

Break with the Bosses' Parties – For a Revolutionary Workers Party

Democrat Biden's Regime: Cold War and Racist Repression

MARCH 23 – The storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6 by a racist mob instigated by Republican president Donald Trump shocked the entire world. It was unprecedented in U.S. history. It destabilized the world's leading imperialist power. Though the mainstream media and Democratic Party politicians screamed coup d'état and insurrection, it wasn't one. The rioters obviously did not have the wherewithal to pull off the toppling of a government or the dissolution of the legislative branch. Nor did Trump have the support in the military to carry

out a "self-coup," like some tinpot dictator such as Alberto Fujimori in Peru (1992) or Ferdinand Marcos in Philippines (1972). Rather, it was an attempt to use a marauding mob to intimidate Congress into not certifying Democrat Joe Biden, the winner of the 2020 election, as president. (And under the extremely undemocratic U.S. system of bourgeois "democracy," Congress does in fact have that power.)

It was a white supremacist lynch mob, with fascists and fascistic paramilitaries in the lead. January 6 recalled the kind of assaults on elected governments that U.S.

imperialism has sponsored in Ukraine (2004 and 2014), in Honduras (2009) and repeatedly against the nationalist Venezuelan regime – just to list a few examples, many under Democratic presidents. Until now the United States itself was supposedly off-limits: there was no U.S. embassy in Washington to pull the strings, as the old joke in Latin America goes. Instead, it was choreographed from the White House. The racist nature of the violent horde was visible in the many Confederate battle flags, the banner of the slavocracy and the KKK. That they were

lynchers was broadcast by the gallows set up on the east side of the Capitol, and confirmed by the messages about hunting in the halls for legislators, and calling to hang Vice President Mike Pence, deemed a traitor for not doing his part in the final act of Trump's campaign to block the results of the election.

The seriousness of the threats is underlined in the evidence being presented in hundreds of court cases that have been brought against rioters, particularly those involving the Oath Keepers
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Smash Fascist Threats With Workers Defense Guards to Defend All the Oppressed

Capitalist "Democracy" Falling Apart – Socialist Revolution the Only Solution

JANUARY 7 – Yesterday's mob rampage at the U.S. Capitol was the culmination of Donald Trump's campaign of frenzied claims that the November 2020 presidential election was "stolen." The assault on Congress was instigated by Trump and his top lieutenants, led by outright fascists, spearheaded by white supremacists brandishing the Confederate battle flag of the slaveocracy, and it was facilitated by the police. Similar riots targeting government centers are nothing new in East Europe, where they have typically been organized by the U.S. (Georgia 2003, Ukraine 2014), and Yankee imperialism has unleashed them innumerable times in Latin America. But they are seen as novel in the United States since the post-Civil War period's racist rampages against Reconstruction. After all, Republicans and Democrats alike claim this is "the world's greatest democracy," a "shining city on a hill" as union-busting racist and warmonger

Ronald Reagan called the U.S. That was hardly the scene on Capitol Hill on January 6. What the world witnessed was a chilling acceleration, the latest bizarre and dangerous episode, in the spectacular unraveling of "democratic" bourgeois rule in the strongest imperialist power. What it dramatically underscores is that this capitalist society is falling apart. The bankruptcy of this decaying system of exploitation, imperialism and racist oppression highlights the

Trump-Instigated, Fascist-Led, Police-Aided Racist Mob Assault on Congress



Fascist-led racist mob of Trump supporters storms U.S. Capitol on January 6.

urgent need to fight for socialist revolution.

In the media and by numerous politicians the Capitol attack is described as an "insurrection," "coup d'état" or failed "coup attempt." Yet this grotesque rampage by a would-be lynch mob was not an actual attempt to seize power (for which they obviously didn't have the forces), nor was it the military trying to disperse and shut down the U.S.' highest legislative body. English doesn't have very descrip-

tive terms for such actions. In Spanish it would be an *amotinamiento*, in French a *coup de main*. It was a mob assault aimed at intimidating Congress into not confirming Democratic president-elect Joe Biden, and failing that, to galvanize hard-core Trumpers into an authoritarian movement for future action. It was not a last paroxysm of Trumpism, but a harbinger of dangerous times to come. The several hundred fascists who turned out, together with tens

of thousands of enraged racists and reactionaries, are plenty dangerous, but the most powerful and central dangers come from the organs of state power of the capitalist ruling class – police, military, National Guard – which brutally repress protests for black rights and protect the fascist terrorists. Democrat Joe Biden is their new boss, and he backs them to the hilt.

That the assault was directly instigated by Trump is obvious. It's also recognized by key sectors of the bourgeois establishment in the U.S., which is genuinely shaken up by yesterday's events. The white supremacist in the White House, defeated in the November elections, set the date for the riot, calling on his supporters to come to Washington for a "wild" time. Some 30,000 did. At a morning rally Trump whipped them up, railing against "RINOs" (Republicans in Name Only) and urging the crowd to "walk down to Congress" in order to "fight." His lawyer, the ubergrifter Rudy Giuliani who instigated the 1992 police riot against New York City's black Democratic mayor David Dinkins, called for "trial by combat." Donald Jr. warned Democrats and Republicans who didn't support the plot to annul the votes of tens of millions of voters, "We're coming for you." This led even right-wing Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming to declare:

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Heroes for Exposing the Crimes of Imperialism

Free Julian Assange – No Extradition, U.S. Hands Off Edward Snowden!

Wikileaks Has Performed a Public Service for All Humanity

On February 12, it was announced that the U.S. Department of Justice had filed a brief in support of a prior appeal against the January 4 decision of a British judge barring the extradition of Wikileaks leader Julian Assange. This confirms that the Democratic administration of Joe Biden is continuing to pursue the prosecution of Assange begun by Republican Donald Trump. Under the draconian provisions of the

Espionage Act, the founder of the internet whistleblower site faces charges which could total 175 years in prison for exposing hideous war crimes by U.S. imperialism and the “dirty tricks” of its spy agencies. By going after Assange with a vengeance, under both Republicans and Democrats, the United States government is seeking to put a stop to exposés of its secrets.

The U.S.’ appeal of the British judge’s ruling was a parting blow of the Trump

regime on its last day in office. In early February, a “blue ribbon” coalition of civil liberties and rights groups appealed to Biden’s acting attorney general to drop the extradition request and dismiss the original indictment of Assange. Their letter emphasized that, “The indictment of Mr. Assange threatens press freedom because much of the conduct described in the indictment is conduct that journalists engage in routinely – and that they must engage in in order to do the work

the public needs them to do.” *New York Times* and London *Guardian* noted that they use the same methods as Assange in garnering information from insiders about government cover-ups. They also published information ferreted out by Wikileaks.

The mainstream bourgeois media does on occasion blow the whistle on some egregious misdeeds of some governments. The Pentagon Papers, *continued on page 15*

Don’t Let Them Silence the “Voice of the Voiceless”

No Execution by COVID – Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Now!

As we go to press, it is reported that while hospitalized on March 3, diagnosed with COVID-19 and congestive heart failure, Mumia was inhumanely shackled by his arms and legs to the hospital bed, exacerbating open bloody wounds due to his unrelenting skin ailment. This is sheer medical torture, as was also the case with Jacob Blake last August in Kenosha, Wisconsin, when he was hospitalized after being shot in the back seven times by police officers. The shackling recalls the treatment of other Black Panthers, including Huey Newton and Assata Shakur, and the chaining of black slaves. Stop the torture, free Mumia Abu-Jamal!

Mumia Abu-Jamal, a former Black Panther and the foremost class war prisoner in the United States, has been imprisoned for the last 39 years in the dungeons of the Pennsylvania penitentiary system, half that time on death row, an innocent black man framed by the police. On February 27, Mumia was hospitalized and diagnosed with COVID-19 and congestive heart failure. Despite having chest pains and difficulty breathing, four prior tests in the prison infirmary returned false negatives for COVID. It was only when he was moved to an outside hospital that an accurate diagnosis was

made, following an outpouring of demands that he receive appropriate medical treatment. He is now back in the prison infirmary, in isolation, his health in a precarious state.

At age 67, Mumia’s life is further endangered because his immune system has been compromised by years of being denied treatment for Hepatitis-C, until in 2015 he collapsed in diabetic shock. He was only able to get appropriate treatment by filing a court suit on behalf of all prisoners suffering from this debilitating and potentially lethal disease. Now, with two life-threatening conditions in the midst of a deadly pandemic that has killed over half a million people in the U.S. alone, Mumia’s supporters are demanding of Pennsylvania governor Tom Wolf that Jamal be released on medical grounds along with all other prisoners over the age of 50, all who have contracted the coronavirus, or are at heightened risk of death by COVID-19.

Now the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), the country’s largest union, has reiterated its call for the immediate release of Mumia, “framed by the corrupt racist justice system in the U.S.” His “only ‘crime’,” wrote NUMSA, “is exposing the racist, capital-

ist justice system in the U.S. which for decades defended and supported the Apartheid government.” Mumia’s life is in danger. Through criminal medical neglect, his jailers could carry out the death sentence that they have been unable to accomplish over four decades, despite the racist judicial system that rigged his trial and relentlessly opposed his legal appeals, as the supposedly “progressive” Philadelphia district attorney, Larry Krasner, has now done as well.

The Internationalist Group has from our inception fought for workers action to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, as Brazilian teachers and West Coast U.S. dock workers did in 1999. We demand that Mumia be immediately and unconditionally freed *now*, and urgently appeal to others to do so. He has been the courageous “voice of the voiceless” who has tirelessly denounced injustice around the globe. Don’t let them silence Mumia’s voice! We print below the message he read from behind bars at SCI Mahanoy to a February 22 online panel on “Julian Assange Appeal and the First Amendment.”

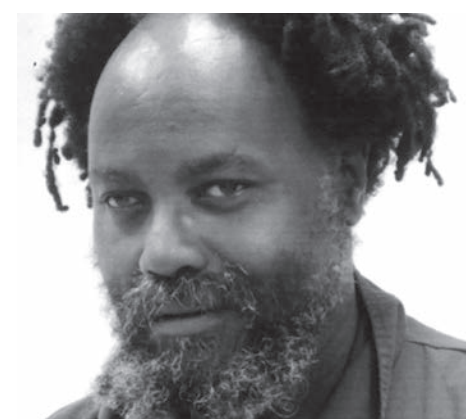
Julian Assange’s Gift

By Mumia Abu-Jamal

Julian Assange, one of the founders of the Internet transparency outfit Wikileaks, is widely regarded by the corporate press as an enemy. Why? I believe the answer can be gleaned by history of journalistic breakthroughs that came, not from the established press, but through alternative and underground presses.

At the height of the Black Liberation Struggles of the 1960s, Liberation News Service produced film interviews with people like Huey P. Newton, one of the co-founders of the Black Panther Party. It was a powerful breakthrough.

During the so-called War on Drugs, a little-known journalist named Gary Webb from



Mumia Abu-Jamal

a tiny West Coast newspaper the *San Jose Mercury News* broke the story of CIA drug-running to black gangsters in Cali. Webb won a Pulitzer and then came the counter attack. The big news guns, the big papers in New York, Washington and L.A., attacked his reporting. *Mercury* cut him loose, and thereafter news of an alleged suicide came. What does this tell us about new news sources against the grain of the establishment?

Now, think back to the Iraq war: remember “weapons of mass destruction”? How about Dick Cheney’s predictions that “they’ll greet us as liberators”? Julian’s Wikileaks broke through the state’s lies like a battering ram. And then Wikileaks released a video of a 2007 shoot-up of Iraqi civilians by U.S. troops in an AH Apache helicopter gunship, the accompanying audio of laughter and guffaws as they shoot... *[Mumia interrupted by prison authorities]*

He told the truth that only Wikileaks could tell. In this wise, Assange and his pals at Wikileaks showed the real face of war, they showed the face of the U.S. Empire. And he’s been treated like an enemy ever since. He broke through. And the fiends of corporate media, like the state itself will never forgive him.

