseille refused to load war material on ships bound for Vietnam as Communist troops at Dien Bien Phu encircled and defeated French troops in 1954, thereby driving French imperialism out of Vietnam and all of Indochina.

On May Day 2008, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) in the U.S. shut down all 29 West Coast ports to demand a stop to the war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, and supporting immigrants’ rights. This historic May Day action was the first time that a U.S. union had struck against a U.S. imperialist war in 90 years, since the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution. The impact



**Comrades of Nucleo Internazionalista d’Italia at the Genova port workers action to stop arms to Saudi Arabia, June 19.**

of this action was felt all the way to Iraq, where dock workers in two ports stopped work in solidarity with the ILWU.

The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International, which had agitated for years to “hot cargo” war material and for workers strikes against the war, contributed significantly to the success of the May Day 2008 strike.

These examples of independent mobilizations of the working class in class struggle, from France to Italy to the U.S. and elsewhere, must be generalized and deepened. The only way to end imperialist war and racist oppression, as well as “blood and tears” austerity at home, is to fight for workers revolution. This requires the leadership of a revolutionary workers party on the program of Lenin and Trotsky, a party that fights for communist leadership in the trade unions and acts as a tribune of the people in fighting against all forms of special oppression. The Nucleo Internazionalista d’Italia seeks to forge the nucleus of such a party in Italy as part of the fight for international socialist revolution. ■

response is tokenistic sectoralism, parceling the task out to caucuses “representing” each oppressed group. As the ISO sank into the swamp of bourgeois liberal “identity politics,”<sup>4</sup> it also faced growing accusations of stifling the development of members from specially oppressed groups. The response was to proclaim a “people of color caucus,” a “trans caucus,” etc.

Most directly connected to the impending dissolution of the ISO, and the

extraordinary rapidity with which this was carried through, was the formation of a “#MeToo commission” as well as a “survivors’ caucus.” Together with hailing the women’s marches centered on “getting out the vote,” the ISO had fully embraced the “#MeToo movement” that has harnessed outrage against real crimes against women in this violently oppressive society to the political objectives of Democratic Party feminism. This involved adopting the feminist dictum that one must *a priori* “believe all women” – or risk being branded an apologist for the horrendous crimes of rape and sexual assault. All the more so in this racist and homophobic society, this is a recipe for witch hunts.<sup>5</sup>

## Denouement

When the new Steering Committee received and circulated a March 11 letter by a former member on the organization’s handling of a 2013 rape allegation, the ensuing uproar ripped to shreds the official optimism proclaimed by the February convention. The

<sup>5</sup> For an in-depth discussion of these vital issues, see “Democratic Party Feminism and the #MeToo Movement,” *The Internationalist* No. 55, Winter 2019.

person accused of rape (who had been elected to the new Steering Committee) was expelled, and all the individuals who had been part of the Steering Committee in 2013 were suspended from leadership positions on the basis that they had allegedly protected him by pushing to reverse a disciplinary committee finding of guilt, on grounds that he was denied the opportunity to make his case to the investigating body or to rebut witness testimony.

On March 15, the new Steering Committee published on the *Socialist Worker* website a “Letter to the ISO Membership” that, among other things, pledged to “study how the ISO can relate to socialist campaigns [sic] run on Democratic ballot lines.” Central to the statement was denunciation of the organization’s “damaging political culture,” depicted as a longstanding pattern of abuse. As activists who had devoted years to the organization struggled to understand the events, widespread resignations ensued in an atmosphere of mass panic. Though a few still sought to keep some semblance of the old edifice together, a March 24-29 online poll of the remaining members and recently resigned ex-members resolved to dissolve the ISO and cease publication of *Socialist Worker*.

On April 19 the ex-Steering Committee issued a last declaration. Reporting that the “final steps” in the ISO’s dissolution had been completed, it stated that “the highly unusual step of voting to dissolve the organization” had been “guided by the recognition that the ISO’s demise was inevitable.” The statement ended with one last pitch for the populist slogan of “socialism from below,” the calling card of groups embracing the ISO’s spiritual godfathers, Tony Cliff and Max Shachtman.<sup>6</sup>

Like the rise of “Sanders socialism,” the fall of the ISO is part of a broader crisis of the reformist left. Just as the growth of the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America is no “new socialist movement,” the debacle of groups on the left flank of social democracy is no “crisis of Leninism.” Quite the contrary, it is a dramatic reaffirmation of the indispensability of genuine Leninism for building a revolutionary leadership. Against capitalist barbarism, communism lives in the worldwide struggle of the workers and oppressed, and the Trotskyist program for carrying it through to victory. Those who want to contribute to making this happen should study and learn from these events. ■

<sup>6</sup> See “The ISO and ‘Socialism From Below’” at [www.internationalist.org](http://www.internationalist.org)



# Call for a Constituent Assembly? Constitutional Tinkering Will Not Put an End to Capitalist Misery – For a Workers and Peasants Government!

## Algeria: For Workers Revolution Against the Military Regime!

The following article is translated from a supplement to L'Internationaliste (May 2019), French-language publication of the League for the Fourth International.

APRIL 24 – Hundreds of thousands of Algerians have taken to the streets every Friday since February 22 – we are already up to the ninth round. More than a million demonstrators have come out on several occasions. These are undoubtedly the most important demonstrations since independence in 1962 and have extended to the farthest reaches of the country, with women and young people playing a prominent role. There is talk of a “February 22 Revolution.” This is an illusion, in the same way that the uprisings that overthrew Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt (in 2011) were described as a revolution, only to be followed by the rise of the Islamists, and then the return of the military.

People chant, “System get lost!” Yes, it’s a whole system, not just a president or a clan. Nor is it only the absence of (bourgeois) “democracy.” But whether it’s corrupt cronies or powerful generals, they will never leave power willingly – they must be overthrown. After the resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika on April 2, dictated by the generals under pressure from the street, the Algerian regime (colloquially known as *le pouvoir*, or “the power”) is regrouping. This system of massive unemployment and low wages, of all-encompassing repression, is called capitalism, and to sweep it away we need an internationalist, socialist workers revolution. It is up to the most dedicated militants to forge the necessary revolutionary leadership.

And not only in Algeria: across Africa, from Sudan and Mali to South Africa, there are struggles to bring down entrenched governments that have been in power for decades. In the imperialist metropolises we see populist movements such as the “yel-

### Sweep Away All the Bourgeois Clans and Overthrow the Capitalist System!



Mohamed Messara / EPA

More than a million Algerians have taken to the streets on several occasions in the *hirak* (“citizens movement”) against “the system.” Above: protest against Bouteflika regime in Algiers, March 24.

low vests” in France, sometimes on the left but more often on the right, which are a distorted response to the ravages of the capitalist economic crisis that have lasted since the stock market crash of 2008. In the absence of a revolutionary leadership that fights against the real cause of the unrest and the destitution of those at the bottom, namely the rule of capital, the populists seek scapegoats, be it “the banks” or immigrants.



President Bouteflika and General Gaïd Salah preside over a military parade in 2012.

In Algeria, the immediate impetus for the protests was given by President Bouteflika’s decision to run for a fifth term. Since “Boutef” has hardly been seen in public or heard from since a stroke in 2013 (which didn’t stop his fourth term!), it became a bitter joke that Algerians were ruled by a picture frame. Of course, it was clear to all that there was a whole corrupt clan proping up this invisible and mute mummy. But to get rid of these parasites, it will take a lot more than good-natured weekly mobilizations.

The pent-up anger against the *hogra* – the arrogant contempt of the ruling class for the population it claims to represent – finally broke through at the national level. At the same time, haunted by the nearly 150,000 deaths of the civil war that raged from 1991 to 1999 between Islamic reactionaries and a murderous army, and well aware that this army stands firmly behind the “decision-makers” (the networks of bureaucrats and businessmen who feed off the misery of Algeria), demonstrators have repeatedly stressed the peaceful nature of their demonstrations.

Thus, ultimately, the aspirations of the masses for a truly honest and democratic regime are counting on the goodwill of at least a section of the armed forces. General Ahmed Gaïd Salah, chief of staff of the ANP (the National People’s Army),

ordered the arrest of several important figures from Bouteflika’s entourage. However, the army is playing cat and mouse with the demonstrations and can at any time resort to massive repression if protesters continue to challenge the military’s transition plans. The strategic task thus posed is how to transform the nascent popular uprising into a workers revolution.

The examples of Tunisia and Egypt show that cosmetic policy changes only lead to a dangerous stalemate. We asked at the time, “What happened to the ‘Arab Spring’?” Our answer:

“Democratic demands can mobilize millions in overthrowing bonapartist military/police rule. But in this era of capitalist decay, as imperialist rulers systematically destroy democratic gains of the past, from trade-union rights to public education, they will not and cannot tolerate even limited bourgeois democracy for those who toil in the workshops of ‘globalized’ capitalism. If one semi-colonial dictatorship is overthrown, it will be replaced by another, slightly reformulated anti-democratic regime so long as the weak bourgeois ruling class dependent on imperialism remains in power.”

–“Storm Over the Middle East,” special issue of *The Internationalist*, Summer 2012

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# Program Is Key: Fight for Permanent Revolution

## South Africa:

# Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party Challenge to ANC Neo-Apartheid Regime

**Critical Support  
to the SRWP in the  
May 8 Elections!**

MAY 7 – From April 4 to 6, the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP) of South Africa held its inaugural congress with a thousand delegates and guests in Ekurhuleni, outside Johannesburg. The party, which defines itself as communist and “Marxist-Leninist,” was initiated by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), the largest and most militant trade union in the country. This is a major development in the South African class struggle, reflecting the continuing unrest and protest against the neo-apartheid regime following the horrendous 2012 police massacre of 34 striking miners at Marikana. It is, moreover, a direct challenge to the Tripartite Alliance – consisting of the African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP) and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) – a bourgeois “popular front” chaining workers to their capitalist rulers, which has governed the country since the end of formal white minority rule in 1994.

With national elections on May 8, the South African media have speculated about the impact of the new party on the voting. Could the scandal-ridden ANC led by President Cyril Ramaphosa fall below the 60% threshold, affecting its ability to govern as a patronage machine, or even lower as in 2016 local elections? Would the SRWP siphon off votes from the populist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) of Julius Malema, often falsely portrayed as “far left”? Whatever the arithmetic, bourgeois elections are inherently rigged against the working class, and particularly against any party that would act as a revolutionary opposition to capitalism. The preface to the SRWP 2019 Elections Manifesto on “Our Attitude to the



SRWP / Twitter

On the first day of the Launch Congress of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party.

2019 Elections” (which begins with a quote from Lenin) states: “One of the most important elements of capitalism’s bourgeois system is an electoral system which gives the appearance of democracy while effectively ensuring power remains in the hands of the rich and powerful.... In real terms, elections are a weapon of suppression and oppression in the hands of the ruling class.”

Particularly given that it was launched barely a month before the looming vote, even those who recognize the formation of the SRWP as a major development that could shake up the political system of “post-apartheid” South Africa do not expect a big

score in this round. Still, the stronghold of NUMSA in the key motor and metal-working industry and its presence in black townships surrounding the key cities can provide extra-parliamentary class power. Recent weeks have seen a mobilization of the new party’s militants in red shirts with hammer-and-sickle symbols at May Day marches by the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) and its largest affiliate, NUMSA, in Polokwane, Durban and Mdantsane, and at election rallies from the platinum mining center of Rustenburg in North West province to the Western Cape. And there are plenty of reasons why poor and working-class South Africans would vote for a communist party.

When the rigidly segregated white supremacist rule known as *apartheid* (“separateness” in Afrikaans) was formally ended in 1994 with the replacement of “whites only” voting by universal suffrage (“one person, one vote”), this was hailed around the globe as a victory. The hated passbook laws, impoverished urban townships and rural “Bantustans,” and pervasive police repression of the black African, Coloured (mixed race) and Asian population were infamous the world over. The anti-apartheid struggle was an inspiration to the fight against black oppression in the United States, Brazil and elsewhere. But what replaced this vicious racist system was a black bourgeois government, presiding over a capitalist economy that was still based on the *superexploitation* of black

labor. Under this system of *neo-apartheid* wage slavery, while there have been some limited gains in housing and public services, since 2000 the per capita income of blacks and Coloureds has *fallen* relative to whites.

Today, a quarter-century after the introduction of (bourgeois) “democracy,” official unemployment in South Africa stands at 37%, one of the highest rates in the world; for young people (under 25 years), over half (52%) are officially jobless. Out of a population of 55 million people, over 30 million are living in poverty, while one in four South Africans goes hungry every day. Today South Africa is the most unequal society on the planet, with 1% of the population owning 70% of the wealth. Spending on basic education has declined by 8% since the onset of the world capitalist economic crisis in 2008. A SAFTU survey declared, “Our Public Hospitals have become mortuaries!”<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, there have been escalating blackouts as the Eskom power authority cuts off electricity (“load-shedding”). And now the ANC government under Ramaphosa is threatening to make it all worse by carving up Eskom and preparing privatization schemes affecting education, water, communications and healthcare.

A major issue in South Africa over the past year has been the land question,

<sup>1</sup> See <http://saftu.org.za/twenty-five-years-after-democracy-more-workers-are-unemployed-more-people-live-in-poverty-and-south-africa-has-become-the-most-unequal-society-in-the-world/>



Speaking at Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party inaugural congress.

Rafael Stedile / People's Dispatch





**Delegates at the Congress of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party.**

namely the theft of African land by the Boer (Dutch) settlers dating back to the Native Lands Act of 1913. This colonial law banned black Africans from owning, buying or renting land in 93% of South Africa even though they make up more than four-fifths of the population. A key purpose was to create a labor force of landless agricultural laborers and to force others off the land and into the mines and urban centers. Although the ANC's Freedom Charter said that "Land shall be shared among those who work it," that has not happened, at all. A government *Land Audit Report* (November 2017) shows that today white farmers own 72% of privately held land, and when you add land owned by companies, trusts and white "community based organizations," this totals 88% – essentially the same percentage as in 1994 – while Africans own barely 1.5% of the land (Coloureds and Indians own 7%).