–From *Imprisoned Nation*, this is Mumia Abu Jamal.

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Now Is the Hour – Organize the Unorganized with Workers Power!

Amazon Union Drive in

Alabama Electrifies Labor

On-the-Spot Report

BESSEMER/NEW YORK – On March 30, just one year after the opening of the massive BHM1 Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama, votes will begin to be tallied in an election by 5,805 workers on whether to be represented by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU). The union organizing drive in Bessemer is being closely watched by the media, business, labor and politicians, from city councils right on up to the White House. It is an international event, pitting workers making \$15 an hour against the second-largest company in the world. And it is of intense interest for Amazon workers everywhere, and those fighting for class-struggle workers action amid the deadly pandemic and coronavirus depression ravaging the capitalist world.

The stakes are high, first of all for the workers in the warehouse, whose shot at moving beyond poverty pay with no rights depends on the union winning. A victory for the RWDSU would be the first successful unionization election in the United States against the Amazon distribution and e-commerce monopoly, with over 800,000 employees in the U.S. and 1.3 million worldwide. It would be a victory against the viciously anti-union company headed by Jeff Bezos, off and on the world's richest man, a robber baron in the tradition of Vanderbilt, Rockefeller and Gould. It would provide a beacon for desperately needed union organizing campaigns at Amazon, its Whole Foods subsidiary, Walmart, and for workers throughout the U.S. and beyond.

At BHM1, which opened just as the COVID-19 pandemic hit last March, the Bessemer warehouse workers are about 85% black and about 50% women. Bessemer is a poor, deindustrialized, majority black city. It also has a history of union organization. Within a very few months, the grinding conditions of Amazon employment led workers to approach the RWDSU, which has a regional office in Birmingham, 20 miles northeast of Bessemer. The RWDSU already represents thousands of workers at poultry and other food production plants in Alabama, Tennessee and Georgia, and thus had a network of organizers ready to assist the Amazon workers.

While Alabama is an anti-union “right-to-work” state as elsewhere in the South, it has a history of militant class struggle in campaigns that organized sharecroppers, textile workers, coal miners, and steel workers. Bessemer itself was founded as a steel company town, but by the late 1930s, the U.S. Steel plant was unionized by the leftist-led Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers. Organizing efforts in the South have always had to contend with the racist oppression of black people, the bosses’ biggest



RWDSU organizers leaflet outside Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama.

weapon when it comes to dividing workers and busting unions. Alabama markets itself to business investors as an anti-labor, low-wage state, but it still has the highest percentage of unionized workers of all the states of the former Confederacy.

Amazon Relentlessly Monitors Time Off Task

In February, *The Internationalist* sent reporters to Alabama to cover and support the unionization campaign. Workers hired in Bessemer told us that they soon realized that in the hyper-automated Amazon warehouses, where the robots are treated better than the human workers, they needed a voice. Workers complain that they have to walk more than five minutes from their workstations to get to a bathroom, and if they have to wait to use it, they can end up facing discipline for exceeding the maximum amount of “time off task” (TOT) allowed per day. TOT means time of “inactivity” when scans are not being recorded (Amazon uses technology to constantly monitor worker activity, in order to enforce a breakneck production pace).

On the eve of World War I, Henry Ford launched the production line to mass produce automobiles, with workers doing repetitive action to achieve maximum efficiency in a non-stop flow. (Ford was later a sympathizer of Nazi Germany, received an award created by Hitler and used slave labor in his German factories.) *Amazon warehouses today are Fordism on steroids.*

Workers report that if they have any problems, the company is unresponsive and unaccountable. Managers refer workers to Human Resources, and HR tells them to go back to their supervisor. Instead of sick days, if you miss a day of work you’re considered “on leave,” and leaves are handled by an outsourced company which communicates poorly with the onsite management. When Amazon notifies a worker that they have possibly been exposed to a coworker

who tested positive for COVID, they send the worker home and tell them to get tested, but they won’t pay them for workdays missed while waiting to get test results.

There are a multitude of issues that could result in discipline or firing, from not meeting the production “metrics,” to “poor time management” to dress code violations, and these are used as a pretext for getting rid of union activists. Without a union contract and representation, the workers are at the mercy of the bosses. One worker summed up why she came to support the union: “Amazon is so automated that I think it’s a detriment to human beings. So I started to realize quickly after a month or two months that this union thing was probably the way to go, regardless of how I felt about it before.”

RWDSU organizers told us that after workers approached them and told them of the conditions and sentiments in the warehouse, the union realized that the facility was a “hot shop” that could be organized rather sooner than later. A major factor was the massive upsurge of anger and protest that erupted across the country after the racist murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and others. During the long hot summer of protest last year, many workers hired in the plant saw the need to stand up for themselves as workers, just as protesters stood up against racist cop terror. Young anti-racist activists, both black and white, were part of newly hired workforce of the warehouse.

The Organizing Drive Takes Off

After a period of securing a base of supporters in the warehouse, on October 20 the RWDSU launched an intensive campaign to obtain some 2,000 authorization cards to qualify for a vote according to the rules of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), an agency of the capitalist government whose function is to manage and suppress class struggle. The RWDSU set up a union tent next to a gas station

near the facility, put up signs and banners along the roadways, and stationed organizers at every entrance to the warehouse property for every shift, starting at 4:30 a.m. and going around the clock, where they handed out literature and authorization cards.

The Amazon bosses were taken by surprise, but soon realized the union campaign had traction, and in turn they launched an intense daily anti-union propaganda barrage at the workers. Spending millions of dollars, Amazon hired at least ten anti-union consultants, paid \$3,200 a day each plus expenses, to hold “captive audience” sessions with the workers, spreading lies and misinformation against the RWDSU and unions in general. These meetings “pissed off” the workers, but continued until the union representation voting began on February 8.

Anti-union messages were spread via teleprompters in the warehouse, daily text messages to employees’ phones, even stickers in the bathroom stalls. Speaking of management’s anti-union campaign, a worker told us, “Everyone there wants you to drink the Amazon Kool-Aid.” The company set up a slick lying anti-union website, “#DoIt-WithoutDues.” It forced contract cleaners in the warehouse, many of them former prison inmates desperate for work, to wear “Vote No” pins. It handed out T-shirts and anti-RWDSU rearview mirror hang tags. And Amazon hires off-duty Bessemer police, who sit in marked police cars with lights always flashing, to keep union activists – and reporters – off the property.

Amazon brought in supervisors from its facilities around the country to hound the workers *as they work*. As one worker told us:

“There is a whole gang of them for each shift. They will come to your station and say we’re here to talk to you about the union, do you have any questions? When you are already confused and scared, this person comes up to you and starts spewing. They sent them all down here to talk to us when you’re working. They are incredibly shrill and annoying. I have never seen any of them do any task that did not involve yammering in somebody’s ear.”

To account for the fact that harassing workers while they work can’t help production (and is a safety hazard), Amazon relaxed its production quotas for workers subjected to these verbal assaults. The bosses are hellbent on stopping the union in Bessemer, so as not to have an example set for other workers.

To obstruct the union organizers, Amazon even induced Jefferson County authorities to alter the traffic lights at the main entrance to the warehouse, so that for any car leaving the property, the light changes to green in about three seconds. This was done to prevent organizers from having time to talk to workers waiting at

Bob Miller for the New York Times

the light. At this intersection, alongside the RWDSU, we distributed a leaflet with our article “Bust Bezos, the Modern-Day Robber Baron—Unionize Amazon and Whole Foods!” (*The Internationalist* No. 55, Winter 2019) to several shifts.

In a swift campaign of just about five weeks, the RWDSU, assisted by the activists in the warehouse, achieved success such that the union filed for an election with the NLRB on November 20. Not knowing exactly how many workers worked in the plant, the union initially presented 700 cards and said it would represent 1,500 workers. Amazon told the NLRB that the union was way short, in fact there were 5,800 workers there. The union then replied, “give us 45 minutes,” and scanned and sent all the cards that were needed. The election was now authorized, and the campaign which had flown under the media radar was now announced to the public.

Due to the COVID pandemic, the NLRB ruled that the election was to be done by mail. Amazon wanted in-person voting, the better to intimidate workers – it even offered to *buy a hotel* to provide a venue for in-person voting. The NLRB rejected this proposal. Amazon subsequently had the U.S. Postal Service install a mailbox at the entrance to the warehouse, texting workers and sending them mailers telling them to vote “no” and drop the ballot in that mailbox.

Class-Struggle Unionism vs. Appeals to Democrats

On February 6, on the eve of the mail-in ballot period, the RWDSU held a rally in cold rain in a field near the warehouse. This was a demonstration of labor solidarity, with representatives of the Teamsters, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the Communication Workers of America, some coming from Atlanta and New Orleans. Labor solidarity is the key to organizing success. The industrial unions were built by “reds” in the 1930s and ’40s – like the Communist-led Mine-Mill union at U.S. Steel – through hard, often bloody class struggle against the capitalist governments, its police and security guards (see box, “Fight Against Racist Terror, Key to Organizing the South”).

On February 28, President Biden posted a video on the POTUS Twitter page expressing solidarity with the union organizing drive at Amazon (without directly naming the company). Union leaders had been urging this for weeks, and now they are highlighting it. This recalls how in 1935, after Franklin D. Roosevelt pushed through the Wagner Act, Mine Workers leader John L. Lewis declared, “The President Wants You to Join a Union.” But while FDR’s law legalized unions, it subjected them to elaborate government control through the NLRB. Democrats may issue statements in support of workers seeking to unionize, but when it comes time for a hard strike – which is what it will take to win anything from Amazon – these phony “friends of labor” have always demanded that the union bureaucrats toe the line and suppress workers’ militancy.

Stuart Appelbaum, the president of the national RWDSU, also sits on the executive committee of the Democratic National Committee, the leadership body of that party of imperialist war, racist repression and capitalist exploitation. This underlines how the labor bureaucracy chains the unions to the bosses’ parties. But the road to successfully organizing Amazon and other union-busting exploiters will not be a policy of abiding by the bosses’ rigged labor laws. An article in

Fight Against Racist Terror Key to Organizing the South

Bessemer’s history of labor organizing goes back a century to the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, formerly the syndicalist-led Western Federation of Miners. A retrospective on Mine Mill in Alabama on National Public Radio (5 December 2018) starts with how in 1918 the miners working Red Mountain (so called because of the iron ore found there) south of Birmingham called in the radical union to unionize the former Tennessee Coal and Iron plant which had been taken over by United States Steel. When a pair of Mine Mill organizers showed up that year – one black, one white – the company formed a vigilante group which kidnapped and beat them up, tarring and feathering and threatening to lynch the black unionist. That U.S. Steel-organized goon squad became the Jefferson County Ku Klux Klan.

By the 1930s, Mine Mill was back. 80% of the miners were black, and Mine Mill had both black and white workers and union officials. In rigidly segregated Jim Crow Alabama, this was a real threat to the racist social order, and the union was viciously red-baited. The union had to meet in the woods, and during strikes in 1934 and 1936, Red Mountain became a battlefield. Eventually Mine Mill was recognized as the official union and won higher pay and better working conditions. U.S. Steel struck back by seeking to supplant black workers with white workers, and by the late 1940s the union was more than half white. This was in the middle of the post-World War II “red purge” in the unions. The 1947 Taft-Hartley Act prohibited Communists from being union officials, and CP-led Mine Mill – the union featured in the classic 1954 film *Salt of the Earth*¹ – was

¹ The film, about of the 1951 union organizing strike of Latino zinc miners in New Mexico, was directed by Herbert Biberman with screenplay by Michael Wilson, both blacklisted by Hollywood as communists. See “Learning from *Salt of the Earth*,” *Revolution* No. 13 (November 2016).