With blacks still jam-packed in urban townships, mostly living in shacks, land hunger is explosive. Malema's EFF has made the land question the focal point of its election campaign, vowing to push through and implement an amendment to Section 25 of the South African's Constitution's Bill of Rights to allow expropriation without compensation of this stolen land. (Parliament last year agreed that there should be such an amendment but failed to enact it, or even to present a draft.) Ex-president Jacob Zuma, who was forced to resign last year in a power play by Ramaphosa, has been trying to claw his way back by emphasizing his support for land expropriation, hoping to win popular support and possibly a post-election alliance with the EFF. Ramaphosa claims to support the de-

mand, yet out of the other side of his mouth he assures international capitalist investors at the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland, in January that "We are not going to allow land grabs in South Africa."

Meanwhile, police have been arresting impoverished blacks who have invaded land held by white farmers, notably in the Stellenbosch wine-growing region, and a court just declared the Black First Land First party's slogan, "Land or Death" to be a "hate crime"! Wealthy farmers are screaming bloody murder, and U.S. president Donald Trump, the white supremacist in the White House, has trumpeted the myth of Afrikaner ultra-rightists that whites are being forced off "their" land by the government and targeted for "large-scale killing." In reality, however land reform legislation is formulated, there will only be at most some land seizures. A wholesale overturn of land ownership is impossible short of a revolution, which all of these bourgeois politicians would bitterly oppose. The SRWP's Election Manifesto, in contrast, declares: "We will abolish private property ownership and inheritance rights, nationalising and collectivising the land for common use under the control of a workers state."

The Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party's "first act as a Socialist state will be to abolish private property ownership," said its chairperson Irvin Jim at a May 4 election rally. While wealthy, mainly white, capitalists lord it over South Africa, the working class which creates that wealth lives in "absolute filth and poverty," eking out a precarious existence in townships like Alexandra in Johannesburg and Khayelitsha near Cape Town. In addition to land, the SRWP Election Manifesto highlights measures for equality, calling to "ensure that domestic work no longer be a woman's burden, by socialising it through public childcare centres, state-funded domestic services and public eateries." The Manifesto also calls to "ensure that full citizenship rights are granted to all the working class, especially to all immigrants." And it declares that "SRWP shall nationalise all strategic industries, particularly the mines, the land and commercial farms, the banks, the big factories and the big businesses."



**Election poster of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party. Cyril Ramaphosa, the former mine workers union leader who became a mine owner, called for action against "criminal" strikers the day before the Marikana Massacre in August 2012. That same year, multimillionaire Ramaphosa bid R20 million (US\$1.5 million) for a prize buffalo for his breeding farm. In 2018 he decreed a R20 minimum wage for workers. *Senzeni na* (what have we done) was an anti-apartheid anthem.**



**May Day in Durban. From left: COSATU president Zingiswa Losi, South African president Cyril Ramaphosa and SACP leader Blade Nzimande, 1 May 2019.**

This would take a socialist revolution, which won't be enacted by a bourgeois parliament. So what is the purpose of participating in the electoral shell game? A 12-point SRWP election video declares:

"9. The election process itself must be conducted NOT as a drive for the maximization of parliamentary seats but as a MOBILISATION OF THE MASSES around BUILDING CONSCIOUSNESS of WORKING CLASS REVOLUTION. "10. Our task is to expose parliament as being permanently captured by the IMPERIALIST-CAPITALIST CLASS, while PROMOTING INDEPENDENT, DEMOCRATIC ORGANS OF WORKERS' POWER OUTSIDE OF IT....

"12. The revolutionary party enters parliament not to function within it as an integral part of the parliamentary system but to TAKE ACTION in Parliament that helps to smash the bourgeois state machine and parliament itself."

Needless to say, it is quite unusual in this day and age for a party claiming some 20,000+ members to talk of smashing the capitalist state machine while running candidates in bourgeois elections. Media pundits characterize the SRWP as "a blast from the ideological past," but some at least recognize that "Many workers in this country feel betrayed by the ANC and its alliance partner, Cosatu, whom they believed have 'sold out' the struggle for socialism" ("New workers' party could shake up elections," *The Citizen*, 20 December 2018). While bourgeois politicians and reformist pseudo-socialists the world over have peddled the lie of a supposed "death of communism" following the counterrevolution that brought down the bureaucratically degenerated Soviet Union and East European deformed workers states, South African workers "never got the memo." As they rose up against apartheid, millions of black toilers believed they were fighting for socialism and to smash capitalism. Many still do, now more than ever.

### **For Revolutionary Opposition to the Popular-Front ANC/SACP/ COSATU Tripartite Alliance**

The current election campaign in South Africa has focused on the corruption of political elites. This was the issue that was used to topple Zuma with media campaigns, court hearings and finally a palace coup inside the African National Congress. In December 2017, Cyril Ramaphosa, the former mine workers union leader who became a capitalist mine owner and the richest black

African in South Africa (net worth in 2018, according to *Forbes* magazine, US\$450 million) narrowly defeated the ex-wife of state president Zuma (net worth, US\$20 million) for the presidency of the ANC. Ramaphosa won because one of Zuma's corrupt cronies flipped his vote at the last moment. Zuma had become anathema to the white capitalist establishment because of his deals with the Gupta brothers, upstart Indian immigrants who made a fortune by milking state enterprises through their agents, in what became known as "state capture." Yet these bosses have eagerly bought off ANC politicians ever since the ANC came to office.

Ramaphosa got his millions from the same source, Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) schemes under which white capitalists would take on non-white partners. As ANC secretary-general he led negotiations with the National Party government that led to the 1994 elections and the formal end of apartheid under President Nelson Mandela. After Ramaphosa lost to Thabo Mbeki for the presidential succession in 1997, Mandela's doctor suggested him as deputy chairman of New Africa Investments, which used workers' pension funds to buy up companies. He later set up his own holding company, Shanduka, which became a BEE partner with Swiss-based Glencore in coal mining deals and then majority shareholder in the Lonrho platinum mining conglomerate. In the 2012 Lonrho miners' strike, Ramaphosa, the former Mineworkers leader become mine boss, sent an e-mail calling the protesters "criminal" and calling for "concomitant action." The next day, police shot dead 34 miners at Marikana.

One of the main slogans of the SRWP in these elections is "vote not for our main butchers" – that is, Ramaphosa. Whether by looting state coffers or by receiving shares from top capitalists, the essence of the ANC-governed neo-apartheid system has been to spawn a layer of black capitalist junior partners in the superexploitation of black workers. A key role in this was played by the South African Communist Party (SACP), through its leadership of the ANC, in the guise of a "National Democratic Revolution." According to the SACP program of "two-stage revolution," inherited from Stalin, the NDR would be the first, bourgeois-democratic stage, in which the "communists" would serve as front men for capitalist rule. Of course, the supposed "socialist" stage of this Stalinist dogma has never occurred, neither in South Africa nor anywhere else. Instead, the real second stage is the bloody repression



and massacre of the workers, as occurred in China in 1927, Spain in 1937, Chile in 1973 and South Africa in 2012.

The Stalinist schema is directly counterposed to – and a betrayal of – the program of the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917, which Lenin laid out in his famous April Theses calling for “all power to the Soviets” – that is, the fight for proletarian revolution. (Stalin had instead given conditional support to the bourgeois Provisional Government.) Since the mid-1930s, the political vehicle for this betrayal has been the “popular front,” in which the workers movement is chained to a section of the bourgeoisie. This class-collaborationist alliance serves as a roadblock to revolution, on the grounds that any socialist measure would mean breaking with the bourgeois “allies.” The embodiment of this *anti-revolutionary* strategy in South Africa is the Tripartite Alliance of the ANC, SACP and COSATU labor federation. The significance of the founding of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party is that it poses a break from the *nationalist popular front* that has governed South Africa for the past quarter century.

That alliance was presided over by Nelson Mandela, who as the ANC declared in its obituary had been a member of the South African Communist Party, and at the time of his arrest in 1962 was a member of the SACP Central Committee. The program of this alliance is the ANC’s Freedom Charter (1955), which contrary to popular-front leftists and anti-communist rightists is not some kind of crypto-socialist, anti-capitalist document. On the contrary, with its vague talk of “socialization” and transferring ownership of mineral wealth, banks and monopoly industry to “the people,” the Freedom Charter was intended, as Mandela himself wrote the next year, to promote “the development of a prosperous Non-European bourgeois class.” This is precisely what has happened under the ANC/SACP/COSATU regime. As Mandela remarked in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994): “The cynical have always suggested that the communists were using us, but who is to say that we were not using them?”

In reality, there is a fourth, silent partner in this “alliance,” namely the mining magnates of the Witwatersrand, including Harry Oppenheimer of Anglo-American (who gave money to Mandela), Clive Menell of the rival Anglo-Vaal mining group, and Roland Rowland of Lonrho, a secret financier of the ANC who lent his jet to ANC leader Oliver Tambo and bought a mansion in Sandhurst, Sandton for Ramaphosa. The key moment in South Africa when the ANC/SACP/COSATU popular front with the Randlords, which led to the Marikana massacre, could have been broken was the period of negotiations with the apartheid masters during 1991-94. The Stalinists had given up all pretense of revolution following the counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and the East European deformed workers states. Yet NUMSA general-secretary Moses Mayekiso, reflecting discontent in the ranks, called at the union’s congress in July 1993 for independence from an ANC government, while the congress called for:

“new forms of organization that will unify working class organisations, and parties that will take forward a programme to implement socialism. This could take the form of a working-class party.”

–quoted in Kally Forrest, *Metal That Will Not Bend: National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, 1980-1995* (Wits University Press, 2011)



**The ANC/COSATU/SACP Tripartite Alliance that has presided over neo-apartheid South Africa has a fourth, silent partner: the Randlords who have promoted black capitalist leaders. Above: Nelson Mandela with Anglo American mining conglomerate chief Harry Oppenheimer in February 1994.**

But after finding no support for its opposition to the Tripartite Alliance and being rebuffed in its calls for nationalization and defense of workers rights at a COSATU special conference that September, the NUMSA leadership essentially dropped its objections. Its opposition harked back to the “workerist” stance of the original MAWU (Metal and Allied Workers Union) in the 1970s, wanting a more pro-labor content to an alliance and looking to an all-inclusive party like the British Labour Party rather than a Leninist party of the revolutionary proletarian vanguard. NUMSA even wrote early drafts of a Keynesian capitalist Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which was then turned into the “neo-liberal” program of the Mandela government. Mayekiso and NUMSA’s hesitant semi-opposition did not provide a road forward, which would have required a sharp break with the Tripartite Alliance and a working-class opposition to Mandela and the bourgeois ANC in the 1994 election.

Certainly that would have been distinctly unpopular amidst the euphoria over the end of formal apartheid and dreams of peace and harmony as Mandela and the last president of apartheid South Africa De Klerk held hands at the May 1994 inauguration. Most of the South African left then called for a vote for the ANC. However, the Workers Organization for Socialist Action (WOSA) led by Neville Alexander put forward a Workers List Party (WLP) which “reject[ed] the idea of a Government of National Unity that includes the racists.” The International Communist League, which then stood on the program of revolutionary Trotskyism, called for critical support to the left-reformist WLP as drawing a class line against the bourgeois nationalist ANC. But rather than WOSA’s call for an amorphous “mass workers party,” we emphasized then that what was needed is “a Bolshevik-Leninist party forged on the program of permanent revolution” (*Workers Vanguard* No. 599, 29 April 1994). The same is true today.

### Critical Support to the RSWP

The introduction to the 2019 Elections Manifesto of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party declares it is “guided by Marxism-Leninism.” The SRWP seeks to “educate, agitate, mobilise and organise the working class” for the “historic mission to defeat imperialism and capitalism and to establish a Socialist South Africa, Africa

and World, as a prelude to advancing to a truly free and classless society: to a Communist South Africa, Africa and Communist World!” These principles are correct and urgent. The burning issue is how to get there. The key is the fight for a revolutionary program, and central to that, as always, is the question of the state.

During the SRWP’s Launch Congress, it published online brief quotes from various documents and speeches. “The short term task of Socialists is to ensure the direction preparation of the political and technical aspects of the working class uprising,” reads an excerpt from the party’s draft manifesto. NUMSA president Andrew Chirwa said the union is firmly behind the SRWP: “This is not a party for reform. This is a party for communists. We are serious about the Revolution. We are a party for SOCIALISM and nothing else.” SRWP national convenor and NUMSA secretary-general Irvin Jim,

### Electoral Cretinism

In the May 4 South African elections, the newly formed Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP) got roughly 24,000 votes. This was a very small total, particularly as the party was initiated by the NUMSA metal workers union, with several hundred thousand members. But as we noted in our article calling for critical support to SRWP candidates, it was not expected that the party would get a significant vote, having been founded less than a month earlier.

The Workers and Socialist Party and the International Marxist Tendency, on the other hand, used the low vote to denounce the very formation of the SRWP, which did not conform to their schema of a “mass (electoral) workers party” on a low-level program. This is a prime example of what Marxists have denounced as “parliamentary cretinism,” what Engels called an “incurable disease” consisting of the belief that “the whole world, its history and its future are directed and determined by a majority of votes” (*Revolution and Counterrevolution in Germany* [1852]).

The fact that the SRWP declared participation in bourgeois elections as a tactic rather than a primary aim is positive. The real test will be if the SRWP can translate its words about communism into class-struggle action pointing toward the overthrow of apartheid capitalist slavery and international socialist revolution. ■

speaking from a podium set between panels depicting Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin, declared: “The ultimate mission is to overthrow capitalism as a system and replace it with the dictatorship of the proletariat for the struggle for SOCIALISM.”