Bloomberg Businessweek (10 March) noted:

“Amazon has fought hard to keep unions out of its U.S. operations and will have a menu of options if the vote doesn’t go its way, such as contesting the result, dragging out talks with the union, or closing the 855,000-square-foot warehouse entirely, a prospect already on the minds of some Bessemer workers and politicians.”

Note that at Amazon’s DCH1 warehouse in Chicago, one of the first sites of pro-union agitation last year by Amazonians United, the company announced in December it was closing the unit, and gave workers the “option” of working ten-hour “megacycle” shifts that begin after midnight and go to around noon, or find a new job, effectively excluding workers with children to care for.

One way that union leaders express their submission to capitalist laws is how they answered Amazon’s union-busting “do it without dues” appeal, by hiding behind Alabama’s anti-labor “right-to-work” law! The RWDSU’s *BAmazon Union Newspaper* (February 2021) had a front-page box declaring “Fiction: You



Black and white coal miners in Birmingham in 1937 when the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers established itself. An integrated union in the Jim Crow South, Mine Mill was always under attack by bosses seeking to stoke racism.

kicked out of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

Then in 1949 the United Steelworkers (USWA), led by anti-Communist bureaucrats tied to the Democratic Party, challenged Mine Mill in Birmingham-Bessemer in an NLRB-ordered union recognition election. “The night before the vote, about 100 Klansmen rode by the Mine Mill office, waving torches, sounding horns,” NPR recounted. The next day the USWA won the vote. So here you had Democrat-led red-baiting labor bureaucrats, using anti-communist laws and a government agency to witch-hunt a left-led union, and allying with the KKK, which got its start in Birmingham as company-organized vigilantes. And today, Amazon once again is using labor spies from the Pinkerton agency, which got its start in union-busting in the steel industry.

Conclusion: *A class-struggle fight to organize labor, breaking from the class*

collaboration of the pro-Democratic Party bureaucracy, is inseparable from the fight against racist terror.

But Mine Mill didn’t go away. Horace Huntley, a black historian whose father and grandfather were in Mine Mill, reported how in writing his PhD thesis – the basis for his book *Black Workers’ Struggle for Equality in Birmingham* (University of Illinois Press, 2007) – he interviewed older miners. One of them told him, “If not for Mine Mill, Martin Luther King could not have come to Birmingham.” In fact, the integrated union laid the foundation for the civil rights movement, Huntley said. The stepfather of Fred Shuttlesworth, who led the 1963 Birmingham campaign, was Mine Mill, and “the mining district, the Mine Mill area, for decades before the civil rights movement, it had already been abuzz with ideas about social justice.” ■

will have to pay union dues. Fact: The State of Alabama *never* requires you to pay union dues in a union shop.” This attempt to conciliate company-instigated backward consciousness will ultimately boomerang against the union.

The RWDSU reports that as news of the Bessemer union drive has spread, more than 1,000 Amazon workers from around the country have already contacted the union, seeking information about unionizing their workplace. And in Italy on March 22, 8,500 unionized Amazon workers carried out a national one-day strike against Amazon demanding reduced workloads and working hours. In Europe, unions have carried out strikes and won representation of many Amazon workers. But even there, the giant company has run roughshod over union complaints about the lack of COVID protection in its facilities.

In Iowa, where the Teamsters are organizing drivers and warehouse workers, a union leader told the *Des Moines Register* (26 February): “Amazon has proven, time and again, that they have no respect for the workers’ right to organize under the (Na-

tional Labor Relations Board) and the election process.” Instead, the Teamsters would rely on strikes to demand higher pay and less stringent rules, “particularly regarding how fast warehouse employees and drivers have to work.” The organizing drives that built the Teamsters into a powerhouse of labor were waged with class-struggle methods pioneered by the Trotskyist organizers of the Minneapolis Teamster strike of 1934, independent of and against the capitalist government and politicians.

Democrats, No Friends of Workers – For a Class-Struggle Workers Party

In the past year, while most of the U.S. economy cratered, Amazon’s revenue was up 38% (to \$386 billion), its profits soared by 50% (to \$20 billion), the company went on a hiring spree, increasing its number of employees by more than 60% (going from 800,000 to 1.3 million worldwide in one year) and Jeff Bezos’ net worth grew by \$75 billion (to \$188 billion). As millions of people stuck at home because of the



NYC demo in solidarity with Bessemer union organizing drive, March 4.

coronavirus pandemic relied increasingly on delivery services, Bezos and Amazon are riding high, raking in the dough. Amazon workers, not so much: aside from a couple months of \$2/hour hazard pay in the spring, employee wages have not gone up at all. Yet these are front-line, essential workers who have been hard-hit by the deadly plague. Not that Amazon cares.

On October 1, Amazon reported that 20,000 of its employees had fallen ill with COVID-19. This may seem like a staggering figure, but it almost certainly is far short of the actual numbers. After complaints about inadequate sanitary procedures and failure to notify employees of cases, the attorneys general of New York and California requested detailed reports on cases from Amazon. The company has yet to turn over the information. In any case, reports from workers call Amazon's figure into question. In an open letter last July, Inland Empire Amazonians United at ONT9 in Redlands, California said they had received "at least 23 different notifications on our AtoZ page regarding positive cases in the warehouse," while workers at a large East Coast facility continue to receive AtoZ notifications of new COVID cases several times a week.

Faced with Amazon's stonewalling, the California and New York attorneys general have sued it over failure to comply with subpoenas and to maintain safe workplaces. The New York brief notes that "Amazon received written notification of at least 250 employees at the JFK8 facility who had positive COVID-19 tests or diagnoses," that in more than 80 of those cases the company failed to close any portion of the warehouse even after being notified, and even closures of workstations of diagnosed workers were perfunctory, often for only 90 minutes. Yet even should these suits succeed, the result would be no more than a slap on the hand for the giant company. In California, Amazon was fined only \$935 each for two facilities (Hawthorne and Eastvale) where workers complained of unsafe conditions after a manager died at Hawthorne.

On top of its willful neglect of COVID safety, Amazon is notorious for its high injury rate: 14,000 serious injuries in 2019, or 7.7 per 100 workers, almost double the warehouse/storage industry rate nationally and increasing every year. The Internationalist Group has called for unionization at Amazon for several years, and in particular for the formation of worker safety committees empowered to close dangerous workplaces. Last May 1, we joined with workers protesting at DLA8 in Hawthorne, with signs calling

to "Unionize Amazon with Class Struggle" and "For Workers Health and Safety Committees." And at JFK8 in Staten Island, New York, IG signs declared, "Amazon Workers: Shut It Down, Clean It Up, Unionize!" and "Trump & Democrats, Enemies of Workers – For a Class-Struggle Workers Party."

This is in sharp contrast to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), "socialists" firmly entrenched in the Democratic Party. The Birmingham, Alabama, DSA has put up banners and promoted the union cause in Bessemer, while pushing for Biden to support the organizing drive. Now the DSA is calling on Biden to "use his bully pulpit" to support the Democrats' "Protecting the Right to Organize" (PRO) Act, which just passed the House of Representatives. Marxists support any measure lifting restrictions on the right to organize, but the DSA program of pressuring the capitalist Democrats is counterposed to the class struggle that will be needed to build a fighting labor movement. Similarly, the reformist Workers World Party (WWP) has initiated national protests in support of the Bessemer union campaign, on February 20 and March 20, while lauding the union bureaucrats' appeal to Biden and other Democrats for support.

As we wrote in our article two years ago: "What's needed is to break the chains that bind wage slaves to the modern slave masters, to **build a workers party to fight for a workers government!** Solidarity – one section of workers defending another and recognizing that our interests are the same – isn't just a nice idea: it's the only possible way in which workers at Amazon, or anywhere else, can fight back effectively and win. **Organize Amazon and Whole Foods workers!**" ■

Biden's Regime...

continued from page 1

and III Percenter fascistic militias and the fascist Proud Boys. The Democrats, now in control of both houses of Congress, sought to split Republican "moderates" from the hard-core Trump supporters with the impeachment of Trump for "incitement of insurrection." To no avail, as the Republicans closed ranks behind Trump and the myth of an election "stolen" by the "deep state." This will now be the legend that right-wing reaction rallies around, as those nostalgic for the slave South embraced the mythology of the "Lost Cause" of the Confederacy – while black people were subjugated by Jim Crow segregation, KKK night riders and lynching. The stage is set for parliamentary warfare in Congress, and violent racist attacks by bitter-end Trumpers.

The response by Biden to the seismic shock of the assault on Congress was to call for national "unity," the theme of his January 20 inaugural address. But even as he spoke over and over of "uniting," the Democratic president said he knew it could "sound like a foolish fantasy." Just about everyone in bourgeois politics and the media agreed that it was exactly that – an impossibility in the deeply polarized U.S. Almost all Republican members of Congress refused to certify the Biden presidency and 31% of the electorate (which translates into almost 50 million people) still says the election, which the Democrat won by a margin of 7 million votes, was fraudulent. This sharp division was soon shown as the new bourgeois administration's \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan passed the House and the Senate with not a single Republican voting in favor. Yet three-quarters of voters support the plan (including 60% of Republicans).

Biden delivered his address in a capital city turned into an armed camp, occupied by 25,000 National Guard troops, specially vetted to weed out "extremists," with government buildings sealed off with ten-foot-high fences, before a National Mall with no people but instead hundreds of thousands of small U.S. flags, to symbolize the by now more than half a million people in the United States who have died of COVID-19 over the last year. As the presidential calls for unity, civility, coming together, bipartisanship and ending "this uncivil war" fall flat, the Democratic administration is preparing to beef up the repressive apparatus of police and military forces. In particular, Biden has announced his intent to pass a "domestic terrorism law." While he cited "white supremacy" in his speech, all past history shows that any such laws will be primarily used against anti-racist and leftist protesters.

"The Revenge of the Deep State"

As Trump's intent to hang onto the presidency no matter what the outcome of the popular vote became clear, the Democrats and some "moderate" Republicans launched various initiatives to thwart this. As we wrote in our last issue, while "Trump Looks to Cops and Fascists, Democrats Appeal to Pentagon Brass" (see "Repression Elections 2020," *The Internationalist* No. 61, September-October 2020). A linchpin was the Transition Integrity Project (TIP), a "bipartisan collection of 100 current and former senior government officials," politicians and other "experts," who carried out war games examining various election outcomes. As we noted, all the scenarios except a Biden landslide hinged on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The TIP was begun by Rosa Brooks, a law professor at Georgetown University and a former top Pentagon official in the Clinton administration. Brooks is the daughter of social-democratic luminary Barbara Ehrenreich, married to a Special Forces lieutenant colonel, and member of Deep State Radio.

Having crushed Bernie Sanders in the primaries, Biden has staffed his administration almost exclusively with hardline Clintonites and former officials of the Democratic administration of Barack Obama. You could call it "the revenge of the Deep State." The Trumpsters talk about the "deep state" as a conspiracy theory, a secret cabal centered on security agencies that pulls the strings behind the backs of the electorate. This is overblown, but there is a certain reality there. Over the decades, the United States has seen a huge

expansion of *institutional bonapartism*,¹ corresponding to the requirements of U.S. imperialist world domination. Key sections of the government operate fairly autonomously of any semblance of legislative control: think CIA, NSA, DIA, DHS.² Liberals such as the late Gore Vidal talk of a "national security state." But the military and police, the special bodies of armed men, are in fact the core of the *capitalist state*.

That imperialist apparatus is staffed by cadres, or professional operatives, a kind of capitalist *nomenklatura* which continues to operate from one administration to the next, no matter which party is formally in office.³ In the U.S., the continuity of policy is maintained via various think tanks, foundations, consulting companies and the like. Republicans staff their administrations with personnel from the conservative Heritage Foundation, the libertarian Cato Institute, etc. The Democrats draw theirs from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, the Center for a New American Security, and the like.

This administration's top State Department and Pentagon personnel have been drawn from a private equity company, Pine Island Capital Partners, and a consultancy, WestExec, set up in 2017 by former Obama administration Pentagon officials. The new Defense Department chief, General Lloyd Austin III, was the former head of the Central Command under Obama, responsible for all U.S. forces in the Middle East, for arming Islamist "rebels" against the Syrian government and for the bombing war against the Islamic State. So much for civilian control of the military! Austin was a board member of defense contractor Raytheon, a mainstay of the "military-industrial complex," and a Pine Island partner. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was Vice President Biden's national security advisor, responsible for supplying the Syrian Islamist mercenaries, in on the assassination of Osama Bin Laden, and subsequently the founder of WestExec and a partner in Pine Island (headed by the former CEO of Merrill Lynch).

So the heads of Democrat Biden's diplomatic and military team are certified deep-staters, Wall Street profiteers, mass murderers ... and Cold Warriors. Blinken and Austin are currently carrying out "An About-Face on China Policy by Biden's Team" (*New York Times*, 18 March), which "seems to adopt much of the Trump administration's conviction that the world's two biggest powers are veering dangerously toward confrontation" and "more directly repudiates the prevailing view of the last quarter century that deep economic interdependence could be counted on to temper fundamental conflicts" with Beijing. The

¹ Basing himself on the example of Louis Napoléon-Bonaparte, who seized power in France in 1852 and proclaimed himself emperor, Karl Marx used the term *bonapartism* to signify the sidelining of bourgeois-democratic governing norms by the military/police apparatus. See the Internationalist Group Class Readings, *Marxism vs. Bonapartism* (2004).

² Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, Department of Homeland Security.

³ Leon Trotsky analyzed the nature of the layer that usurped power in the Soviet Union under Stalin, and called for a proletarian political revolution to oust the parasitic bureaucracy of the degenerated workers state. The Stalinists didn't refer to their apparatus as a bureaucracy, of course, but instead referred to the *nomenklatura*, a list of names of cadres who could be shifted from one position to another.

authors of a 2017 *Foreign Affairs* article that proclaimed the “the end of a post-Cold War construct that assumed these two great powers had to learn to get along,” Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner, are now respectively the White House Asia coordinator and the Pentagon’s top official for Asia.

After four years of falsely blaming Hillary Clinton’s defeat in the 2016 election on Russian interference, complaining that Trump was in Vladimir Putin’s pocket and inconsistent on Xi Jinping, the Democrats are out to prove that they are the true Cold Warriors. Last week Biden called Putin a “killer,” and the next day Blinken met with top Chinese officials in Alaska to berate them over Hong Kong, Taiwan and Xinjiang, where both Biden and Trump’s Secretary of State accused China of “genocide,” a total fabrication. Then Washington acted shocked to hear the Chinese respond to this “human rights” imperialist rhetoric by pointing to police repression of Black Lives Matter demos. The *New York Times* (21 March) headlined: “That Was Fast: Blowups with China and Russia in Biden’s First 60 Days.” The media are trying to play it down, saying that the “competition” is mainly over technology, cyberconflict and influence. Fat chance.

It is true that the U.S. has vast military superiority in firepower against China and Russia, and that neither of those countries is looking to launch a war against the most powerful imperialist country in the world. But things could get out of hand, and Washington could miscalculate. It’s happened before. In 2016 we wrote that Hillary Clinton was the candidate most likely to start a war with Russia. The recent rounds of sharply increased tensions with Moscow began when Clinton, as Obama’s Secretary of State, worked together with fascists and ultra-rightist nationalists to drag Ukraine into NATO and turn it into a U.S./European Union satellite on Russia’s doorstep. They were surprised when Putin annexed Crimea, with the support of its majority Russian population. If tensions escalate in the South China Sea, where the head of the U.S. Navy’s Indo-Pacific Command is itching to provoke a military clash, things could blow up.

As the warmongering mounts, the League for the Fourth International’s defense of the Chinese deformed workers state against imperialism and counterrevolution stands out in stark relief. In 2019-20, the LFI denounced the U.S.-fostered anti-communist riots in Hong Kong while the opportunist left acted as running dogs of U.S. imperialism, barking as Washington banged the war drums over “human rights.” Meanwhile, Biden Democrats as well as Trump Republicans scapegoat China for the coronavirus. Yet China with its planned economy acted quickly and massively to contain the deadly outbreak while throughout the capitalist world, with its disorganized, profit-driven health systems, COVID-19 has unleashed a tidal wave of death. And over the last year, the all-sided China-bashing is reflected in a huge increase in racist attacks on Asian Americans. It’s clear: *the bipartisan anti-China war drive fuels anti-Asian bigotry.*

Empty “Reforms,” Deportations and Repression

While pursuing an aggressive imperialist agenda abroad, on the domestic front Biden is pushing a dual-track policy of “progressive” reform bills with no chance of being enacted, to keep the liberals (and



Liberal war hawks take the reins of U.S. imperialism again. Above: Joe Biden and his current Secretary of State, Antony Blinken (top right, leaning forward), in the war room with Barack Obama and his Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, watch the assassination of Osama Bin Laden in real time, 2011.

their left camp followers) quiet, combined with stepped-up repression. The media noted that the Biden Democrats were able to keep their left flank in line and squelch any serious protests before Inauguration Day. Now they have rushed proposed immigration and labor reforms through the House (while dropping the \$15 per hour minimum wage because of objections of an unelected parliamentarian), very consciously sending them to the Senate to die. Their hope is that mass vaccination and the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, amounting to more than 9% of last year’s gross domestic product, along with moratoriums on evictions and student loan payments, extended unemployment benefits, \$1,400 “stimulus” checks and \$3,600 per child tax credits, will tide them over.

The administration’s first crisis is over immigration policy, with the arrival of thousands of desperate Central American refugees at the southern border. After an Inauguration Day “100-day pause on certain removals” was blocked by a Texas judge, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) in fact speeded up deportations, expelling 29,000 in Biden’s first month in office. The Border Patrol is turning away adults and families, using Trump’s COVID emergency order, while letting unaccompanied minors in, to be held in overcrowded facilities.⁴ It has begun “surprise deportations,” loading families in vans while giving them false reassurances, and then dumping them back in Mexico. Now the first photos have come out of children being held in “pods,” lying on thin mats with nothing but foil sheets to cover them, as under Trump in 2018 ... or deporter-in-chief Obama in 2014. The wanton cruelty – and hypocrisy – is staggering.

Meanwhile, police murder and racist repression have escalated. After the wanton killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis cop last May, the unprecedented daily and nightly mass marches of millions protesting the cops’ assault on black lives continued for weeks. But despite deceptive liberal/reformist calls to “defund the police,” no real changes were made anywhere in the functioning of capitalist “law enforcement.” And the number of dead exacted by the racist police murder machine, far from diminishing in the face of protest, jumped sharply. In 2020, 2,206 *civilians were killed by cops*, far above the average

⁴ See “Stop Biden’s Deportations, Let the Kids Go!” on page 10 of this issue.

of 1,400 police killings annually in the previous 19 years of this century.⁵ In Britain, by way of comparison, three people were killed by police last year, and a total of 22 since 2001. The systemic racism of U.S. capitalism, rooted in the heritage of chattel slavery, is undeniable and ever-present.

In this panorama of generalized capitalist rot of a putrefying system, the bourgeoisie has to resort to extraordinary measures by the central axes of the capitalist state, the repressive apparatus of the police, the military and the courts – which Joe Biden more than anyone else represents. They are already planning large-scale repression. In 2018, the Pentagon had a war game that they called the “Z-bellion.” What happens when young people born after 1996 rise up, they asked. The official description begins: “Although millennials experienced these events [like 9/11] during their coming of age, Gen Z lived through them as part of their childhood.” It goes on, “many found themselves stuck with excessive college debt when they discovered employment options did not meet expectations.”⁶ This is what the Pentagon is gearing up to deal with. The fascist militias and small fascist movements will act as auxiliaries to the military and police apparatus as the U.S. increasingly moves toward a bonapartist “strong state.”

So the liberals are wringing their hands about the need for “policing reforms,” for more training in crowd control and the like. There is now a slew of reports – from New York City to Philadelphia, Baltimore, Indianapolis, Chicago, Los Angeles and elsewhere – on the brutal police response to the anti-racist marches last summer. But it’s not a question of training – the very presence of cops at protest demonstrations is a provocation. The fact is, from the time of slavery on, the police as an institution are inherently white supremacist. Even where there are black cops, black police chiefs and black mayors, they are enforcing racist, capitalist “law and order.” The police can’t be reformed, and certainly can’t be abolished so long as capital rules. The Internationalist Group says: *Cops out! For workers action against racist repression! For black liberation through socialist revolution!*

⁵ And these figures are only of the publicly reported killings by police agencies. See <https://fatalencounters.org/>.

⁶ “Pentagon War Game Includes Scenario for Military Response to Domestic Gen Z Rebellion,” *The Intercept*, 5 June 2020.

Far from “defunding” the police, Biden – who portrays himself as the cops’ BFF and has always sought the support of police “unions” – has called for \$300 million more to beef up the COPS (Community Oriented Policing) program. Since last fall, Biden has been calling for a “domestic terrorism” law, and as noted earlier, in his inaugural address he talked of confronting “white supremacy.” But as the Democratic administration gets down to drafting its law, the language shifts. In January, the DHS issued a National Terrorism Advisory about “ideologically-motivated extremists.” And who might those be? At the beginning of March, the Director of National Intelligence issued a Domestic Violent Extremism alert. It lists racially motivated violent extremists, animal rights/environmental extremists, etc., and then “anarchist violent extremists” who “oppose all forms of capitalism.”

You can be sure that the implementation of this law against “DVEs,” or domestic violent extremists, will be used against the left. How could it be otherwise? January 6 showed like a flash of lightning the role of military and police in fascist groups. In a February 16 town hall meeting on CNN, Biden himself talked “about the impact of former military, former police officers, on the growth of white supremacy” – and everyone knows that it’s not just “former.” Now in Portland we are getting a taste of the repressive future. A trio of judges in Oregon has legalized the police practice of “kettling,” which the Portland Police Bureau resumed in early March, surrounding an entire demonstration, detaining and photographing everyone with their IDs. Kettling is a violation of democratic rights – Fourth Amendment rights against unreasonable search and seizure, First Amendment rights to freedom of assembly – but now it’s back.

Even more ominous are the terms in which the courts authorized the use of such police-state tactics. A U.S. district judge ruled in January that “officers are entitled to have reasonable suspicion as to a moderately cohesive group,” even if those in it are not ideologically aligned. A Multnomah County judge ruled that a police officer needs only to have an “objectively reasonable basis to suspect criminal activity is either afoot or about to be afoot,” and can cite some specific facts. And in December a U.S. magistrate judge dismissed a class-action suit by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and declared kettling legal. So this is already being used against the left, with the full-throated support of Portland’s Democratic mayor Ted Wheeler, who is also in charge of the police who have beaten, pepper-sprayed, kettled and banned anti-racist and anti-fascist demonstrations.