At the same time there were delegations from Brazil of the PT (Workers Party), which for 13 years led a bourgeois popular-front government just as corrupt as the ANC’s, which failed to carry out even a minimal land reform and presided over the capitalist state, beefing up its repressive forces against protests by the poor and working people and implementing anti-worker policies in alliance with right-wing bourgeois parties. Also present were guests from the PT-allied MST (Landless Workers Movement) and from the PSOL (Party of Socialism and Freedom), which voted for the PT in the decisive round of the October 2018 elections. The demonstration by Congress delegates and guests demanding freedom for imprisoned PT leader Luis Inácio Lula da Silva was an act of internationalism. But the prominence given to the ultra-reformist popular-frontist Partido dos Trabalhadores and its allies undercuts the SRWP’s call for a workers state that would nationalize the land and big business.

Another of the quotes from the Congress read: “Capitalism has failed! We’ve tried it and our people are still jobless and homeless.” This goes along with various statements to the press saying that NUMSA “decided to form the workers’ party after realising that more than two decades after freedom and democracy, the capitalist system had intensified the suffering of the working class” (*The Citizen*, 20 December 2018). Others cited the shock of the Marikana massacre leading to NUMSA’s decision at its 2013 special congress to call for the formation of a revolutionary socialist workers party. This seems a frank and accurate description of the lead-up to the birth of the SRWP, and a reflection of the thoughts of many South African workers today. At the same time, it speaks of an *empirical* reaction to the experience of South African workers after 25 years of black capitalist government under the ANC. What’s needed is a *theoretical* understanding and *programmatic* expression of that belated recognition.

The launching of a self-proclaimed communist party based on the workers movement with some tens of thousands of working-class members and calling to smash the capitalist state is a huge development. The SRWP slogans and election platform denouncing “capitalist democracy in post-apartheid South Africa” as “a system where once in five years workers are asked to vote for one capitalist party or another” place it well to the left of most reformist pseudo-socialist, pseudo-communist and even pseudo-Trotskyist groups. We call for *critical support* in the May 8 South African elections to the *Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party*, drawing a class line against the capitalist ANC and other bourgeois parties, including the EFF, and potentially opening the way to a breakthrough in the struggle for socialist revolution in South Africa and the whole of the African continent.

But our call must be for a critical vote for the SRWP, as the concrete politics of the newly formed party are far from fully formed. While it opposes the devastation that the capitalist ANC has brought upon poor and working people, and calls for a communist South Africa and African con-





Miners commemorate second anniversary of Marikana massacre, Rustenburg, 16 August 2014.

tinient rather than a two-stage revolution, the SRWP has not explicitly broken with the Stalinist heritage, from which many of its cadres come, nor with its pretense of representing “Marxism-Leninism.” Mao Zedong and Fidel Castro are quoted favorably. And while the SRWP speaks of a “workers state” and “socialist state,” its official documents do not explain how this would come about or call explicitly for socialist revolution. This is important in a context where both the Stalinist SACP and sundry social democrats talk of “socialism” as resulting from an electoral victory and based on the existing capitalist state.

There has clearly been considerable discussion of the question of the state in the course of the formation of the SRWP, but the outcome is uncertain. A “Draft Manifesto of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers’ Party,” amended as of 16 February 2019, quotes extensively from Lenin’s *State and Revolution* (1917), the theoretical preparation for the October Revolution. The Draft Manifesto states: “parliament is a form of capitalist class rule and ... the demands of the working class shall never be achieved through parliament. The end of the apartheid regime came through the action of the revolutionary masses. Workers need to set up their own organs of representation, a workers’ Soviets/Councils and a workers government. The bourgeois parliament must be disbanded. We stand for the dictatorship of the working class in power.”

However, a subsequent amended version of the Manifesto presented to the April Launch Congress dropped these references. In addition, where the February version called for such measures as “mineral wealth, mines, banks, strategic and monopoly industry shall be nationalised and placed under workers control and management by the Socialist government,” and “nationalisation of the banks, mines, without compensation,” the April version makes no mention of nationalisation, workers control, workers councils or a workers government. Clearly there has been a push to “moderate” the Manifesto.

Particularly significant is the reference in both version to “popular election” of “police bodies” and “security services” of a “Socialist South Africa,” which are supposed to be “helpers, protectors and defenders of the people.” But, whereas the earlier draft calls for “armed workers self-defence

that is directly and immediately accountable to the workers councils,” saying that “the armed organs of the capitalist state must be disbanded,” all this is gone in the version presented to the Congress. This implies that without a revolution smashing the capitalist state apparatus there could be some kind of reform (“popular election” of police) that would turn these repressive organs of capital into “defenders of the people.” This is a particularly deadly illusion, as the Marikana massacre underlined. The SACP has both led the POPCRU police and prison guards “union” and commanded police and security forces, and the SAFTU includes a police “union.” Revolutionary Marxists call instead for *cops out of the unions*.

### For a Leninist-Trotsky Party to Fight for Permanent Revolution in South Africa

Such issues require sharp political debate, for they go to the heart of the struggle for socialist revolution in South Africa. The slightest concession to Stalinist and social-democratic reformism here would doom the struggle for genuine communism based on the program of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. The fact that these questions are being debated in the newly formed party underscores the importance of its appearance. It’s significant, therefore, that the main group in South Africa claiming to represent Trotskyism, the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP), affiliated with the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) historically led by Peter Taaffe, is *far to the right of the SRWP*, criticizing it from a purely social-democratic standpoint. Thus the CWI considers cops to be “workers in uniform” and organizes “unions” of prison guards in Britain, as we have noted in denouncing this fatal illusion.<sup>2</sup>

The WASP traces its origins back to the “Marxist Workers Tendency” of the ANC. The very idea of a “Marxist” tendency of a capitalist party is a frontal attack on Leninism and Trotskyism, negating the class line. Yet the Taaffeites are repeat offenders, repeating this betrayal from Pakistan and South Africa to Mexico and Venezuela. Naturally they called for a vote to put the ANC in office in 1994, and

<sup>2</sup> See “Her Majesty’s Social Democrats in Bed with the Police,” *The Internationalist* No. 29, Summer 2009.

thus bear responsibility for its subsequent anti-worker policies. Rather than calling for a workers party based on the program of Marx and Lenin, fighting for the dictatorship of the proletariat and a communist South Africa, the WASP calls (“Potential for working class unity in new mass party,” *Izwi Labasebenzi*, November 2018) to build a “new mass party” around the struggle for a monthly minimum wage of R12,500 (a little under US\$900). This is like calling for a workers party in the United States on a program for “\$15 Now.”

In a recent statement, “How should workers use their vote on 8 May?” (27 April), the WASP was even more explicit, accusing the SRWP of being insufficiently electoralist (“a light-minded attitude towards using parliament for mass mobilization”) because it was launched only a month before the elections. Doing their electoral math, these fake Trotskyists argue that, simply based on the NUMSA membership, it “could have secured at least six seats for working class MPs with a proper campaign.” Talk about parliamentary cretinism! While reluctantly calling for a vote for the SRWP, the WASP urges it to dissolve into a “mass workers party” that “can unite the broadest possible layers of the working class,” based on the July 2018 Working Class Summit called by the SAFTU under Zwelinzima Vavi. Far from calling to smash the capitalist state, the WASP social democrats dream of administering it, as their British comrades did in the 1980s until the Labour Party tops gave them the boot.

The SRWP grew out of the December 2013 special congress of NUMSA which codified its break with the ANC/SACP/COSATU Tripartite Alliance that it rightly held responsible for the Marikana massacre. At the time, we noted that this “promises to be an earthquake in South African politics” (“South Africa: Workers Slam ANC Neo-Apartheid Regime,” *The Internationalist* No. 36, January-February 2014). Nevertheless, we pointed out that NUMSA leaders still upheld the ANC’s Freedom Charter and the Stalinist program of a “New Democratic Revolution,” although sometimes giving it a left twist. We also underscored the ambiguity of what was meant by socialism. As recently as 2016, NUMSA defended its earlier “tactical support” to Zuma against Mbeki within the ANC. On these issues there has been a notable evolution, as the documents of the SRWP no longer praise the Freedom Charter or call to push the ANC to the left nor do they mention the NDR, instead calling for the dictatorship of the proletariat. However, many ambiguities and reformist conceptions remain.

We noted then that “NUMSA documents are sharply critical of how the Alliance has turned out, but they do not oppose such a class-collaborationist political coalition on principle,” rejecting the very basis of this nationalist popular front. Instead, while noting that the union had backed the ANC

from 1994 up until its 2013 break, SRWP spokesman have said that policy had become “outdated.” This leaves the door open to supporting a less cravenly anti-worker alliance with bourgeois forces, such as the EFF. Beyond such key issues of policy and strategy, NUMSA’s trade-union practice is often more militant than that of other unions – and certainly than the strikebreaking of the National Union Mineworkers and other COSATU affiliates – but firmly within the capitalist framework. NUMSA still has an investment company, whose CEO has been linked to the Zuma faction of the ANC, and while criticizing Ramaphosa’s 2018 anti-union labor relations law, it has generally adhered to the restrictions on strikes.

A genuinely revolutionary workers party cannot be bound by capitalist legality as it fights for transitional demands posing the need for socialist revolution. In the face of the escalating blackouts the SRWP calls to oppose Ramaphosa’s plans to dismember and ultimately privatize Eskom. However, a communist leadership would go further, occupying the power plants and imposing *workers control* of the electrical grid, rooting out the endemic corruption and acting to provide reliable energy to working-class districts. It would act as a tribune of the people, not only criticizing reactionary attitudes toward immigrant workers but mobilizing to prevent pogroms and anti-immigrant repression. While the new party rightly appeals to working people from all ethnic groups, in the South African context, where more than four-fifths of the population is African and continues to be subject to deep-seated racial oppression, a communist vanguard cannot be color-blind and should fight for a *black-centered workers government*.

A quarter century of neo-apartheid superexploitation under a black capitalist government is excruciating proof of the bankruptcy of the Stalinist/social-democratic reformist policies of popular-front class collaboration and “two-stage” revolution. The conditions of impoverished township dwellers, industrial and mine workers and landless agricultural laborers make clear that only a party based on Leon Trotsky’s perspective of *permanent revolution* can show a way out of the hell that South Africa’s toilers have been condemned to. Co-leader together with Lenin of the 1917 October Revolution, Trotsky held that in semi-feudal and late-developing capitalist countries like tsarist Russia – or apartheid South Africa – even basic democratic rights cannot be won except by the working class taking power, establishing its own class rule in a workers government that overthrows capitalism and extends the socialist revolution internationally.

The appearance of an explicitly communist party based on militant sections of the South African proletariat has tremendous potential, which could shake the entire continent as masses of working people are bringing down entrenched governments in Sudan and Algeria, and send shock waves into Europe and around the world. The decades-long struggle against apartheid slavery electrified fighters and defenders of the oppressed across the planet. The struggle against the neo-apartheid regime could do so again. But that can only occur under the leadership of a revolutionary communist workers party steeled in the political battle against all forms of reformism on the basis of genuine Bolshevism, in a reformed Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution. ■



# Algeria...

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## What Next?

As the popular movement has been organized on a weekly basis like the “yellow vests” in France, Bouteflika’s handlers initially borrowed from French president Macron’s containment policy: in mid-March it was announced that he would not run again and would eventually step down after “consulting” the population on future changes. No one bought it.

In late March, General Gaïd Salah was obliged to step in, proposing that the Constitutional Council declare Bouteflika unfit for office, as provided for in Article 102 of the Algerian Constitution. The speaker of the parliament’s upper house, Abdelkader Bensalah, would then serve as caretaker president. But Bensalah is a known stooge of the Bouteflika gang, so that did not in any way reduce the size of the demonstrations.

Gaïd Salah repeated his “suggestion” on March 30, this time adding that any attempt to “undermine” the army would be a “red line” not to be crossed. On April 2, Bouteflika finally resigned. Salah, himself a former protégé of Bouteflika, began purging the secret police agencies of Bouteflika’s supporters to bring those agencies back under the direct control of the army, in effect streamlining the repressive apparatus.

Some protesters have counterposed Article 7 of the Constitution, according to which “the people are the source of all power,” to the provisions of Article 102, but this is really just abstract rhetoric. Another call was raised to purge the famous three “Bs” – Bensalah, Tayeb Belaiz (president of the Constitutional Council) and Noureddine Bedoui (head of the interim government). Belaiz has now resigned and the ministers of this “government” have had a hostile reception wherever they go. But driving out the corrupt politicians one-by-one would be a never-ending process.

Presidential elections are now set for July and, although sentiment for boycotting them seems to be steadily growing, the generals could still impose them. It was symptomatic of the isolation of the Bouteflika clique that the initial mass marches were not met with instant police repression. But Gaïd Salah’s recent statement that the demonstrations were under the “protection” of the army was perhaps more threatening than reassuring. The announcement in *El-Djeich* (the voice of the army) on April 5 that the armed forces would support “the legitimate demands clearly expressed by the people” gives the high command plenty of room for maneuver.

Recent incidents indicate that the army is losing patience with protesters. On Tuesday, April 9, as students were preparing to march on the center of Algiers, as they had done since the beginning of the movement, they were attacked and arrested by the police. On Friday, April 12, riot police in the center of Algiers fired tear gas grenades at densely packed crowds, which included children and elderly people. Even groups leaving the demonstration to return home were teargassed, and plainclothes police chased young protesters in the streets. The following week, on Tuesday, April 16, shock troops from the Investigation and Intervention Brigade were sent to the Faculty of Law of the University of Algiers to break up a student demonstration.

A particularly chilling event was the arrest of protesting youth on Saturday, April 13,



Police block workers march in Algiers on May Day.

in the square in front of the main post office, the site of the weekly student demonstrations. The ten arrested members of the Democratic and Social Movement (MDS, successor to the former pro-Soviet Stalinist party, PAGS) and the Youth Action Rally (RAJ, a civil rights association) were taken to a police station located 20 kilometers outside Algiers. The four women arrested were subjected to a strip search – a despicable act of humiliation, and a clear warning to the entire left.

In the last two days, internal quarrels at the top of the repressive organs have intensified. General Gaïd Salah has issued warnings and threats against the hard core of the Bouteflika clan’s supporters, the DRS (Department of Intelligence and Security, now called the Department of Surveillance and Security after a cosmetic reorganization). At the same time, the army chief of staff complains of the actions of the masses who have chased away ministers, and declares that it is necessary to “defeat” those who work for “destabilization”; that he will impose a “peaceful transition”; and that there will be presidential elections in July, period.<sup>1</sup> He wants to “end the game,” as the headlines say. “Game over”<sup>2</sup> in reverse? We think not.

## A Constituent Assembly Under Military Tutelage?

The condemnation of the “system” and of the entire regime is both widespread and deep, but has no positive agenda other than a nebulous desire for a new form of government. Neither a political leadership nor any organs of struggle have emerged. There are some slogans hostile to General Gaïd Salah, but they are far from universal. Although most of the protesters are young and from the “popular classes,” the presence of various professions, from lawyers and university professors to journalists and judges, has also played an important role.

The movement has been fueled by labor strikes and work stoppages, but these have not turned into a general strike, and the stoppages sometimes had the character of a multi-class “civic” mobilization. Even the billionaire Issad Rebrab, whose industrial group Cevital (metallurgy and agribusiness) is the largest private enterprise in the country, entered the game and joined the demonstrations. But workers on strike at the Metal Structures plant near Bouïra are only the latest victims of ruthless exploitation by Cevital.

General Gaïd Salah rounded up the “usual suspects,” businessmen linked to the Bouteflika clan, such as Ali Haddad, president of the FCE (Business Leadership Forum), who was detained at the Tunisian border while trying to flee the country. But

<sup>1</sup> Under from protesters, in early June the election was canceled.

<sup>2</sup> A message in a video game indicating the player has lost. In the demonstrations that brought down Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt, demonstrators carried homemade signs saying (in English) “game over.”

to just accuse this clique of plundering the country or even throwing away Algerian oil money on megalomaniacal projects, like the huge \$ 4 billion Algiers mosque, is to seek to divert attention from the far larger crimes of Bouteflika and his regime, in which state capitalism cohabits with a rapacious crony capitalism.

Especially following the counterrevolutionary overthrow of the Soviet Union in 1991-1992, Algerian governments, as pawns of imperialism, imposed the so-called “neoliberal” policies of privatization and austerity for workers, following the International Monetary Fund’s playbook. This already began under General Zéroual, the predecessor of “Boutef.” After the attempt to industrialize the country by using oil revenues to buy state-owned “turnkey” factories proved to be a failure, the turn to the “free market” was led by the Islamists.

In the fall of 1988, after a revolt of urban youth which was repressed at a cost of more than 500 lives, the regime initially undertook to loosen up the political system by establishing a multi-party regime. The immediate beneficiaries were the Islamists, which led to intervention by the army after their victory in the first round of parliamentary elections in December 1991. The generals sought to preserve their monopoly of power at any price. However, following a cruel civil war, the army installed Bouteflika as president to work for reconciliation with Islamist reactionaries and pursue their “free market” policies.

Thus a future government controlled by the military could continue, or even strengthen, privatization and austerity measures under the pretext of breaking with the “system.” Since the year 2000, there have been tens of thousands of protests against rising food prices, unemployment and widespread corruption – the same causes of the protests this spring of 2019. Southern Algeria has been wracked by strikes in oil installations. However, they were suffocated due to their relative isolation, as well as by bonuses and coupons provided by the regime. The same strategy of cooptation and repression could be followed today.

The two main government parties, the National Liberation Front (FLN) and the National Democratic Rally (RND) are largely discredited. This is also the case of the bogus opposition parties, based mainly in Kabylia, the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) and the Socialist Forces Front (FFS). The latter, despite its name, is a bourgeois party that supports a “social market economy”. In addition, there is the Workers Party (PT), falsely termed “Trotskyist”, which has previously given “critical support” to Bouteflika, and rather uncritical support for his policy of “national reconciliation” with the Islamists.

It must be emphasized that this system is designed to the satisfaction of the military power at the heart of the regime. The FLN is played off against the RND, the FFS against the RCD, while the PT provides “anti-imperialist” background noises, as the pro-Moscow Stalinist party did (under the pretext of breaking with the “system”) before its collapse. Nevertheless, these too are discredited. One of the main arguments for constitutional reform is that it is high time to reduce presidential power. But a more tradi-

tional parliamentary system would also be subject to manipulation by the generals, and any pretense of achieving “democracy” in the semi-colonial framework is illusory.

Currently, these three opposition parties are trumpeting the slogan of a constituent assembly in order to redo the Constitution. They deliberately spread illusions about the role of the army. On March 30, the first secretary of the FFS declared that the army must “bend to the will of the overwhelming majority of the Algerian people,” that it “must ... be a guarantor of the good progress of the democratic transition and cannot in any case influence its ins and outs.” But then, none of these parties has ever been a real opponent of the “system.” In fact, Louisa Hanoune, the main leader of the PT, had previously called on Bouteflika himself (in 2004) to organize a national congress to form a constituent assembly!

The Social Democrats of the Socialist Workers Party (PST), historically associated with the United Secretariat (USec) of Ernest Mandel, have joined in these frauds. Like their French co-thinkers who founded the NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party), they abandoned their “Trotskyist” rhetoric for more traditional reformism. The PST does not even claim that a constituent assembly would be the first step towards some kind of “socialism.” For them, the last stop on their trolley is called “sovereign constituent assembly representing our democratic and social aspirations” (Statement of the PST, April 21).

Worse still, the PST concocts pseudo-Marxist arguments about how the bourgeois officer corps could become part of the “revolution.” For example, an article on the PST website, “Legal Debate and the Challenge of Transition” (March 28), envisages the possibility “of political conditions allowing the popular forces to bring most of the armed forces into the ranks of the revolution ... allowing the country to move from military rule to a democratic civilian government.” A dangerous and even suicidal illusion! These anti-Trotskyists are advocating a constituent assembly under military tutelage!!

Compared to these docile “constitutional” social democrats who seek to play the role of the Kadets (the Constitutional Democrats) in the Russian Revolution, even the call for a “truly democratic and popular revolutionary government” by the vestigial Stalinists in *Alger Républicain* (3 April) seems quite a bit to their left.

During the elections for Bouteflika’s second term in 2004, we of the League for the Fourth International wrote that in a country like Algeria, “dominated for decades by an authoritarian regime which considers itself unmovable, one cannot exclude the possibility of calling a constituent assembly in response to the thirst for democracy of the working masses.” We stressed, however: “But for this to have a revolutionary content, it is necessary to first establish the revolutionary power of the working people.” Not only does this precondition not currently exist in Algeria, today the demand for a constituent assembly would serve as a cover for a reorganized military regime subordinated to imperialism. As we said at the time:

“Can a ‘democratic’ assembly under bourgeois domination resolve the burning linguistic and regional issues that have shaken Algeria or crush the Islamic fundamentalist reactionaries? Impossible! It is a criminal illusion to imagine that a stable parliamentary democracy can be established in a country like Algeria, where a tiny layer of rich capitalists and corrupt bureaucrats, support-



ed by the army, exercises its domination over the pauperized masses on behalf of imperialism. The army won't be kicked out of power by an impotent 'democratic' assembly; to accomplish this a working-class counter-power must be organized, based on councils of workers and peasants, soviets, with their own workers militias – and then the armed forces that defend capital will begin to come apart. The proletariat must fight, with independent class struggle, for the broadest democratic rights as an integral part of the fight for proletarian power, and not in an illusory attempt to achieve 'democracy' without overthrowing the capitalist state."

–“Algeria: Rigged Elections and Workers Resistance to the Capitalist Offensive,” *The Internationalist* No. 18, May-June 2004

## The Working Class Must Defend All the Oppressed

A few weeks after the start of the *hirak* (the “citizens movement”), Amazigh (Berber) flags appeared in the demonstrations, including in the capital. An article in *El Watan* (20 April) refers to failed attempts by police to seize these flags and sow divisions among the protesters. What kind of mockery of “democratization” would it be that is incapable of clearly and firmly opposing the policy of Arabization imposed by the Algerian government? This reactionary policy is not only a brutal negation of the democratic rights of the Berbers, it has always paved the way for Islamist reactionaries. In 1999, Bouteflika boasted that Tamazight<sup>3</sup> would never be an official language, that this demand was a balloon that he would pop.

Nevertheless, after the revolt in Kabylia in 2001, during which 130 people were victims of repression, the next year Bouteflika was forced to include Berber as an official language. This, however, has not been carried out, and there have been many student protests demanding that Tamazight education be funded. In the twilight of his reign, Bouteflika reconfirmed Berber as an “official language” (but not a “state” language) and even made Yennayer, the Berber New Year, a holiday. These are rather empty symbolic gestures.

In the words of Lenin, genuine revolutionaries demand “absolutely no privileges for any one nation or any one language” (“Critical Remarks on the National Question” [1913]). We of the League for the Fourth International demand equal rights for Arabic (including the popular language, as opposed to literary Arabic), Tamazight and French. Against the poison of nationalism, it is necessary to forge the unity of the entire Algerian working class precisely on the basis of the defense of the Kabyles and their democratic rights, including their right to self-determination. This does not mean, however, that we are calling at this moment for independence for Kabylia.

The 2001 crackdown in Kabylia led to the creation of the Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylia (MAK). After 2010, “Autonomy” became “Self-Determination” as the MAK began to demand independence. Some Amazigh nationalists are now urging abstention from the ongoing struggle, saying that the Kabyles were strongly involved in the struggle for Algeria’s independence from France, but got nothing out of it. Their calculations would be to form a small Kabyle state against a hostile (or indifferent) Algerian majority, which supposes the patronage of one or another imperialist power – a suicidal illusion.

<sup>3</sup> Amazigh is the name of the Berber people; Tamazight is the Berber language.

There is another independence movement, the Union for a Kabyle Republic, which split from the MAK. Both organizations have been targets of a veritable witch hunt in recent times, while the regime’s repressive bodies have carried out brutal arrests (with the acquiescence of bourgeois parties like the FFS and the RCD) following pro-independence meetings. We strongly denounce this new wave of attacks on Kabyle militants. However, the more moderate Rally for Kabylia, which also separated from the MAK and seeks a negotiated federal solution, presumes the goodwill of the central government in what it hopes would be a stable bourgeois democracy – an impossibility in a country dominated by imperialism. Such a solution could only be envisaged under a workers’ state.

The defense of women’s rights is fundamental to any conception of democracy, but it is not included in the main slogans of supporters of a “Second Republic.” The struggle for the liberation of women is a strategic issue for the revolution, in Algeria as elsewhere. Trotskyists demand the abolition of the paternalistic family code, full equality of rights between men and women, and complete separation between religion and the state. Homosexuals are also victims of the bourgeois moral order. A medical student was slaughtered in Algiers in February for allegedly being a homosexual. We say: Down with Article 333 of the Constitution, which outlaws homosexuality!

We fight for the right to free abortion on demand, including for minors, and for a free, high quality medical system, accessible to all. The integration of women into social labor should be facilitated by measures such as 24-hour free daycare and equal pay for equal work. It is not just a matter of democratic rights, but attacking the very roots of Islamic reaction. Only the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a planned and collectivized economic system can emancipate women from domestic slavery. In fact, all basic democratic rights can only be secured by proletarian revolution.

Algerian history since independence shows that bourgeois nationalism has led only to a bonapartist regime, which has neither broken the grip of imperialism, nor achieved real economic development, nor realized democratic gains for women and other oppressed sectors. This again confirmed Trotsky’s theory and program of permanent revolution, which drew lessons from the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and October 1917: in colonial and semi-colonial countries, as in the case of Algeria, a weak bourgeoisie is incapable of realizing even bourgeois-democratic tasks, and it is incumbent upon the working class, led by a Bolshevik Party, to put itself at the head of all the oppressed to accomplish the democratic tasks by establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, which will undertake socialist tasks.

## For Genuine Trotskyism in Algeria!

On March 2, it was reported in the Algerian press that Louisa Hanoune, leader of the Workers’ Party, was chased out of the demonstration in Algiers as a stooge of Bouteflika. Hanoune participated in the negotiations of Sant’ Egidio in 1995 and signed a joint platform with the FLN, the FFS and both “moderate” and hardline Islamists supporting Bouteflika’s policy of “national reconciliation.” According to a biographical article in *Jeune Afrique* (22 April 2016), Bouteflika offered Hanoune a ministerial post in 2000 and very much re-

gretted her refusal. Like the French Stalinists regarding the popular front of 1936, she undoubtedly thought that she could be more useful as external support to the government, a murderous Bonapartist regime.

Hanoune met with General Gaïd Salah on 13 February 2014, and then issued a statement affirming “the need to preserve the unity of the military institution and its cohesion in the face of any attempt at division likely to undermine the stability of the country and pave the way for foreign interference.” The PT then praised “the proven experience of the army in the fight against terrorism, which is a source of pride for the Algerian people” (Algeria1, 15 February 2014).

All the PT’s speeches about “continuing the revolutionary mobilization” and setting up popular committees to prepare a constituent assembly (perhaps drawing up lists of concerns and demands, as Bouteflika initially proposed) while opposing military interference in politics look like a desperate attempt to avoid going down with a sinking ship. As protégés of the French group of the late Pierre Lambert, which abandoned Trotskyism and degenerated into reformism more than 40 years ago, the PT is a social-democratic formation down to its roots. In the recent split of the Lambertist Parti Ouvrier Indépendant (POI, Independent Labor Party) in France, the Algerian PT joined the Gauquelin (Lacaze) faction. The Gluckstein faction, in the person of historian Jean-Jacques Marie, now suddenly claims to be shocked, shocked by the pro-Bouteflika antics of the PT.