Meanwhile, in New York City police viciously attacked a Black Lives Matter march on Martin Luther King Day. Today, not only are Democratic big city mayors the bosses of the racist killer cops, as we have repeated, now they are also nationally as well. As the experience of the Obama administration showed, that will change nothing. Recall also that Biden denounced “antifa” in the election campaign, that he called for police to shoot “rioters” in the leg, and that Vice President Kamala Harris billed herself as California’s “top cop,” keeping people in jail even when there was evidence to prove their innocence.

For Class Independence from the Capitalist Parties and State

Workers have begun fighting, as we foresaw from the onset of the pandemic a year ago, with a series of strikes and the Amazon union drive in Alabama, the outcome of which will have a tremendous impact (see page 3 of this issue). But it's not just there. In January there was the Teamsters strike in New York City's Hunts Point Market, the largest produce distribution center in the U.S. (see page 11). Then there was the standoff between the Chicago Teachers Union and a would-be union-busting mayor (see "Chicago Teachers in the Eye of the Storm," on edworkersunite.blogspot.com). There is an ongoing strike by nurses in Worcester, Massachusetts against one of the biggest, most anti-union for-profit hospital chains in the country. There is the fight of immigrant women laundry workers in NYC, fired for organizing a union (see page 13), and the fight by IATSE (stage hands) union workers against a lockout by the Portland Trail Blazers.

On March 9, the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives passed the Protect the Right to Organize (PRO) Act. It includes some fairly far-reaching provisions, which AFL-CIO bureaucrats believe would make it somewhat easier to organize unions. (Whether that would do much against a hard-nosed anti-union employer with lots of resources, like Amazon, is another matter.) The bill would make it illegal to fire strikers; classify "subcontractors" such as Uber/Lyft drivers as employees with labor rights; reinstitute the agency shop (i.e., overturn the *Janus* ruling), and even eliminate the provisions of the Taft-Hartley law banning secondary boycotts and strikes. But these are amendments to the National Labor Relations Act based on the 1935 Wagner Act, which was passed by the Democratic administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt to gain *government control of labor* through the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) after the explosive 1934 strikes in Minneapolis, San Francisco and Toledo, Ohio.

We see today how unions are hamstrung by government regulations, no-strike clauses and bans on just about every effective labor tactic from sit-down strikes to flying picket squads. Yet almost all the labor movement, and most of the left, is enthusing over the PRO Act, particularly regarding the Amazon union drive in Alabama. The internet outlet Left Voice (19 March) criticizes "many on the Left" who have "uncritically praised" the bill and lists ways in which the legislation would "strengthen the bonds between organized labor and the state," including compulsory arbitration in first contracts. But it concludes, "we should most definitely support and even fight for the passage of the PRO Act." So while huffing and puffing, these "left" social democrats tail after the Democratic Party. The Internationalist Group, in contrast, calls to break with the Democrats and fights against all forms of control of labor by the capitalist state.

When the Obama administration early on introduced the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), to make card checks sufficient to recognize a union, we explained, "Why Marxists Oppose All Government Intervention in the Unions" (*The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009). We underlined how Leon Trotsky in his unfinished essay, "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay" (August 1940), insisted on "*complete and unconditional in-*

dependence of the trade unions in relation to the capitalist state," and cited how the Trotskyists in the 1930s opposed the Wagner Act as restricting the right to strike. The way to get rid of the ban on secondary boycotts is not to beg the bosses' government but for militant trade unionists to dispatch flying squads to picket out the plants. It can be done. It has been done. But that requires a class-struggle labor leadership prepared to take on and defeat the capitalists, their parties, politicians and state.

Triple Pandemic: Socialist Revolution, the Only Solution

Last summer, we wrote that U.S. capitalism was facing a "triple pandemic" of a deadly plague, racist police murder and mass unemployment.⁷ In many ways, the issues facing us today are the same as then, with one major difference: now the Democrats hold the levers of power in Washington and many states, as well as most large cities. Last year protests against racist police brutality and discontent over the response to COVID-19 were channeled into support for the Democratic Party in order to get the racist, misogynist, xenophobe Trump out. The vast majority of the left joined in this, either calling to vote for Biden or vowing to "defend the vote" and install Biden as president in the face of a Trump "coup." The opportunist left is co-responsible for putting the Democratic administration in office, and they act like it, pressuring it for more money, calling to "hold Biden's feet to the fire," rather than opposing it outright.

In contrast, from Trump's very first day in the White House, the Internationalist Group proclaimed: "To Defeat Trump... and the Democrats, Fight for Workers Revolution" (*The Internationalist* No. 46, January-February 2017)." Last fall we declared (in "Repression Elections 2020"): "The workers and oppressed should not give one vote for Democrats, Republicans or any capitalist party or politician." The day after the January 6 storming of the U.S. Capitol, we reiterated:

"The Democratic Party, no less than the Republican, is our class enemy, and in many ways, it is the more dangerous enemy, as people's illusions in it are systematically fostered and used for subjugating the working class to its exploiters and oppressors. So, crucially and key to everything else, it is necessary to break with the Democrats.... [A] key task is the fight to build a workers party, a party with a program for class struggle to defend all the oppressed."

—"After January 6: What Is To Be Done?" on page 19

And the day after Biden's inauguration, Sándor John of Class Struggle Education Workers, speaking on the early morning show with Johanna Fernandez on WBAI radio, called for revolutionary working-class opposition to the Democratic administration. Asked how to respond to those who breathed a sigh of relief at Trump's departure from the White House, John replied:

"When people are confronted by a white supremacist and misogynist like Donald Trump, it's scary. And that is then used by the party which has been the main governing party of almost all U.S. wars, which carried out mass incarceration through the 1994 Crime Bill that was godfathered by Joe Biden, which deported a record number under Obama,

⁷ See "To Uproot Racist Oppression: Socialist Revolution," *The Internationalist* No. 60, May-June 2020.

No to the Democratic Party of Amazon (and Silicon Valley and Wall Street)

As we go to press, Vermont senator Bernie Sanders, now head of the U.S. Senate Budget Committee, is heading to Bessemer, Alabama to pose as a supporter of the union organizing campaign at Amazon. Don't be fooled! Sanders may talk of "democratic socialism," but his role is to rope young people, women, African Americans, immigrants, and the poor and working people generally into voting for the capitalist Democratic Party. In the 2020 elections, the top recipient of Amazon's political donations was ... Democrat Joe Biden, who got \$1.7 million, followed by \$800,000 to Democrat Sanders and \$790,000 to the Democratic National Committee (DNC).¹ That's more than 13 times the amount Jeff Bezos' anti-union behemoth gave to Trump and the Republicans.

Meanwhile, Google's parent company Alphabet gave a whopping \$16.8 million to Democrats (including \$3.66 million to Biden, \$1 million to Sanders, \$2.5 million to the Democrats'

¹ "Big Tech and CEOs Poured Millions into The Election. Here's Who They Supported," observer.com, 2 November 2020.

etc. Particularly right now, when everybody's memory is supposed to dissolve in a red-white-and-blue cloud of happy talk, it's important to recall that history."

Over the last year we have experienced endless expressions of the pathology of the decaying system of production for profit. The overflowing hospital morgues, with refrigerated trucks parked outside to receive the bodies, and the horrific death tolls were the result of market-driven medical care. For lack of capacity (due to closures in the name of "cost effectiveness"), the authorities sought only to "flatten the curve," so that hospitals wouldn't collapse, rather than stopping the spread. So they sent patients ill with COVID home to infect their household or nursing home residents. In the winter a second, even more deadly wave broke out as capitalist governments around the world, under pressure from business interests, opened up economies prematurely. Now Europe may be experiencing a third wave. And although vaccines were developed in record time, their distribution has been a spectacle of utter chaos.

Meanwhile, the mass unemployment triggered by the necessary lockdowns continues. Over 9.5 million jobs have disappeared in the U.S. Temporary layoffs have turned into skyrocketing long-term unemployment, with millions more people supposedly no longer in the labor force (and thus not counted in jobless statistics), even though they're desperate for work. Over 500 large companies filed for bankruptcy in the first six months after the outbreak, and by December some 420,000 small businesses had closed for good. Add to this that, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, some 17 million households are behind on rent or mortgage payments, with almost 6 million adults facing imminent eviction. Other estimates place the number of people threatened with eviction at 30-40 million. Despite moratoriums, stimulus checks, unemployment benefits, and the rest, *the coronavirus depression is well underway.*

Come February we had widespread

super PAC, Future Forward USA, and \$1.9 million to the DNC) and only \$1.5 million to Republicans. Microsoft gave almost \$13 million to the Democrats and \$2.4 million to Republicans. Facebook chipped in \$1.2 million to Biden, \$347,000 to the DNC and \$249,000 to Sanders. Apple gave \$4.5 million to the Democrats and only \$250,000 to Republicans. And so on.

Same story on Wall Street, where the Democrats raked in \$74 million, compared to a paltry \$18 million for Trump. The Democrats, who sometimes masquerade as "friends of labor," are in fact a party – and in 2020, the main party – of big business. So long as the unions are chained to the capitalist Democrats, the party of high finance, of imperialist war abroad and racist repression at home, they will be stymied every time they engage in real struggle. Workers should follow the lead of the Portland Painters (IUPAT) Local 10, which in August 2016 resolved that it "does not support the Democrats, Republicans or any bosses' parties or politicians," and "we call on the labor movement to break from the Democratic Party, and build a class-struggle workers party." ■

power outages in Texas, depriving millions of electricity and heat in the midst of the lowest temperatures on record. This led to water supplies failing even at major hospitals. In the midst of it there was racist Republican Ted Cruz's excellent vacation, when he ran off to Cancún while his constituents were freezing and living without power and water. The Democrats are blaming it on the Republicans, the Republicans blame it on windmills. Yet the reason the power plants were not winterized and there were no reserves of natural gas is the ultra-"free-market" power system. And the fact that Texas is not on a national grid is due to a deal negotiated by the Democrats going back to the 1930s and renewed in the 1990s. Whichever party is in office, it is capital that rules – and in Texas that means the energy industry.

It's an endless horror show. And in all of this – whether it is exposure to the coronavirus, medical treatment, racist repression and attacks, job loss, homelessness, access to vaccine, the disaster of "remote education" or any other measure of the crisis – the hardest-hit are the African American, Latin American, Native American and immigrant populations, particularly those with the least resources. This is what we see with the workers celebrated as "essential" but treated as disposable, who didn't have the luxury of working from home. The death toll on the Indian reservations is horrendous. Black workers are still the first fired and last to be rehired. Immigrants "without papers" are ineligible for government emergency support. Now mass killings highlight the wave of anti-Asian attacks spurred by Trump's vicious talk of a "Chinese virus" and "kung flu," and the Democrats' war propaganda against China.

All this underlines that no amount of tinkering or reforms can end the chaos and suffering. It's not a rough patch with light at the end of the tunnel. This is a crisis of the capitalist system itself – it will take socialist revolution to resolve it. That will be a fight. Time to enlist. ■

For Teacher-Student-Parent-Worker Control of the Schools!

Chaotic Reopening of NYC Schools:

This Is What Mayoral Control Looks Like

Use Union Power to Reopen Schools Safely!

By Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT

FEBRUARY 23 – The deadly coronavirus pandemic led to the first-ever nationwide U.S. school shutdown. By March 25, every kindergarten-to-grade-12 (K-12) school in the country was closed. The measures, taken on a city-by-city and state-by-state basis, were essential as part of broader stay-at-home orders, which by mid-April covered 95% of the U.S. population.¹ Due to a criminally deficient public health system, the disease (COVID-19) by mid-February 2021 has infected over 28 million people and caused 500,000 deaths in the United States (out of more than 110 million cases and 2.4 million deaths worldwide). The economic toll has been staggering, setting off a “coronavirus depression,” whose effects will be felt for years. Meanwhile, school shutdowns – which for much of the country have extended into the fall and winter, and could last to the end of the school year in June, or later – have had and will have lasting consequences.