The liberal social democrats of the PST are already theorizing about a new Algerian military regime. The article cited above, which originally appeared in *À l’encontre* (March 30), a theoretical review published by the NPA under the title “Algeria: The Army, the Juridical and Constitutional Debate for a ‘Controlled Transition’ and the Dynamics of the Popular Uprising Against ‘the System’,” written by Nadir Djermoune, was subsequently published on the PST website. It approvingly quotes the Algerian sociologist Yazid Ben Hounet, who insists that the Algerian army does not come from a distinct ethnic group, like the Syrian army, and does not constitute a “distinct social class” as in Egypt. The conclusion of the sociologist, we kid you not, is that the current role of the army “*is that of accompanying this peaceful revolution, rather than that of repression or confiscation of this democratic momentum.*”

As thousands of demonstrators chant “*Djeich – chaab, Khawa – khawa*” (people and army together, all brothers), instead of warning that the army is not a “friend of the people,” these reformists are feeding dangerous illusions. The Algerian officer corps is even favorably compared to the Armed Forces Movement in Portugal in the 1970s, and the conclusion by this member of the national leadership of the PST is that one can envisage a “partial analogy” with a “Portuguese scenario.” In fact, the opportunism of the “far left” at the time, which lined up behind various military factions (pro-Stalinist or with the manifestly counter-revolutionary Social Democrats), helped to wreck a truly revolutionary opportunity in which the construction of proletarian organs of dual power was concretely posed. But the current policy of the PST is much farther to the right than the opportunists of the 1970s.

The dangerous nonsense of the PST is echoed in the declaration of solidarity of the “International Bureau of the Fourth



## Free Louisa Hanoune

On Thursday, May 9, Louisa Hanoune, General Secretary of the Algerian Workers Party (PT), was called before the military tribunal of Blida as a witness in the scope of an inquiry against Saïd Bouteflika – brother of the deposed President – as well as of two former heads of the secret police, Mohamed Mediène (alias “Toufik”) and Athmane Tartag (alias “Bashir”). However, she was then placed in preventive detention accused of being somehow involved in “attacks on the authority of the army” and “conspiracy against the authority of the state.” This arbitrary arrest is a direct attack on the rights of millions of people who have demonstrated in recent weeks and presages a hardening of the military power. The League for the Fourth International demands that Louisa Hanoune be immediately released!

International” (the former USec), which praises “popular sovereignty” – a deeply anti-Marxist concept – and the “renaissance of the Algerian revolution.” At that time, in the early 1960s, Mandel’s followers justified their support for the FLN by claiming that petty-bourgeois nationalists were building a “workers and peasants government” and would eliminate capitalism under the sway of an inevitable “dynamic” objective process. But this “Algerian Revolution” has proved mythical. The objectivist opportunism of yesterday has ended up defending bourgeois democracy and spreading illusions about an army won over to a peaceful revolution.

The Algerian masses desperately need a revolutionary leadership armed with a genuinely Trotskyist program, which understands that in order to win and extend even basic democratic rights, capitalism must be overthrown by organs of proletarian power. Against the bourgeois nationalism of the opportunist left, such a revolutionary workers party built on the basis of Lenin’s and Trotsky’s Bolshevik program would counterpose proletarian internationalism, fighting for a socialist revolution that would spread throughout the Maghreb (northwest Africa) and into the heart of the imperialist centers.

The revolution in Algeria must also be linked to the struggle of the workers in the former colonial power, France. In the former colonial metropole, which is still eager to maintain its “sphere of influence” in Africa, it is crucial to fight against the divisions within the working class fomented by the racist government of Macron (and its predecessors), as well as for full citizenship rights for immigrants and the right of asylum for those fleeing imperialist devastation. The revolutionary unity between French and Algerian workers is decisive for the future of the class struggle in both countries, underlining the urgency of the struggle for a reformed Fourth International, world party of the socialist revolution. ■



# Throw Off the UGTA's Stranglehold on the Working Class!

## Against State-Controlled "Trade Unionism"

### Forge a Revolutionary Leadership

*The following article is translated and slightly abridged from the supplement to L'Internationaliste (May 2019).*

In the framework of the protests which began on February 22 against a fifth presidential term for Bouteflika and turned into the *hirak* (citizens movement) against "the system," the action of the working class so far has been mainly one of support for the popular protests rather than acting as a working-class vanguard. There have been walkouts and strikes over specific demands. What is needed, however, is a mobilization of the enormous power of the workers to sweep away this moribund regime and open the road for a genuine revolution against the *capitalist system*. May Day could herald the beginning of such a mobilization. What matters then will be to arm it with a revolutionary leadership.

After three weeks of demonstrations, anonymous calls for a general strike began circulating on the Internet. On Sunday, March 10, no train, local or long-distance, left the stations of Algiers. The metro, trolleys and buses were also shut down by strikes. High schools across the country were closed by strikes. In the port of Béjaïa, in Kabylia, the strike was particularly effective, including in schools and public offices, but also in the food industry (the sugar and oil factories of Cevital). However, there was no follow-up and the strike movement did not give rise to an organizational framework capable of extending and generalizing it.

Strikes have also been reported on the sites of SONATRACH, the state oil company. Workers in the industrial area of Rouïba, near Algiers, including the SNVI auto and bus assembly plant, also walked out. A week later, a strike at the SONATRACH natural gas field in Hassi R'mel was confirmed. On Sunday, March 24, municipal employees across the country went on strike. In addition to calling for Bouteflika's departure, the strikers in Algiers, Blida and Constantine also demanded salary increases, as well as improvements in the areas of health, housing and education. Strikes were renewed in various sectors during that week. From March 29 in the wilaya (prefecture) of Tizi Ouzou in Kabylia there was a strike in public offices and banks, schools and SONELGAZ gas stations.

It remains to be seen if the strikes to support the popular movement will trigger a class offensive. Mass unemployment and the proliferation of short-term contracts mean that the working class is on the defensive. Despite its militancy, the Algerian proletariat has been betrayed on all sides, unable to bring together its struggles in a unified counter-offensive and present itself as an alternative to the regime, or to provide a way out for the plebeian masses, especially the desperate youth of the country. The main reason for this failure is the grip of the UGTA's dead hand on the working class. Far from mobilizing the workers to defend their interests against capitalist attacks, this *corporatist* organization and its corrupt apparatus have been the instrument of one government after another to prevent the workers' struggle.



**Around 2,000 workers of the SNVI auto/truck factory in Rouïba, on March 18, have called for the departure of UGTA leader Sidi Said, to say no to a fifth presidential term for Bouteflika, and to demand the end of the "system."**

#### UGTA: An Obstacle to Mobilizing the Workers

In *El Watan* (18 April) there appeared an article, "Historic Mobilization of Trade Unionists Outside UGTA Headquarters: Sidi Said Told to 'Get Out'." In demanding the departure of the leadership of the confederation, they would have us believe that there was a degeneration of the UGTA starting with the arrival of Abdelmadjid Sidi Said, who turned it into a simple device at the service of the bosses, and that it must now be put back on the path laid down by its founders in the service of the workers. What a lie! The UGTA is not a workers union born of the struggles of the exploited. On the contrary, it is an obstacle to workers' defensive economic struggles. It is an emanation of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists of the National Liberation Front in the struggle for independence, and then became part of the state apparatus as a mass organization of the FLN (see *The Internationalist* No. 18, May-June 2004).

While all pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracies tend to integrate with the bourgeois state in the imperialist era, the UGTA is an integral part of the machinery of bourgeois repression, whose task is to prevent the formation and growth of working-class trade unions. The end of the FLN's political monopoly after 1988 opened up a new field of maneuver for the UGTA bureaucrats: from then on, they maintained links with all three bourgeois parties that make up *the system*: mainly the RND (which they helped found) along with the FLN and the RCD. The corporatist system thereby became more flexible, but it has not been abolished. Competing unions were theoretically possible, but in practice they were rarely registered; at best, they are simply tolerated.

Under Sidi Said ("Captain Madjid"), the UGTA at first mobilized behind Bouteflika's candidacy, then backed General Gaïd Salah in opposing the protests. To be sure, in this troubled period there have been some manifestations of dissent. In Kabylia, UGTA locals organized marches chanting slogans such as "Down with Sidi Said"

and "Give the UGTA to the Workers." The April 17 demonstration of about a thousand trade unionists in front of the UGTA headquarters in Algiers to demand the ouster of Sidi Said was supported by the representatives of the PT. To justify their turn, these semi-official social democrats appeal to the dogma of the French social democracy (the Amiens Charter) according to which political parties worry about elections, whereas the unions deal with economic problems. Such distinction is particularly absurd in Algeria.

The trade unionists quoted in the *El Watan* article are activists of Louisa Hanoune's PT. After taking advantage of all the financial privileges and acting as a parasitical appendix of the regime, having supported all the bourgeois gangster cliques, from "Boutef" to Sidi Said, today, in the face of the mass revolt, they want to restore their image by tailing after the popular movement. However, workers don't have short memories.

The PT is not alone on the left in seeking to "democratize" the UGTA. In an article announcing that "The Algerian Revolution Has Begun!" (*La Riposte*, 29 March), Allan Woods' International Marxist Tendency tries to peddle the lie that UGTA is "the powerful workers union of the country," whereas its real role has been to stifle the struggles of the workers. Movements to reform the UGTA are also enthusiastically backed by the PST. This is not surprising, since the PST is itself part of the UGTA bureaucracy (although other PST activists are leaders of independent teacher unions).

The predecessors of the PST even claimed in the 1970s, when the UGTA was part of the one-party regime of the FLN, that the UGTA could have a "class struggle leadership." It is frankly impossible to claim that the UGTA has only recently become a tool of government. The reformists look back to Aïssat Idir, one of the founders of the UGTA during the war of independence in the 1950s. The UGTA declared then that its task would not be to defend the interests of the working class, but rather to be an instrument of the nationalist movement which was being transformed into a new ruling class, "passing from the

stage of making demands to the taking of responsibilities" (*L'Ouvrier Algérien*, August 7, 1962).

Today, the PST joins the call (April 22) for a "huge national rally on May 1 in Algiers to reclaim the UGTA for the workers and demand the immediate and unconditional departure of the national secretariat and of its secretary-general" (Sidi Said). An article on the French NPA website, "Algeria: on the dissidence in the UGTA and strikes" (17 April), refers to a "rebellion" inside the confederation. There are allegedly some dissident sectors of the leadership that would be ready to throw Sidi Said overboard, just as the generals sacrificed Bouteflika. Moreover, the social democrats of the PST are linking their call to reform the state-controlled "union" to the maximum program of a constituent assembly, without a single mention of a struggle for socialist revolution.

If, under the pressure of the street and in the course of a convulsive class struggle, part of the bureaucracy of the UGTA should break away and join a union organization independent of the state apparatus, it will not be thanks to the class-collaborationists of the PT and PST. And such a step would emphasize even more the need to forge a truly revolutionary leadership.

As for the independent unions, which have some support in the education and health sectors – they have now joined together in the Confederation of Algerian Trade Unions (CSA), which even includes imams (Islamic clerics) as government employees. They remain anemic, and not just because of their semi-legal status. They function as auxiliaries rather than irreconcilable enemies of the UGTA and are open to state patronage. We note in particular that the SNAPAP receives support from the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, which operates at the international level as a trade union branch of U.S. imperialism, funded directly by the government.

The question of independence from the bourgeois state is not simply a tactical issue, but a political one. As Trotsky pointed out, "in the epoch of imperialist decay the trade unions can really be independent only to the extent that they are conscious of being, in action, the organs of proletarian revolution." For many currents that claim to be Trotskyist, this is at most a ritual formula that they cite on rare occasions when they want to give themselves a left cover while they continue their reformist daily work.

For the Algerian proletariat, on the other hand, organizational and political independence from the capitalist state and all wings of the bourgeoisie is decisive for transforming the struggle against the regime into a movement for workers revolution to overthrow the capitalist system. This is precisely why the League for the Fourth International insists on the need to forge the nucleus of a revolutionary and internationalist workers party that fights for a workers and peasants government and the extension of the revolution to the entire African continent and inside the imperialist metropolises. ■



# Bourgeois Farce of the “Fourth Transformation” Mexico: López Obrador in the Service of the Bosses and the Imperialists

**Break With All the  
Bourgeois Parties:  
Morena, PRI, PAN, PRD!  
Build a Revolutionary,  
Leninist-Trotskyist,  
Workers Party!**

The following article is translated from *Revolución Permanente* No. 9 (May 2019), published by the Grupo Internacionalista, Mexican section of the League for the Fourth International.

Last July's election resulted in an overwhelming victory for Andrés Manuel López Obrador, commonly referred to in Mexico by his initials AMLO. He was the candidate of the “Together We Will Make History” coalition bringing together his bourgeois-populist National Regeneration Movement (MORENA), the reactionary, misogynist, homophobic Social Gathering Party (PES) sponsored by evangelical Protestant churches, and the Party of Labor (PT, a bourgeois party that began as a front for the Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI). With over 30 million votes, AMLO got more than 53 percent, a margin not seen since the golden age of PRI one-party rule [which lasted from 1929 to 2000]. Left in the dust were his opponents: Ricardo Anaya of the coalition between the clerical-reactionary National Action Party (PAN) and the weakened Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and José Antonio Meade, the gray bureaucrat placeholder of president Enrique Peña Nieto's PRI.

AMLO's victory awakened enormous enthusiasm from the masses of people who yearned for an end to the bloodbath that began under the PAN and PRI governments of recent years. Many commentators wrote that the political pendulum was swinging to the left in Mexico while the Southern Cone of South America was heading in the opposite direction. However, the truth is that the new AMLO government is not leftist, even within the spectrum of bourgeois politics, but instead has a typical bourgeois-populist character. Unlike the governments of the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, a popular front does not govern Mexico today. Unlike Venezuela under Hugo Chávez or Nicolás Maduro, the AMLO regime has the blessing of U.S. imperialism. In Mexico today there is an effort underway to reorganize a strong government around the presidency in order to rebuild more effective mechanisms of social control. As we wrote on the eve of the elections:

“In general, it is clear that the Mexican bourgeoisie has accepted ... AMLO's victory, and in fact supports him as a necessary fix for capitalism.”

– “Elecciones en México: López Obrador al rescate de la burguesía” [Elections in Mexico: López Obrador to the Rescue of the Bourgeoisie], *El Internacionalista* supplement, June 2018



**Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (center) at swearing in of new head of the main businessmen's association**

The first five months of his government have made it clear that AMLO serves the Mexican bourgeoisie and its imperialist senior partners. Time and again he has promised the Mexican capitalists that he is not their enemy, and in fact he has gained the open support of a significant sector of the Mexican business class. AMLO and his team are collaborating with the imperialist U.S. government to implement racist Trump's immigration policy. They offer migrants the carrot of legal residence in Mexico, but increasingly also the stick of police persecution, today under the National Migration Institute, soon by the National Guard [a new paramilitary force introduced by López Obrador]. They want to keep the impoverished Central American migrants in the south of Mexico, far from the U.S. border (see “The Caravan of the Dispossessed” in *The Internationalist* No. 53, September-October 2018).

In spite of his pretense of being “the president of all Mexicans,” AMLO represents the latest effort of the weak Mexican bourgeoisie to maintain social equilibrium in an industrialized country, with a powerful proletariat that could awaken and unleash its volcanic force. The struggles of the exploited and oppressed that are breaking out now and in days to come will only achieve victory with complete class independence from the bourgeoisie, its politicians, parties, and state. Class struggles require a working-class, revolutionary and internationalist political program that points toward a socialist revolution that would establish a workers and peasants government and spread beyond the borders of Mexico, to the north into the heart of the imperialist monster as well as south to the rest of the American continent.

## **AMLO: Bourgeois Populist Caudillo**

In September 2012, after his defeat in the last presidential election, AMLO decided to leave the PRD. Up to then, the National Regeneration Movement had only been an electoral campaign organization independent of the PRD bosses Jesús

Zambrano Grijalva and Jesús Ortega. After he quit the PRD, MORENA began to build itself up as López Obrador's new political vehicle. Far from the factional tribalism that characterized the PRD throughout its history, MORENA would be the monolithic platform of its *caudillo*, AMLO. Since it separated from the PRD, we have referred to López Obrador's vehicle as “MORENA, a Bourgeois Populist Movement” (in “El puño obrero puede noquear a Peña Nieto” [The Workers' Fist Can KO Peña Nieto], *Revolución Permanente* No. 2, March 2013).

This time, López Obrador used a different strategy, which proved effective: he began to recruit local political leaders across the country, with special emphasis on the northern states where the PRD was never strong, to build his campaign on their ready-made political machines. By the beginning of 2018, when the outlines of the presidential contest were already clear, important state and even national leaders of the PRI and PAN had defected to MORENA. The chairman of the PAN during the first years of the government of Felipe Calderón, Germán Martínez Cázares,

loudly endorsed AMLO for president in January. Shortly thereafter, his predecessor, the ultra-reactionary Manuel Espino, followed suit. When 300 PAN activists from Apodaca, in the state of Nuevo León, announced that they had quit the party and joined Morena, AMLO greeted them: “you are welcome here, and the doors are open” (Aristegui Noticias, 26 January 2018).

This phenomenon was repeated across the country. In exchange for mayoral, gubernatorial and parliamentary posts, Morena systematically recruited traditional bourgeois politicians with well-established webs of patronage. The success of this strategy became clear on July 1, when AMLO and his Movement swept every state of the country, with the exception of ultra-conservative Guanajuato. In the southern states, he maintained or increased his votes: in his home state of Tabasco, for example, AMLO won 99 percent of the precincts. But in the north, MORENA won by landslides for the first time. In Nuevo León, the coalition took 60 percent of precincts. In states where the PAN won in 2006 and the PRI in 2012, AMLO and MORENA won almost every post.

This “electoral migration” reflects a change in AMLO's constituency between 2006 and 2012 on one hand, and 2018 on the other. In his first two runs for the presidency, the principal support for AMLO was the “popular front” around the PRD, which had formed around Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 1988. The task assigned by the bourgeoisie to this front of class collaboration was principally to divert struggles against the anti-worker policies of Mexican governments into bourgeois parliamentary politics. To pressure the government while keeping the organizations of poor people tied to the bourgeois PRD, this popular front was expressed in various coalitions “against privatization,” for “dialogue towards an alternative national project,” as well as in “popular assemblies,” etc. “Independent” unions, formally separated from state tutelage but politically chained to the bourgeois PRD, were an integral part of this popular front.

*continued on page 22*



**In November Mexican president-elect held a mass meeting with the military high command and over 10,000 soldiers where he announced the formation of the National Guard, a new escalation in the militarization of the country.**



## Taxi Workers Under Siege

*Class Struggle International Workers/Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas, an organization of immigrant workers based in New York, in conjunction with the Internationalist Group, has taken part in the struggles of urban car service workers for more than a decade. As a result of the emergency conditions facing taxi workers, particularly due to the inundation of app-based taxis, in NYC and around the world, the CSIW/TIC recently issued a pamphlet analyzing the nature and origins of the crisis, and putting forward a class-struggle program to fight the capitalist assault. We print here (slightly abridged) the lead article of the pamphlet.*

On May 10, the app-based taxi company Uber launched its hugely anticipated “initial public offering” (IPO), for the first time selling shares on the New York Stock Exchange. The lead-up was marked by “an insane amount of hype and media coverage” (CNN). Instead Uber had “the worst first-day dollar loss of any U.S. IPO ever” (*New York Times*). Its stock fell by 7.6% from its opening price, meaning that the initial investors took a loss of \$655 million. A week later, its stock price was at the same level, leaving it with a market capitalization of \$69 billion. Yet last fall its lead underwriters, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley, put the company’s value of \$120 billion, almost double its current level. Its rival Lyft, the second largest app-taxi<sup>1</sup> outfit, launched its IPO in March, only to see its share price fall by one-third.

It was a brutal comeuppance for the high-flying tech companies that have been touted as the harbingers of a “gig economy” in which careers and steady jobs are out, replaced by brutally exploited temporary, part-time or freelance workers, classified as “contractors,” who have no job stability, health care or other “benefits” and work for minimum or sub-minimum pay. Yet all they have produced so far are massive losses. Uber and Lyft burned through over \$5 billion just in the last year (March 2017-March 2018), and there is no prospect of either company becoming profitable in the near future. The fact that investors on the first day of the IPO poured another \$8 billion into the coffers of Uber, which raised \$20 billion in the last ten years despite mounting losses, shows how desperate Wall Street is. This is another speculative bubble, like the dot.com binge at the turn of the century or the sub-prime mortgages that led to the 2008 stock market crash. Sooner or later it is bound to burst.

There are some complaints in the financial press about Uber and Lyft’s “creative accounting” designed to hoodwink unwary small investors. “The early investors are try-

<sup>1</sup> Note on terminology: Various terms are used to designate that segment of the urban car service industry consisting of vehicles that are summoned by mobile phone applications. We refer here to “app-based cars” or “app taxis,” as a neutral description. The terms “rideshare” and “ride-hail” used by Uber and Lyft are loaded propaganda terms and inaccurate. Passengers in Uber, Lyft, Juno, Via and similar vehicles don’t share with random persons (except in pool cars), nor are they part of some kind of cooperative “sharing economy.” And they do not hail these vehicles on the street, as they might with a “traditional” taxi. These terms and another of their favorites, “transportation network companies,” are attempts to make it seem as if they are a different industry than taxis (and thus should not be tightly regulated, as taxis are).

### Wall Street, Uber Profiteers and Democrats Wring Workers Dry

ing to find some sucker who will buy the stock in the public market,” an accounting expert told the *Wall Street Journal* (14 May). Yet the real victims of this gigantic swindle are taxi drivers who are seeing their livelihoods and their lives destroyed. The app taxis may have raked in enough to cover a few more years of multi-billion-dollar losses, but the IPO financials show that *to become profitable, they will have to drastically slash driver pay and incentives*. Analysts at Guggenheim Partners wrote that to reach its profit margin “would likely require LYFT to cut pay by ~20%” or to completely eliminate incentives or insurance costs. And this was after Lyft sharply increased its fees and commissions late last year. Uber’s S-1 statement for the Securities and Exchange Commission spelled it out in print:

“In particular, as we aim to reduce Driver incentives to improve our financial performance, we expect Driver dissatisfaction will generally increase.... Driver dissatisfaction has in the past resulted in protests by Drivers, most recently in India, the United Kingdom, and the United States.”

“Driver dissatisfaction”? Seething anger, outrage, fury would be a more accurate description. That outrage and frustration is increasing and will continue to do so. But how will it be expressed? What the press didn’t cover is that while these global corporations devour billions of dollars, their drivers barely make the minimum wage, and sometimes far less. Across the world, Uber boasts of having 3.9 million drivers in 63 countries, on whom they impose poverty pay, while driving down the incomes of all taxi workers, bankrupting many. A striking Uber driver called the system “slavery” and his bosses “slave drivers,” as his pay often barely covers expenses, leaving him with nothing, working for free (Democracy Now, 9 May). In New York City, in a little over a year, *at least nine taxi workers have committed suicide* because

of their desperate economic condition. The latest, on March 23, was a livery cab driver who had driven for Lyft since 2014.

In New York, driver earnings across all sectors of the industry are miserable. Cabbies are clocking 70+ hour weeks and barely making ends meet, if at all. As it stands, most taxi drivers work 10 to 12 hours per day and earn an average of \$25,000 a year, with no health insurance to speak of or benefits of any kind. Several studies and U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics put the hourly earnings of taxi drivers at around \$14 per hour after expenses. Despite their overall losses, Uber has been making a killing in NYC, with Democrat politicians like Andrew Cuomo backing them up along the way. Meanwhile, the Taxi and Limousine Commission continues its vicious, racist harassment of drivers, extorting thousands of dollars for minor “violations” like picking up passengers without proper authorization. And in the background, New York’s crumbling public transit system, which capitalist politicians and their Wall Street patrons have been running into the ground for decades, continues to deteriorate.

A minimum pay floor for app-based drivers that went into effect January 30 is supposed to increase their pay to \$17.22/hr. after expenses. When taxes for “self-employed contractors” are deducted, this would only bring their earnings up to the New York state minimum wage of \$15 per hour. At the same time, New York governor Cuomo rammed “congestion pricing” through the state legislature, with the support of NYC mayor Bill de Blasio, including a \$2.50/2.75 surcharge on fares in Midtown and Lower Manhattan.

This is nothing short of highway robbery – legalized pilfering of driver wages at a time when taxi workers from all sectors of the industry are in dire economic straits. And it was cooked up by the same Democratic politicians who helped cause

the congestion in the first place by flooding New York streets with over 100,000 app-based taxis, far outnumbering the 13,587 medallion yellow cabs. These new unregulated taxis can pick up anywhere and set their own rates, siphoning off a middle-class clientele (those with credit cards), while yellow cabs, black cars and green cabs are tightly regulated and relentlessly policed. Burdened for years by skyrocketing costs of living, plummeting wages, predatory bank loans and vicious TLC harassment, many cabbies have reached the breaking point. Meanwhile, app-taxi companies are planning to drastically lower their pay. The situation is explosive, and this powder keg of class struggle could detonate at any moment.

But at present, taxi workers are divided. Yellow cabs, green cabs, black cars, liveries, dollar vans, app-based – the different sectors have been set against each other by the taxi bosses and city rulers. Black car and livery drivers are separated by ethnicity – Dominicans here, Mexicans there, etc. And yellow cab drivers (many from South Asia) blame the influx of Uber drivers for their travails, citing the company’s artificially low fares (which have now been raised). The reality is that *all* taxi workers are being gamed by the capitalist profiteers and Democratic politicians who have backed Uber and its competitors to the hilt at the expense of drivers. And the congestion surcharge has made things worse by framing the issue as one of improved public transit versus a recalcitrant taxi industry, thereby by pitting taxi workers against the riding public and against their brothers and sisters in the Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100, who make NYC’s subways and buses run.

The issue facing us is what it will take to confront this calamitous situation. The first step is to overcome divisions in this highly segmented industry. The next is to prepare to take on the capitalist state. Twice this year, Uber and Lyft drivers based in Los Angeles have called job actions, which have been picked up by drivers in San Francisco, New York and elsewhere in the U.S., as well as in London, England. While they have gotten a lot of press, it’s hard to gauge their impact, as they mainly consist of turning off the app. The numbers in protest rallies are small (100 or so in L.A., several score in SF and NYC). And by focusing on one sector, they feed into the bosses’ divide-and-conquer schemes. It is to the credit of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA), representing mainly “traditional” yellow cab drivers, that it took up the appeal for strike on May 8 and called a solidarity protest outside the TLC headquarters. Yet the moment the NYTWA rally started, the members of the Independent Drivers Guild (IDG) left.<sup>2</sup>

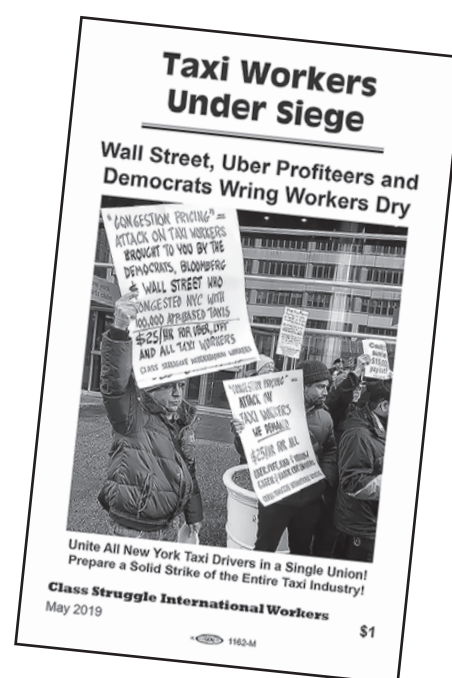
<sup>2</sup> *AM New York* (7 May) published a story the day before the app-based drivers strike in which it reported that, while the IDG claimed to be “standing in solidarity” with the strikers: “The Independent Drivers Guild receives some funding from Uber and is opting out so as not to break its agreement with the company....” The IDG is a “company union,” directly financed by the bosses, set up to prevent the rise of a genuine workers union representing the drivers. Class-conscious app-taxi drivers should have nothing to do with it.