When schools closed suddenly in the spring, teachers and students had to go online with no preparation or adequate materials. Educators and administrators scrambled to acquire or invent curriculum, most students from low-income households didn’t have computers or reliable internet at home (63% in the case of the poorest families),² many had no quiet place to participate in remote classes, the platforms used had problems (“Zoombombing”), etc. For most students, “remote learning” was a contradiction in terms. A study based on assessments in the early fall showed that overall, students’ scores were down 13% in reading compared to previous years, and by 37% in math. Black and Hispanic students’ scores fell even more, reflecting that they were significantly (20%) more likely than white students to be learning remotely and half as likely to have had live contact with teachers.³

While coronavirus cases were escalating in much of the country, rates of infection and of positive tests for COVID-19 in the summer and early fall were far lower in New York City, making it possible to reopen schools. While some in the United Federation of Teachers called to keep the schools closed entirely until there was a vaccine,

¹ “Which States and Cities Have Told Residents to Stay Home,” *New York Times*, 20 April 2020.

² “Not all kids have computers – and they’re being left behind with schools closed by the coronavirus,” Research brief on *The Conversation*, 8 May 2020.

³ “The Learning Gap Is Getting Worse as Schools Rely on Remote Classes, Especially for Students of Color,” *Time*, 8 December 2020. The study was by the business consultants McKinsey & Co., *COVID-19 and learning loss – disparities grow and students need help* (December 2020) based on data from a Curriculum Associates Research Brief, *Understanding Student Needs: Early Results from Fall Assessments* (October 2020).



First day of school, 1 October 2020, at JHS 157 in Queens, New York.

and to have all instruction remote, Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT and the Internationalist Group demonstrated with signs declaring, “‘Remote Learning’ Widens Racist Gap in Education” and “Remote Learning: An Oxymoron.” The CSEW declared: “Where Pandemic Is Raging, Keep Schools Closed” but “Where Infection Rate Is Low, Schools Should Reopen Safely with Billions for Sanitation & Ventilation, Triple Classrooms Now, No Hiring Freeze, Hire Thousands.” And we called for “educator-led control of the schools by councils of teachers, students, parents and workers.”⁴

Chaotic Reopening Due to Capitalist Constraints

The actual reopening of NYC schools in the fall was a story of unending chaos (see “Google + D.O.E. + de Blasio & Cuomo = Capitalist CHAOS”). For weeks, Democratic mayor Bill de Blasio insisted that, come what may, schoolhouse doors would open on September 10. But in the face of mounting pressure from teachers, administrators and parents over safety and sanitation needs, and a strike threat by the UFT (which hasn’t struck in decades), the mayor backed off and pushed back opening to September 21. Then, however, as the union insisted that no teachers would have to teach both in-person and remote classes, de Blasio and his schools chancellor Richard Carranza finally faced the fact that the Department of Education (D.O.E.) had a massive staffing crunch. So reopening was put off another week for elementary schools, and to October 1 for middle and high schools. But that was only the beginning of the confusion.

The UFT and the principals’ association said that 10,000 more teachers would need to be hired to carry out effective teaching of students in the “blended” (or “hybrid”) cohorts, who would come to school every other day, or every third day, the other days being remote. De Blasio finally agreed to hire 2,000 additional educators on a week’s notice. By

⁴ “A Class-Struggle Program to Reopen New York City Schools Safely” (6 September 2020), *The Internationalist* No. 61, September-October 2020.

November, the D.O.E. said it had hired 5,600 new teachers and substitutes, plus sending 2,000 department staff with teaching licenses into the classrooms. But clearly this was not enough; soon many “in-person” classes were being delivered remotely, to students (from different classes) with laptops in school gyms! To actually get class sizes down to 10-15 students (necessary for social distancing, and for effective education) from the previous contractual limit of 30-34, so that all students could attend school in person, as the CSEW has demanded, would require *tens of thousands* more educators.

The UFT capitulated on its demand that everyone entering the schools upon reopening be tested, but its insistence on stricter safety protocols did have an effect. Along with mask-wearing requirements, every classroom was reportedly checked for ventilation, ostensibly with union participation. This led to some repairs, installing 13,700 MERV-13 filters and placing 15,000 air purifiers with HEPA filters in classrooms. But in many older buildings (and New York City has a lot) without central HVAC systems, ventilation consisted of freeing windows that had been nailed shut or could only be opened a couple inches. A few schools with structural ventilation defects were not opened. Initial testing showed very few infected students and staff (0.17% positivity out of 16,000 tested). But by October 7, with community outbreaks in “hot zones” such as South Brooklyn, some 169 schools were temporarily closed.

Eventually, as infection rates crept up, and then in November sharply increased in many parts of the city, a citywide positivity rate of 3% was reached on November 18 and de Blasio shut down the whole system, citing a vow he had made in the summer. On December 7, elementary schools reopened, but only for students whose parents had opted for “blended” by an arbitrary cut-off in mid-November. Still, testing of tens of thousands of students, teachers and staff had shown that schools were not a center of spreading the disease – the positivity rate in the schools was only 0.19%. But after the

closing of the schools, New York’s citywide positivity rate rose past 6% and the spread of COVID-19 among teachers and students increased. At the end of the week-long winter break, all but two buildings (out of more than 1,400) are operational, but there have been hundreds of temporary closures due to two or more unrelated cases in the building.⁵

Throughout this time, the Movement of Rank and File Educators (M.O.R.E.) caucus of the UFT, a coalition of liberal and reformist currents, has demanded “no full reopening of in-person schools until 14 days of no new cases” (M.O.R.E. statement, 1 September). In protests in September, while the CSEW called in a special supplement, “NYC Teachers: Use Your Union Power to Make Schools Safe to Reopen,” M.O.R.E. supporters chanted, “1, 2, 3, 4, we demand close the doors.” We noted that M.O.R.E.’s call for “equitable remote learning” is an “unrealizable pipedream,” adding:

*“M.O.R.E.’s demand to keep schools closed until there are 0 cases in fact means indefinitely shutting down public education for the 114,000 homeless students, the 155,000 English-language learners, the 220,000 students with disabilities and many if not most of the 800,000 students living in poverty who constitute 70% of the entire student enrollment of the NYC public school system.”*⁶

Subsequently, M.O.R.E. has called to “Shift all classes to remote format until the end of school calendar year” in June 2021 (Health Justice Working Group statement, 15 November). The same demand to end in-person classes is raised by the UFT Solidarity Caucus (*The Chief*, 11 January). While M.O.R.E. poses as a “social justice” caucus, *this is a discriminatory and reactionary program*.

These supposed “progressives” hide behind the fact that a majority of the families of African American and Hispanic students (52% and 54% respectively) opted for remote instruction, as we discuss below. *Yet those are the students who stand to lose the most* – up to an entire year of education, according to one study – *by not having in-person classes*.

⁷ When the NYC Department of Education reports that only 43% of school bathrooms are operational, M.O.R.E. uses this to argue to keep schools shut, instead of demanding that the union force the D.O.E. to provide adequate sanitary facilities. M.O.R.E. is currently campaigning to “tax the rich,” a call it shares with de Blasio and many other Democrats. The issue is not raising more taxes but demanding the rulers pay the billions needed for safe, quality public education. Last August, NY State announced it was withholding 20% of (already cut-back) education allotments,

⁵ As of 20 February 2021. See <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-year-20-21/return-to-school-2020/health-and-safety/daily-covid-case-map>

⁶ See “The Fight Over Reopening Schools Is a Class Battle,” from the upcoming *Marxism & Education* No. 6.

⁷ See the McKinsey study cited above, Appendix 6.

draining \$2.4 billion from NYC schools.

The bottom line is that liberal and social-democratic education activists along with the labor bureaucracy chained to the Democratic Party all *accept the limits of the capitalist system*. They buy into the lie that “there is no money” – in the center of international finance capital, no less! They confine themselves to pressuring the bourgeois politicians to get a little *more*. In doing so, the union bureaucrats and wannabe bureaucrats adopt the terms of the ruling-class education “reformers” who have been on the warpath for decades demanding that teachers do more with less. What’s needed instead is to mount a *class offensive* uniting union power with the support of parents, students, all working people and the oppressed to *defeat the bipartisan capitalist assault on public education which continues amid the deadly pandemic*.

The Battle Over Reopening Schools

The toll of school closures has been significant. NYC public school enrollment has fallen from 1.1 million students in 2019-20 to 960,000 in 2020-21, a huge drop of 140,000. In addition, with the large majority of students receiving only remote instruction, a significant number of those enrolled have not been doing schoolwork. This is reflected in 71,000 students who received “course in progress” (NX) grades, or incompletes, for the first semester of this school year. (Of these, the hardest hit are 13,800 English language learners and 20,100 special needs students.) The D.O.E. says it has distributed roughly 400,000 iPad tablets to students since the start of the pandemic, but as of December 100,000 were still not in students’ hands. Even then, many (particularly homeless students) have problems with connectivity, while untold numbers are connecting to school with cellphones.⁸

With the start of 2021, elementary schools are open and now middle schools are slated to reopen, so that by the end of February up to 250,000 New York City public school students may be attending in-person classes, about half of them five days a week. (High schools, which were opened for a month and a half in the fall, will remain closed for now.) The positivity rate from random in-school coronavirus testing of students, teachers and staff from October 2020 until now is 0.55%, far below the citywide average (now around 8.5%), and there have been no significant outbreaks since schools reopened in the fall. The UFT leadership has supported the middle school reopening so long as the safety standards are maintained. And vaccination for 15,500 teachers has been arranged through the union, while some thousands more have been vaccinated through city and state programs.

Last fall, there was widespread resistance to resuming in-person instruction in part due to the demands from Republican president Donald Trump, who sought to force teachers back to school regardless of safety conditions and community transmission. But now Democratic president Joe Biden is pushing to “reopen schools in 100 days.” He is supported by national teachers union leaders – Dr. Jill Biden, who teaches in a community college, is a member of the National Education Association (NEA) – and his \$1.9 trillion “American Rescue Program” includes \$130 billion earmarked for K-12 education.

⁸ To top it off, the College Board announced that students could not take advanced placement exams with their iPads, even though it accepted that last year.

So now a rash of articles in the liberal media blame teacher unions for closed schools (e.g., “Teachers’ Union Prevents Return to Schools,” *New York Times*, 26 January). And the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have issued an “operational strategy” to “get all students back to school safely, and as soon as possible.”⁹

These issues came to a head in the long standoff between the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and Democratic mayor Lori Lightfoot that ended with an agreement, approved by the union membership on February 9, to gradually bring pre-kindergarten through eighth grade students back to school by providing vaccination, setting criteria for temporary school closures according to health metrics, providing frequent testing of school personnel, dropping disciplinary measures against teachers who refused orders to return to school due to unsafe conditions, providing more accommodations to work remotely for employees with household members with medical risks, and predominantly union “building- and district-level safety committees empowered to enforce health and safety protocols.” The deal was brokered by American Federation of Teachers (AFT) president Randi Weingarten in personal consultation with Joe and Jill Biden.

Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT has called from the outset, beginning in early August, to *use union power to make schools safe to reopen*. Those who demanded that schools be kept closed even where virus contagion was low (and now even with vaccine becoming available) instead of fighting to make them safe have made a colossal error. We warned that this “plays into the hands of enemies of public education, both conservative and liberal,” aiding Trump and the privatizers and union-bashers who seek to set parents against teachers. It also runs counter to the overwhelming evidence that “remote education” *can’t* work for the great majority of students and exacerbates racial/class inequalities. And it blows the critical opportunity to win important safety measures which are also key to quality education, notably by sharply reducing class size. CSEW wrote: “*Teachers unions right now have power like never before – we have to use it.*”

The *Wall Street Journal* (29 June 2020) noticed this as well, whining, “Teachers unions are ... in a position to hold the economy hostage.” “Teachers unions know how to play hardball,” said the voice of finance capital, noting that the AFT and NEA “have signaled that they would consider strikes if schools reopen without sufficient safety protections.” Damn right. We called to “Get Ready to Strike to Make NYC Schools Safe to Reopen.” While UFT tops did threaten to strike over safety, and got concessions, they did not use their power to win lasting gains. An AFT document, “Reopening Schools During a Time of Triple Crisis: Financial Implications” (June 2020) put the cost of reopening schools at \$116.5 billion. Hiring the huge numbers of new teachers needed to ensure small class sizes *would probably push the cost to over \$500 billion*. This was the time to fight for that.

Yet neither the August 2020 NYC Memorandum of Agreement nor the February 2021 Chicago “Framework” required sharply lowering class sizes, and keeping them low. On the contrary, the D.O.E.-UFT agreement maintains class sizes at the same level as in the existing contract (30 to 34 for elementary, middle and high schools). That would fill an

⁹ Transcript of CDC-USDOE press conference, 12 February.



Both Democrats and Republicans have pushed for charterization, corporatization and privatization in bipartisan war on public education. CSEW says: capitalists hands off the schools!

average NYC classroom, and *would make social distancing impossible*. Moreover, the MOA allowed *up to 64-68 students in remote classes* of “blended” cohorts, which along with a huge amount of grading *would make any real interaction between teachers and students impossible*. And there are reports of classes for special needs students (required by state law to be no more than 12-15) with 30-38 students, *which would make individual attention impossible*. Unionists fighting to defend public education, teachers’ rights and students’ well-being should have demanded small class sizes.

The negative consequences of remote-only classes for students’ education, social development and mental health are undeniable and well documented, particularly for the youngest and the most oppressed and disadvantaged. Educators have made heroic efforts in designing remote classes with multi-media content, seeking innovative ways to get student participation, but genuine education is collaborative, and you can’t get that staring at a screen – especially with most students not showing their faces (and surroundings) for good reason. If the likes of M.O.R.E. deny or can’t see this, it reflects among other things a kind of petty-bourgeois “millennial” blind spot, to put it generously, in which facility with technology is presumed to be the case for all teachers and for all children.

The medical concerns of teachers and parents are very real – witness outbreaks of influenza in schools. However, studies have repeatedly shown that, in contrast to the flu, COVID-19 transmission among children is sharply lower than among adults, particularly among elementary-school-age children. Moreover, evidence from the fall semester in studies in Mississippi, North Carolina and Wisconsin where schools were open indicate that “there has been little evidence that schools have contributed meaningfully to increased community transmission,” and that “within-school transmissions were very rare.”¹⁰ Requiring *universal face mask use*, maintaining social distancing by *reducing class sizes*, preventing crowding in common areas, increasing *room air ventilation* and expanding *screening testing* can keep schools safer from COVID infection than in the community, for students, educators and staff. But that requires *union action to ensure safe schools*.

In addition, unions must insist on *expanding accommodations* allowing for at-home work for older teachers, those with underlying medical conditions and with household members in high-risk categories. These provisions are vital “particularly for paraprofessionals, ... school aides and food service workers,” who

¹⁰ “Data and Policy to Guide Opening Schools Safely to Limit the Spread of SARS-CoV-2 Infection,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA), 26 January.

are disproportionately older, African American and Latino, “and thus at greater risk,” as we wrote last September.¹¹ In addition, education unions should demand *vaccine for all teachers and staff*. The CDC, in rolling out its February 12 “Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools,” said that vaccinations would be nice, but not necessary. Labor should respond: if you want the kids in school, provide vaccine to the school workers. Puncto. *Winning this would strengthen unions for enforcing the safety demands as well*.

For Union-Led Teacher-Student-Parent-Worker Control of the Schools

On top of these demands, a key element should be the formation of *union-led teacher-parent-student-worker committees* at every school to *inspect and sign off on reopening plans*, and to see that they are rigorously followed afterwards. This would go a long way toward overcoming much of the reluctance of many African American and Latino parents to send their children to school for in-person classes, even as their kids suffer most from the educational divide intensified by remote instruction. Reporting on this, an article in the *New York Times* (2 February), “Missing in School Reopening Plans: Black Families’ Trust,” quoted Farah Despeignes, a black mother and elected parent advocate with two sons in the city schools, saying: “Because I can’t see for myself what’s going on in that building, I’m not going to trust somebody else to keep my children safe.”

She is right to say that “everything that has happened in this country just in the last year” proves that black people “have no reason to trust the government.” The chaotic experience of reopening schools this fall reinforced justified mistrust in the school administration. And school buildings in lower-income, predominantly non-white neighborhoods are generally in worse shape than those in the Upper East Side and Upper West Side, Brooklyn Heights, Riverdale or Kew Gardens. But if parents were part of union-led committees that could determine if bathrooms are broken or filthy, if air flow is inadequate, if there are too many desks in the classrooms, if rapid testing is not available – then they would not only “have a say,” they would have *power* to insist: no in-person school until these are fixed. If not, then shut the system down with mass strike action. Any attempt to mobilize community opposition to such a strike would be doomed to fail.

In New York, the United Federation of Teachers under Randi Weingarten and now

¹¹ See “A Class-Struggle Program to Reopen New York City Schools Safely,” and related articles on the CSEW web site, edworkersunite.blogspot.com.

Michael Mulgrew supported mayoral control of the schools when it was introduced by billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg in 2002, and the UFT continues to do so today. The M.O.R.E. caucus says it opposes mayoral control, but to be replaced by what? A 23 April 2012 statement called for “an elected people’s board of education which represents the interests of teachers, students, parents, and community.” In Chicago, the CTU calls for an elected school board, a demand Mayor Lightfoot campaigned on, but then rejected after she was elected. But an elected board, while preferable to mayoral dictatorship, is no guarantee of any real change. Education is such a big issue for the ruling class today that billionaires like Bill Gates, Eli Broad and Bloomberg spend millions to buy school board elections.¹² That’s elections under capitalism: money talks.

As we wrote last fall: “The challenge and problems posed in reopening schools are a key moment to *fight against mayoral dictatorship*, and for *educator-led control of the schools by councils of teachers, students, parents and workers*. This was a vital component of the educational policies of the early Soviet republic following the 1917 October Revolution.”¹³ Teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools is “only” a democratic demand, as is the call for free, secular, coeducational, integrated quality public education for all. But it’s no accident that right-wingers routinely label public education a “communist plot” – Marx and Engels were among the very first to call for this, in their 1848 *Communist Manifesto*. Ultimately, it will take a socialist revolution to win these demands, over opposition by the capitalists, their parties and politicians. *But a union-led fight to safely reopen schools can be a huge first step.*

That means, first and foremost, taking on the Democratic Party. From the beginning, the fight over school reopening has been a political fight. Trump and his education czarina Betsy DeVos are sworn enemies of public education, who tried every possible avenue to privatize it – and then suddenly they cynically posed as defenders of public schools. Teachers unions and activists went all-out to elect Biden and a Democratic Congress. But now it’s Democrat Biden pushing to reopen, while Bloomberg (now once again a Democrat) calls on the president to “stand up to the unions” and tells teachers to “suck it up” and get back to the classroom.¹⁴ So, yes, the labor-haters and union-bashers are on the warpath. The way to defeat them is not to seek to keep schools closed where community transmission rates make it possible to reopen gradually, but rather to *use union power to set the terms for safe reopening with lasting gains.*

Various leftists have put forward a simplistic argument that opening the schools is just a plot by the bosses, who

need workers back on the job to exploit them. Thus the internet outlet Left Voice (9 February) writes: “Concern for students is just a cover to gain support for these attacks against educators. School reopenings are a linchpin in getting the entire economy back up and running for the sake of capitalist profits.” But working people are genuinely concerned about students – their kids – and they also need to work. LV says, “We need to pay non-essential workers to stay home.” The idea that “we” are going pay most of the working class to stay home for months under capitalism is idiot utopian reformism. It means that the petty-bourgeois can safely work from home while low-wage essential workers are on the job keeping the population fed, the hospitals functioning and public transport running.

There’s not one word in the LV article recognizing the toll that keeping children out of school has on their education and social development. What about the documented rise of anxiety, depression and suicides of kids isolated in their homes, with no connection to school and friends? And it is striking that from these self-proclaimed socialist feminists, the only mention of mothers who have left jobs to stay home with their children is dismissively quoting Biden’s reference to their predicament. It’s true that the capitalists need to have the schools open in order to put the economy into high gear: that’s what gives education unions extraordinary power right now. It’s why if unions do play “hardball,” as the *Wall Street Journal* fears, we can win. But labor is saddled with sellout leaders who barely even play softball because they are beholden to the bosses and their Democratic Party. *A class-struggle leadership is needed for the unions to break with the Democrats and build a workers party.*

The battle over school reopening is part of a decades-long fight against a *bipartisan capitalist war on public education*, as Wall Street billionaires (Bloomberg), Silicon Valley tycoons (Bill Gates), hedge fund operators (Democrats for Education Reform) and Democratic Party hacks (Arne Duncan, Rahm Emanuel) unite with Republicans from Ronald Reagan to Donald Trump in the drive to to charterize, corporatize and privatize public schools. To defeat this onslaught, it is necessary to fight it down the line. That means, in the middle of the pandemic, to *fight to integrate New York’s notoriously segregated schools*, using union power to *demand an end to and block screening for selective schools*. It means *stopping high-stakes testing* during this crisis, which exacerbates the education abyss between the haves and have-nots. It means locking-in *small class sizes*.¹⁵ And it means getting *cops out of the schools*, as the CSEW has long demanded.

The disastrous state of public education, like the horrific death toll of the COVID-19 pandemic and mass unemployment, are vivid expressions of a rotting capitalist system sinking deeper into barbarism. The struggle for health, safety, quality education and every other measure of social well-being requires nothing less than *socialist revolution*, in the U.S. and globally. ■

¹² As we noted in our article, “Mobilize Bay Area Workers to Win Oakland Teachers Strike” (edworkersunite.blogspot.com, February 2019), “Bloomberg has dropped more than \$5 million on California elections to elect charter school supporters, including \$300,000 in 2017 to finance the Great Oakland (GO) coalition that wants to turn half of local schools into charters.”
¹³ See “The Fight Over Reopening Schools Is a Class Battle” (edworkersunite.blogspot.com, 26 September 2020).
¹⁴ The “former self-appointed Emperor of New York City” demagogically declared on CNBC that “Poor people don’t have iPads, they don’t have Wi-Fi.” A blogger at the pro-Democratic Party *Daily Kos* (5 February) calculated that Bloomberg could buy an iPad Air at full price for every student in the NYC public schools and still be worth \$54.2 billion.

For Workers Action to Stop Deportations

No to Biden’s Deportations, Let the Kids Go!



Internationalists at demo against deportations by the Biden administration at Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn, NYC on March 13.

Joe Biden is facing his first immigration crisis, the product of the glaring disconnect between the Democratic Party’s “immigrant-friendly” rhetoric and its running of the brutal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) deportation machine. In its first month in office, the new administration deported just under 29,000 people, according to statistics on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) site. That figure doesn’t even include tens of thousands of immigrants picked up in the border area and simply “returned” to Mexico. And then, after February 23, the daily count suddenly stopped being reported.