*Order Now!*

**Taxi workers in New York and around the world are being bled dry. In New York City a number of drivers have committed suicide. Class Struggle International Workers has published this 48-page pamphlet analyzing “Uber-Exploitation,” the “Medallion Taxi Racket” and their links to Wall Street and the Democrats. It presents a class-struggle program to unite all sectors of this fragmented industry in an all-out battle against capital.**

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What's needed above all is a strategy to *defeat the taxi bosses* – all of them – by mobilizing the power of the working class. In New York, Class Struggle International Workers/Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas together with the Internationalist Group has put forward a program *to unite yellow and green cab, black car, limousine, van and app-based taxi drivers together with mass transit workers* to bring traffic to a standstill and paralyze this center of international finance capital. In this fight *we are going up against the power of Wall Street* and the capitalist parties – *mainly the Democrats* – in a battle that must be fought *politically*. And because paying a living wage to drivers would bankrupt these high-tech slave drivers, a purely defensive struggle cannot win. That underscores why it is necessary to *break with the Democrats, Republicans and all parties of capital*, and to *forge a class-struggle workers party*.

Only a program for revolutionary struggle internationally can bring down these giant companies on the cutting edge of a worldwide anti-working-class offensive. *The Uber/Lyft “business model” depends on having “suckers” for investors and desperate “slaves” for drivers, sinking ever deeper in poverty*. Sooner or later it will blow up in the faces of the Wall Street sharks and Silicon Valley vultures who are behind it, and the Democratic hucksters who are facilitating this plundering. It can't work if investors wise up, and particularly if workers fight back. So that's what we have to do. The time is now, the question is how. That is the issue this pamphlet seeks to address. ■

## Mexico: AMLO...

*continued from page 20*

Faced with the erosion and fracturing of the old mechanisms of social control upon which the PRI erected its “perfect dictatorship” (as right-wing Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa called it) over the course of more than 70 years, Cárdenas' popular front was an alternate solution and a safety net for Mexican capitalism. First under Cárdenas, and later López Obrador, this front diligently did its duty to deflect the struggles of the exploited and oppressed into the sterile channels of bourgeois politics. Every time that social unrest broke out in the countryside or the cities, the popular front placed itself at the head of struggles in order to neutralize them. Far from being a failure for losing the elections in 1988, 1994, 2000, 2006 and 2012, *the popular front was a smashing success at the task assigned to it by the capitalist rulers of Mexico*, that of implicating the forces of the left in defeating the struggles of the working class.

This time, AMLO was not elected to stop a resurgence of class struggle. The Mexican bourgeoisie decided to turn to his services because of the generalized popular frustration over the havoc wrought by a “war on drugs” dictated by U.S. imperialism that has led to a growing trail of blood over the past two presidential administrations. The toll of this war, now at more than a quarter million violent deaths, has also left the population fed up with the phony “alternation” between the PAN and the PRI. Cynicism about the all-embracing corruption of Mexican politics was also a key factor in crystallizing the vote for AMLO. Nevertheless, neither a change in “national security” policy nor a “war on corruption” will change one bit the roots of the rot and poverty stalking the coun-

try, which are the product of capitalism in a semi-colonial country.

### AMLO Towards a New Corporatism

It's no accident that López Obrador hopes to consolidate his control of the workers movement by strengthening corporatist structures. Carlos Aceves del Olmo, who presides over the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), the country's main corporatist labor federation, has pledged the “total support” of his organization to the AMLO government. During the announcement of a pact between business owners, workers and the government to raise the minimum wage last December 17, the *charro*<sup>1</sup> chief said: “this country is experiencing a revolution that you are making, Mr. President, as the *Jefe Máximo*,” or supreme leader (*Sin Embargo*, 17 December 2018).

But it is impossible to hide the ossification of the CTM. So the government of López Obrador is pursuing the formation of new union structures under its control, like the International Federation of Workers (CIT), headed by MORENA loyalist Napoleón Gómez Urrutia [long-time head of the semi-corporatist miners federation], or PETROMEX, the government-approved “union” that seeks to organize oil workers at PEMEX fed up with the *charro* Carlos Romero Deschamps, who no longer enjoys the full confidence of the new government.

Take, for example, the National “Union” of Education Workers (SNTE). This organization has been instrumental in implementing capitalist attacks on public education, including by assassinating more than 150 of its dissident teacher members. Even though they had promised to dismantle the corporatist apparatuses, PAN presidents Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón had to draw support from these “unions.” Many of the militant teachers of the National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE) in Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Guerrero supported the election of AMLO based on his promise to repeal the “education reform” implemented by the outgoing president Peña Nieto. Now they are seeing that the education policy of the MORENA government is sticking to the course of the PRI and PAN governments that preceded it (see “AMLO abroga la contrarreforma educativa, insiste en el dictado del estado capitalista [AMLO Abrogates the Education Counter-Reform, Insists on Capitalist State Control],” *Revolución Permanente* No. 9, May 2019).

Elba Esther Gordillo (the former “president for life” of the SNTE) was one of the principal allies of the two PAN presidents. She fell into disgrace and was jailed during the PRI government of Enrique Peña Nieto, but now López Obrador requires her services once more. As part of this strategy, pro-AMLO leaders of the dissident CNTE have been given the government assignment

<sup>1</sup> The corporatist labor federations in Mexico are not workers unions but labor cops integrated into the capitalist state apparatus, under a labor law copied from Mussolini's fascist Italy. In the late 1940s, the PRI-government (the state party which governed Mexico for 70+ years) moved to purge leftist union leaders, jailing hundreds of union militants and imposing total state control on what were previously semi-corporatist unions. The prototype of the new government-appointed “union leader” was Jesús Díaz de León, who took over the railroad workers union and who typically attended official functions dressed up in elaborate cowboy (*charro*) regalia. Ever since, the government-controlled labor bodies have been known as *charro* “unions.”

of “returning” to the old SNTE, supposedly in order to “democratize” it. *But as a state apparatus of labor control of the teachers, the SNTE cannot be democratized*. A return of the CNTE to the SNTE will have the sole purpose of once again subjecting the former to corporatist control, from which it has long struggled to free itself, although never completely, ever since 1979.

### National Guard, Militarization and Bonapartism

The strong presidency that AMLO wants to build requires strict control over the armed forces and the police. All over Mexico, the Army, Navy and Federal Police have become part of the landscape as a result of the “war on drugs” that has gone on for more than 12 years. The result of this war has been utter disaster: the former president of Chile, Michelle Bachelet, in her capacity as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said during a recent visit to the country that “Mexico has rates of violent death typical of a country at war: 252,538 since 2006” (*La Jornada*, 10 April). In fact, there have been more violent deaths in Mexico than in Iraq.

Bachelet, who was also the former Chilean defense minister, was in Mexico to give her stamp of approval to the formation of a new military/police formation, the National Guard modeled on infamous repressive forces like the Italian *carabinieri* and Chilean *carabineros*. Initially consisting of whole detachments of the Military Police and Naval Police, this new force (with military discipline and “retired” military commanders) will have wide-ranging functions, from “investigating and combating crime” to “intercepting communications,” and will militarize the borders (see *Proceso*, 14 April).

The rampant militarization of the country is a product of the weakening of the old PRI regime's corporatist mechanisms of social control. It corresponds to the effort during the governments of Calderón and Peña Nieto to establish a typical Latin American “militarized democracy,” Colombia-style. López Obrador's National Guard goes even further, completely legalizing the militarization of policing in Mexico. *This is AMLO's answer to the infamous disappearance of the 43 teachers college students of Ayotzinapa: to found an even more powerful repressive institution!*

The bourgeois opposition has opposed AMLO's National Guard, hypocritically, since it was the governments of the PAN and PRI that launched the war on drugs that has drenched the country in blood. In spite of their grandiloquent protests, in reality they only oppose completely secondary details (as if, for example, civilian as opposed to military commanders would at all change the militarized character of the new force). López Obrador has made it clear that the National Guard is a branch of the armed forces, which time and again he has called “the people in uniform.” Nothing could be further from the truth. The army that AMLO idolizes is the same army that massacred students at Tlatelolco in 1968 and carried out the *dirty war* against leftists and peasant fighters in the 1970s; it is army that massacred the Zapatistas in 1994; the army that repressed the teachers in Oaxaca in 2006, together with the Federal Police (which was first deployed to repress the strike at the National University of 1999-2000).

The National Guard will be another essential component of the bourgeois state, which as defined by Marx and Engels, is

the sum of the special bodies of armed men which together with the prisons and the courts, serve to defend bourgeois private property. The working class and the oppressed must understand this well. Any illusion in the AMLO's repressive forces will soon prove to be suicidal.

### Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!

Quite a few leftists are full of enthusiasm for the new government. These professional class collaborators believe that the victory of MORENA represents some kind of democratic triumph in Mexico. Some reactionary commentators have also fanned a conservative hysteria against the new government, which they call “crypto-socialist.” This label is false to the core: the bourgeois populist government of AMLO is an instrument of the bourgeoisie.

Mexico is a country of belated capitalist development, a semicolony of the United States. Despite having three bourgeois-democratic revolutions in its history, the democratic tasks remain to be completed. The Mexican Revolution that broke out in 1910 was aborted and its demands, like the liberation of the oppressed peasant masses, national independence and the establishment of democratic rights, were betrayed. As the great Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky pointed out in his theoretical and programmatic perspective of *permanent revolution* – and as the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 confirmed – the only way that exists in the epoch of imperialist decay for a backward capitalist country to realize these demands is for the working class to take power, establish a workers and peasants government based on the expropriation of bourgeois property, and extend the socialist revolution on an international scale.

Today the program of Red October is the only one that can liberate the exploited and oppressed masses in this country. The farce of a bourgeois “fourth transformation,” after three democratic revolutions that failed precisely because they did not transcend the bourgeois framework, is a cruel joke. The Mexican proletariat has exceptional social power. Capable of stopping the economy of this country that is so deeply integrated with the economy of the northern empire by NAFTA (now known as the “U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement,” or USMCA), the mobilization of its power will be felt throughout the hemisphere.

Particularly, given the effective connections between the proletariat in Mexico and the U.S., which produces for the same bosses, and moreover given the existence of a veritable human bridge that connects the struggles of workers in the two countries, the fight for socialist revolution in Mexico bears a strategic importance. Not only is Mexico a “weak link” in the chain of imperialism in North America; the conditions of super-exploitation and oppression that prevail in the country make outbreaks of social struggle inevitable. The key question is with what program one should fight in order to win.

The program of international socialist revolution that one hundred years ago guided the workers in Russia to smash their chains and the chains of all the oppressed is necessary to triumph here and now. The dilemma is that the leaderships of the working class betray the struggles of the exploited and lead them to defeat, time after time. What's needed is a party like the Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky, that will serve as a tribune of the



people, fighting against every form of oppression as part of the revolutionary struggle. To forge in Mexico the nucleus of a Bolshevik-Leninist section of a reformed Fourth International is the task to which the Grupo Internacionalista, section of the League for the Fourth International, dedicates its efforts. ■

## Brazil Strike...

*continued from page 4*

responsibility of imposing the anti-worker “reforms” required by the entire bourgeoisie – it prefers that Bolsonaro do the “dirty work.” The PT would criticize it, of course, but without trying to stop it. Then they can return later with “clean hands.”

As part of the preparations for the June 14 general strike, some leftist groups (notably sectors of the PSOL and the MRT [Revolutionary Workers’ Movement] with its Esquerda Diário Internet portal) have responded to the veto of union leaders by brandishing the slogan “*Fora Bolsonaro*” (Bolsonaro Out). The PSOL tendency Esquerda Marxista (Marxist Left) even claims authorship of the slogan. It is quite likely that in the June 14 demonstrations there will be multitudinous cries of “Free Lula” and “Bolsonaro Out.” But what does this mean in reality? A government of General Mourão? Even if it were amplified to say “Bolsonaro-Mourão Out,” it would mean a *new government of the popular front*, or even of the “right.” Even sectors in the Congress, such as Rodrigo Maia’s ultra-rightist DEM, do not agree with PEC 06/2019, because their electoral base consists largely of public employees. What they want is a *different* pension reform, which is also the case of the PT.

The Liga Quarta-Internacionalista warns that the PT popular-front governments did not favor the working class or the urban or rural poor. On the contrary, from Lula’s pension reform to the escalation of racist repression by Dilma against impoverished black people and slum dwellers in the framework of the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics, the PT governments and their bourgeois “allied base” did everything they could to stifle the workers’ struggle. Later, when the workers had become sufficiently demoralized, they ceded the reins of government to the antediluvian right. That is why we insist that ***workers mobilization to defeat the Bolsonaro-Mourão militarist regime must lead to revolutionary workers and peasants government and the overthrow of capitalism***.

LQB and the Class Struggle Committee seek to extend and deepen the June 14 strike. However, even if successful on its own terms, that strike would only be a work stoppage for one day, plus a parade. A genuine general strike, as Friedrich Engels has pointed out, is a political struggle that “will either be victorious immediately ... or end in a colossal failure, or finally *lead directly to the barricades*” (Engels’ letter to Karl Kautsky, 3 November 1893). Therefore, in the midst of the strike we struggle to *cohere organs of dual power*. As we did during the convulsive “hot winter” struggles of June 2013, we call today to turn ***the protests into workers revolt aiming at the struggle for power, to form self-defense committees based on the workers movement, and to spark workers councils and councils in working-class neighborhoods***.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See “Hot Winter in Brazil: Mobilize Workers Power! Organize a General Strike!” *The Internationalist* No. 35, Summer 2013.

The “pension reform” of PEC 06/2019 prepared by economics minister Paulo Guedes is based on the Chilean model imposed in 1981 by the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. Now another militarist government is trying to do the same. In all the countries of Latin America that have adopted this disastrous policy, the result has been a staggering increase in poverty among the elderly, which has repercussions in a decline of consumption and economic stagnation. Only ***international socialist revolution*** can crush the anti-worker “reforms” instigated by the sharks of Wall Street. The fundamental requirement is to ***build a revolutionary Leninist and Trotskyist workers party***. We call on class-conscious workers, those who would carry the struggle against the hunger policies of all capitalist governments through to its conclusion, to join us in this task. ■

## Trump amenaza...

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tención de inmigrantes centroamericanos, cuando encerraba a más de 7,700 jóvenes centroamericanos durante cuatro meses en bases militares ahí y en California y Texas.

A pesar de la suspensión de la “política de separación de familias” que causó indignación y protestas masivas el año pasado, el gobierno aún pone obstáculos y retrasa la devolución de esos niños a los familiares que esperan recibirlos. Pero el abuso de niños por parte del sistema migratorio tampoco es nada nuevo. La American Civil Liberties Union desenmascaró recientemente el trato brutal recibido por niños inmigrantes detenidos bajo el gobierno de Obama, de 2009 a 2014, que incluía golpizas, posiciones estresantes, negación de la atención médica, amenazas de muerte y abuso sexual.

Para más de 50 mil adultos y familias detenidos, las condiciones son aún más sórdidas y amontonadas. A los inmigrantes detenidos se les da poca comida y no se les provee de ningún tratamiento médico mientras las enfermedades de extienden. En El Paso, los detenidos están parados encima de los baños para liberar espacio para otros en las atestadas celdas. Funcionarios del gobierno de Trump han alegado en tribunales que los inmigrantes detenidos no tienen derecho a contar con jabón, cepillos de dientes ni cobijas, toda vez que ninguno de estos materiales aparece en la ley de 1997 que exige que los detenidos sean mantenidos en “condiciones seguras y saludables”.

En México, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, conocido como AMLO, poco después de tomar posesión, estableció una nueva fuerza policíaca, la Guardia Nacional. Según ordenó Trump en el “acuerdo” del 7 de junio, unos 6 mil efectivos de la Guardia Nacional serán desplegados en la frontera sur de México para dificultar a los centroamericanos la llegada a Estados Unidos. AMLO está cumpliendo al pie de la letra con las exigencias del mandatario norteamericano, diciendo que México “se mantendrá en una política de no confrontación” con Trump. Pero Trump, el *bully* imperialista sigue asestando golpes contra México, tal como hizo en su campaña electoral de 2016.

***Estados Unidos es un estado policíaco para los inmigrantes***. Los inmigrantes deben comportarse con la precaución que requiere un régimen autoritario, pues están sujetos a ser arbitrariamente detenidos en sus casas, sus lugares de trabajo, afuera de los tribunales o en las calles, frecuentemente a manos de policías del ICE vestidos de

**ÚLTIMAS NOTICIAS: al cierre de esta edición se ha anunciado un paro de labores por los trabajadores de la tienda en línea Wayfare, basado en la ciudad de Boston, exigiendo que la empresa cancele sus contratos con ICE.**

civil en vehículos policíacos sin distintivos. Mientras Trump azuza la xenofobia (miedo y odio en contra de los extranjeros), los derechos de toda la población se encuentran amenazados por este ejercicio desenfrenado de poder policíaco. Los derechos constitucionales al debido proceso, en contra de arrestos y búsquedas sin motivo, en contra de castigos crueles e inusuales, etc., supuestamente deben aplicarse a todos. Como con la falsa “guerra contra el terrorismo”, la guerra contra los inmigrantes amenaza los derechos de todos.

Aunque el miedo se extiende por doquier, también se le ha desafiado. Cientos de miles protestaron en contra de la separación de familias el año pasado. Estamos lidiando, sin embargo, con un régimen que no tiene empacho alguno en violar derechos: las protestas por sí solas no lo van a detener. ***Lo que es crucial es movilizar el poder de una fuerza que pueda detener la maquinaria deportadora: la clase obrera***. Necesitamos movilizar el poder del movimiento obrero a escala nacional en acciones de masas para inmovilizar el sistema de “remoción de inmigrantes” y, en último término, para paralizar el capitalismo. ***Redadas y arrestos deben ser enfrentados mediante protestas de masas, incluidas las acciones de trabajadores, inmigrantes y estudiantes para bloquear a los policías deportadores***.

EE.UU. se ha convertido en la nación campeona de las deportaciones. Esto, sin embargo, ya antes de que tomara el poder el “cazamigrantes en jefe” Trump. El demócrata Barack Obama se ganó el título de “deportador en jefe” al expulsar una cantidad récord de inmigrantes, más de 8 millones, muchos más de los que Trump ha logrado expulsar. La “bien aceitada maquinaria deportadora” que Obama le entregó a su sucesor va ahora a cambiar de velocidad. Y su fallida “reforma” migratoria de 2013 contenía muchas de las medidas que

intensifican la represión contra los inmigrantes que Trump ha implementado.

La “crisis” migratoria es resultado directo de las depredaciones del capitalismo imperialista. La explosión de detenciones de los inmigrantes comenzó en los años 1980, con una oleada de refugiados que huían de las guerras sucias patrocinadas por EE.UU. en Centroamérica. Se intensificó después de que Bill Clinton impusiera el Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte en 1994 que destruyó buena parte de la agricultura mexicana, empujando a millones de campesinos a emigrar. La ley de Clinton para la Reforma de la Inmigración Ilegal y la Responsabilidad Inmigrante de 1996 más que triplicó el número de detenidos, que pasaron de unos 5 mil, a más de 16 mil al día.

Pero fue Barack Obama quien realmente creó la gigantesca maquinaria de detención que tenemos hoy en día. Expandió el sistema a unos 200 centros por todo el país, además de establecer más de un millar de instalaciones como cárceles de condado en las que los inmigrantes son detenidos. Las prisiones para niños fueron construidas por Obama y expandidas en respuesta al flujo de menores no acompañados que huían de la violencia en Honduras y Guatemala en 2014. El de la detención es ahora un enorme negocio en EE.UU., siendo que la mayor parte de las prisiones empleadas tienen administración privada, y son altamente redituables.

Mientras que liberales, izquierdistas, muchos inmigrantes y jóvenes enfocan su ira en contra de Trump, el hecho descarnado es que los demócratas han hecho más que él para militarizar la frontera y perseguir a los inmigrantes. El Grupo Internacionalista llama a favor de ***movilizaciones de masas de obreros e inmigrantes para parar las deportaciones***. Exigimos que las ***cárceles y campos de concentración del ICE sean cerrados***. Decimos: ***¡Dejen entrar a los refugiados! ¡Plenos derechos de ciudadanía para todos los inmigrantes!*** Sobre todo, para dirigir esta lucha peleamos para romper con demócratas, republicanos y con todos los partidos capitalistas, para construir un ***partido obrero internacionalista*** que derribe el racista dominio del capital mediante la revolución socialista. ■

## The Internationalist



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¡Movilizar el poder obrero e inmigrante para parar en seco la maquinaria demócrata y republicana de deportación!

## Trump amenaza con expulsar a millones de inmigrantes

24 de JUNIO – Una oleada de pánico cundió en Estados Unidos la semana pasada, cuando familias inmigrantes enfrentaron la perspectiva de ser arrestadas en sus casas o en las calles, separando los padres de sus hijos nacidos en EE.UU. y enviándolos a centros de detención para su inmediata deportación. El presidente Donald Trump quería sembrar el terror cuando tuiteó el 17 de junio: “La próxima semana, ICE [la policía migratoria] comenzará el proceso de remoción de millones de extranjeros ilegales que se encuentran ilícitamente en Estados Unidos. Serán removidos tan rápidamente como llegaron”.

Como de costumbre, el pronunciamiento de Trump fue un artilugio político que tenía el propósito de azuzar el frenesí antiinmigrante y racista en el lanzamiento de su campaña para su reelección como presidente, que comenzó con un mitin celebrado un día después en Orlando, Florida. Oficiales de ICE dijeron que esto les tomaba por sorpresa. Aún así, el anuncio que Trump lanzó con bombo y platillo de que habría “millones” de deportaciones desencadenó espanto entre los 15 millones de inmigrantes indocumentados (incluyendo a sus familias) que viven en EE.UU. Muchos tenían miedo de ir al trabajo, o incluso de hacer compras, en tanto que activistas en defensa de los derechos de los inmigrantes se preparaban para resistir las masivas redadas policíacas.

El miedo se intensificó cuando ICE informó que se enfocaría de inmediato “únicamente” en 12,870 individuos que se considera que están “prófugos” por no haberse presentado en comparecencias ante los tribunales. Asimismo, afirmaban que los policías de la *migra* de hecho planeaban arrestar a las personas en sus hogares,



Migrantes reclusos en condiciones infrahumanas en un corral de la Patrulla Fronteriza debajo de un puente en El Paso, Texas, en marzo de este año.

y que todo estaba listo para comenzar en la madrugada del domingo, 23 de junio, en los casos de 2,000 familias en diez ciudades norteamericanas. El sábado, sin embargo, Trump pospuso la operación por dos semanas, de modo que pueda presidir un desfile militar patriótico en Washington el 4 de julio. Pero si los demócratas no acceden a reducir drásticamente los derechos de los inmigrantes y de los refugiados, “¡las deportaciones van a comenzar!” tuiteó.

El encargado de Trump de esta operación es el jefe de ICE, Mark Morgan –el anterior jefe de la policía migratoria, Ronald Vitiello, fue despedido en abril por haber expresado dudas acerca de la “óptica” de una campaña para hacer redadas en hogares inmigrantes, con los padres sacados a rastras mientras sus hijos lloran frente a

res inmigrantes cuyo trabajo es clave en sectores enteros de la economía. Pero esto implica romper lo mismo con el Partido Republicano como con el Demócrata, los dos principales partidos del capital que han puesto en marcha la monstruosa maquinaria de las deportaciones.

El tuit aterrador de Trump apareció días después de su anuncio de un “acuerdo” con México el 7 de junio, que expande la política establecida en enero en virtud de la cual más de 10 mil migrantes que huyen de la guerra y el terror en Centroamérica serán enviados por EE.UU. a esperar en las ciudades fronterizas mexicanas mientras se procesa sus solicitudes de asilo, lo que puede tomar meses, o incluso años. El “acuerdo”, a su vez, fue obtenido inmediatamente después de la amenaza de imponer aranceles del 5 por ciento a las mercancías importadas desde México, amenaza que fue rápidamente retirada después de que importantes fabricantes se quejaron de que estaban moviendo sus instalaciones productivas a México como resultado de la guerra comercial de Trump contra China.

Al mismo tiempo, decenas de miles de migrantes –en su mayoría centroamericanos que huyen de la violencia y la devastación económica causadas por el imperialismo norteamericano– están reclusos en miserables campos de concentración en EE.UU., incluidos miles de niños a los que se mantiene en brutales condiciones en prisiones privadas. Hay escándalo en torno a un centro privado de detención para 2,200 adolescentes (de entre 13 y 17 años) en la base aérea de Homestead en Florida, se prohíbe a los niños abrazarse, e incluso tocarse unos a otros, sólo se les permite estar una hora al día en el exterior y están sometidos a vigilancia constante, incluso cuando van al baño. Cuando civiles llegaron con cajas de pañales y otros productos higiénicos, las autoridades se rehusaron a recibirlos.

Los republicanos y algunos demócratas se rehúsan a llamar a estas instalaciones de detención por su nombre propio, campos de concentración, a los que la Alemania Nazi tornó tristemente célebres. No obstante, eso es exactamente lo que son, y no es la primera vez en la historia del país. Hubo gran indignación cuando el gobierno anunció planes para recluir inmigrantes en Fort Sill, en Oklahoma. Japoneses norteamericanos contaron como durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial ellos fueron reclusos ahí en un campo de concentración norteamericano por órdenes del presidente demócrata Franklin D. Roosevelt. Otro presidente demócrata, Barack Obama, también utilizó Fort Sill en 2014 como un centro de de-

*sigue en la página 23*



En una protesta de julio de 2018, el Grupo Internacionalista llama a cerrar los campos de concentración y a “¡Aplastar la Gestapo de ICE con la revolución obrera! No se puede combatir a Trump con los demócratas, ¡construyamos un partido obrero revolucionario!”



¡Por la acción de obreros e inmigrantes para poner alto a las deportaciones!

vecinos enojados. Su jefa, la secretaria de “seguridad de la patria”, Kristjen Nielson, también renunció en abril cuando Trump prometió “ser más duro” con los inmigrantes. Pero incluso ahora, jefes de la *migra* están recelosos de iniciar un estallido de enojo e irritación que podría rivalizar con la reacción explosiva del verano pasado a la separación de familias por parte de la policía y a la reclusión de inmigrantes adolescentes en jaulas.

Con sus planes de aterrorizar a los inmigrantes, a Trump el tiro podría salirle por la culata. Pero para que eso ocurra, debemos actuar. El Grupo Internacionalista hace un llamado a todos los defensores de los derechos democráticos y de los inmigrantes a movilizarse para **parar en seco las redadas**, inundando las calles para bloquear las vanes sin distintivos y a los escuadrones de captura. Hemos llamado a la **acción obrera para poner alto las deportaciones**. Esto incluye paros laborales sindicales y movilizaciones callejeras junto con millones de trabajado-