Meanwhile, there has been an explosion of the number of unaccompanied children and teenagers from Central America arriving at the border: 9,400 in February alone, triple the number in 2020. Under the Democrats, the Border Patrol is expelling any adults or families that they encounter, not even allowing refugees to apply for asylum, using a pandemic emergency rule instituted by the immigrant-bashing Republican Donald Trump. When unaccompanied minors are detained, under court orders they are supposed to be released from detention facilities within 72 hours. Instead, many young immigrants are being held in jails run by the Border Patrol. Some are penned up in an open-air “processing center” under a Texas highway bridge.

Others are being stashed in tents in a holding facility for young refugees and immigrants in Donna, Texas built for 250 people but now holding 1,000, many under age 10. As was the case under Trump, Biden’s DHS is denying public access to its jails, holding pens and concentration camps. However, according to the 1997 *Flores* settlement agreement allowing some inspection of government facilities holding children, two lawyers spoke with 20 children at Donna. They are being housed 40 to a room, partitioned only by plastic sheets, in the giant tents. Some had not been allowed to leave the tent for the entire time they had been there, and had gone for days without a shower.

When Trump issued his vindictive order to separate children from their par-

ents in May 2018, there was a huge outcry. Tens of thousands went into the streets to denounce the Border Patrol child snatchers holding kids hostage. Photos of children being held in cages and sleeping on mats with only foil sheets to cover them provoked outrage. Yet, as we pointed out then, the facilities with cages for kids were built by the Democratic administration of Barack Obama, which first instituted family separation. Obama also deported more people than any other president (over 5 million, plus another 3 million just dumped across the border), at a rate 50% higher than Trump. Now Biden is holding kids in tents, sleeping on gym mats with foil “blankets,” as it plans to set up *more* camps for immigrants, at a convention center, an oil workers camp and an airfield.

So where is the outrage? Rather than massively protesting in the streets, liberals and the reformist left have largely limited themselves to lobbying the Biden administration for a change in policy. Meanwhile, the Democrats’ “immigration reform” supposedly offering a “path to citizenship” is set to be acted on by the House of Representatives. However, its chances of passing the Senate are nil, and not just because of Republican threats to filibuster. A number of “moderate” Democrats are now resisting calls for immigration reforms. Even bills to provide permanent residency to “Dreamers” who arrived in the U.S. when they were children and to farm workers are running into resistance. The reform plans are mainly political theater, appealing to immigrants and “progressives” to blame Republicans.

The Internationalist Group. Revolutionary Internationalist Youth and Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas (Class-Struggle Immigrant Workers) have attended some of the very few immigrants’ rights protests that have been held since Biden’s inauguration, in Los Angeles on February 26 and New York City on March 13, with our banners and signs calling “For Workers Action to Stop Deportations,” for “Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants,” “Smash the I.C.E. Gestapo with Workers Revolution,” and declaring “Biden: No Friend of Workers, Immigrants – Build a Workers Party!” ■

A Fight for All Workers

Hunts Point Teamster Strike Shows Potential for Labor Upsurge

JANUARY 30 – The week-long strike by 1,400 mainly Latino and black workers at the Hunts Point Produce Market in the Bronx was the first major labor battle of 2021, and it ended with gains for the strikers, who are members of the Teamsters union. The market supplies 60% of the fruits and vegetables consumed in New York City, and together with the adjacent meat and fish markets it is the largest fresh food distribution center in the U.S. The workers have been on the job throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, keeping the city and surrounding region supplied with produce. They work in, and many come from, the South Bronx area that is the poorest congressional district in the nation, and which has been hard-hit with some of the highest rates of infection in NYC. The strike drew national attention, taking place amid a changing of the guard in Washington as labor-hating Republican Donald Trump was replaced by phony “friend of labor” Democrat Joe Biden as the chief executive officer of U.S. capitalism.

International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 202 called the strike as the contract expired. It was their first strike in 35 years. Before the walkout, workers were mostly making between \$18 and \$21 an hour, hardly a “living wage” in New York City. Traditionally supplying restaurants and greengrocers, as many of the former shut down or cut back due to pandemic quarantine orders, the market delivered to groceries and bodegas throughout the NYC metro area. As truly essential workers, the Hunts Point Teamsters move about 300,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables a day, keeping New Yorkers fed in these trying times. Prior to the pandemic, 15,000 trucks would go in and out of Hunts Point daily. Working at close quarters in the produce market, hundreds of workers fell ill with the coronavirus. A number died, including Local 202 members Fernando Gordon, Gregory Treadwell, Jamie Hatcher and Victor Vasquez. Meanwhile, the bosses raked in \$15 million in pandemic Paycheck Protection Program aid from the government.

Hunts Point is the most central point in the food chain that feeds the city and surrounding region. As the strike loomed, the New York *Daily News* (14 January)



Hunts Point strikers after approving contract, January 23.

warned, “Break out the frozen veggies.” The Teamsters demanded modest raises of \$1 an hour in each of the three years of the contract, as well as a \$0.60 an hour increase to the health benefits fund. The Hunts Point Produce Market “cooperative” board, representing the bosses of 29 food distribution companies, insultingly said that the workers should be “grateful” to have jobs during the pandemic. The bosses “offered” paltry raises of 32 cents/hour for each year of the contract, much lower than the increased cost of living due to inflation. With this “slap in the face,” as one union official put it, the fight was on.

From Day One of the strike, supporters of the Internationalist Group, Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas (Class Struggle International Workers) and CUNY Internationalist Clubs mobilized in support of the workers’ struggle. On January 18 the Internationalist Group issued a leaflet, “NYC Labor: All Out to Support Hunts Point Market Strikers!” of which hundreds of copies were distributed to strikers. We joined the strike lines daily, usually two or three shifts a day, with signs in support of the strike and declaring, “Picket Lines Mean Don’t Cross, Period!” Students from the City University of New

York were greeted warmly by workers, as they have been at strikes and organizing drives at Verizon, B&H Photo, Spectrum and elsewhere in recent years. Many workers’ children have attended CUNY, one of the few ways working people in New York City can get a higher education.

Early in the strike, union members showed their militancy and desire to fight to win against the arrogant bosses. Sometimes the cops were able to escort trucks in, but in many cases pickets would congregate in front of the trucks, convincing the driver to leave. In a dramatic scene, at midnight on the start of the third day of the strike, workers on the line were stopping trucks from coming in when a swarm of cops in riot gear – Democratic mayor Bill de Blasio’s NYPD – moved in to break the workers’ picket. It was a vivid demonstration that the police are enforcers of the bosses’ “law and order.” Aware of the danger of racist cop violence and echoing last summer’s mass protests, strikers held up their hands, saying “Don’t shoot.” The police arrested five strikers, charging them with disorderly conduct. The workers, unbowed, were back picketing by 3 a.m.

On Wednesday, the fourth day of the strike, a freight train with 21 cars heading into the market was turned around. After that no trains entered the market. As the strike began to hit the bosses’ revenues and affect the food supply chain, Democratic New York governor Andrew Cuomo pressured for a return to the bargaining table. On Friday afternoon, Local 202 officials announced that a deal had been reached, and on Saturday the deal was approved by the strikers by a 285 to 6 vote. Most workers will receive raises totaling \$1.85 over the three years, bringing their base pay up to \$20.42, while the top-paid workers will receive raises totaling \$1.20 and a \$1,300 bonus in the third year. The companies will increase their contribution to the health care fund by \$0.40/hour and the workers

will receive one additional sick day and two more floating holidays per year. The bosses’ original demands to change overtime rules were rebuffed.

“When we fight, we win,” is a popular slogan we heard during the strike. Unfortunately, that is not always the case, though the opposite is certainly true: if we don’t fight, workers always lose. At Hunts Point, *the popular strike won gains which, although limited, could encourage labor struggle around the country.* “We fought this battle for the rest of the working people of this country,” said Local 202 president Danny Kane. Around the U.S., many employers have been itching to use the pandemic as an excuse to bust unions, while many workers are fed up with being treated as expendable, risking their health for poverty pay, even as they are hailed as essential. The Hunts Point strike was a modest victory for our side, against the bosses. To win big, it’s necessary to massively mobilize the power of the working class.

“That’s the Power of Unity”

The Terminal Produce Market is one of three major distribution markets in the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center, where roughly 9,000 workers are employed. The Cooperative Meat Market distributes beef, pork, poultry and other meat products, while the New Fulton Fish Market distributes seafood. Other companies like Anheuser-Busch and Baldor, for specialty foods, also have distribution centers at Hunts Point. Many of their workers are represented by Teamster and UFCW locals. At the market, the work is intense and grueling. Many workers put in 10 and even 12 hours a day, working through the night to dispatch trucks in the early morning.

One striker told us, “Lifting is all we do. We have to take the stuff off the pallets and stack them back on. We have jacks but we have to stack the pallets first.” A retired worker said, “A lot of workers go out with back problems. Sometimes they get hit by jacks.” He added that you breathe in a lot of fumes on the loading docks: “Some guys when they blow their noses at the end of the day, it comes out black.” Another Teamster who works at a warehouse across the street told us, “This job f--ks you up. I’ve got arthritis all in my fingers, I’ve got to get knee surgery.” And then there is the coronavirus toll. This poses the need for *union safety committees* empowered to shut down the workplace when working conditions are unsafe.

The bosses have real contempt for the workers. On the first day of the strike, a worker who held a sign saying “Picket Lines Mean Don’t Cross” as he tried to stop a truck told us, “The boss looked at us when we asked for our raise and said, ‘What you do is nothing special. You guys should be thankful you have a job’.” There are multiple tiers at the produce market, with most Teamsters there making \$18.57 to \$20.70 an hour before the strike, but new hires make less. Also there are non-union, off-the-books workers hired by the truck-

Screenshot from New Yorker video



Hunts Point is vast, the largest food distribution center in the United States.

ing companies, doing even harder work with longer hours and making \$15 an hour or less. What's needed is a drive to unionize *all* workers in the markets, including immigrant workers who are denied equal rights and threatened by the authorities. Class-struggle militants demand full citizenship right for all immigrants, a demand that is key to uniting the working class and stopping bosses from driving down everyone's wages.

The produce bosses hired strike-breakers to keep market operations going, and strikers were furious that even some members of Local 202 were entering through a back entrance of the market to scab. One worker told us the scabs "go in through the back like cowards. But I'll see them inside when we get back to work." Yet the union leadership instructed the ranks to abide by anti-union laws that "prohibit" stopping the scabs. As we said in our leaflet, and in conversations with workers on the lines, "**Scabs must go!** Workers must rely on their own class power to win this crucial battle." What was needed was to mobilize New York City labor by the hundreds to help build "**massive picket lines that no one dares cross**, and make the Hunts Point strike the **kickoff for a drive to unionize hundreds of thousands of low-wage workers** (like at Amazon!) across the city."

An example of real class solidarity during the strike was the stopping of the freight train going into the market on Wednesday, January 20. Trains go in and out every night. Two nights later, as we were standing with a group of strikers, the workers proudly told us how it went down. Ramon, a picket captain was dispatched to talk to the train crew because he knew them. He reported: "The cops were saying, 'You can't get on the tracks, we can arrest you for trespassing.' I said, 'I'm not on the tracks, I'm on the sidewalk and I know the guys that are coming in.'" So when the train came in, Ramon was there with a picket sign. The conductor asked if there was a strike:

"He said, 'I'm not crossing.' So the cop comes in and asks the conductor, 'You got any problems here?' and he said 'No, we're not crossing the line, we're Teamsters too.' [The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen is now part of the IBT.] The motorman came out and he says 'Listen, we're not crossing the

line. The only way this train is going to go in is if you call management – they're not union.' The cop says, 'Oh, we'll call management, where's your management?' He says, 'In Ohio'."

Then security tried to escort the train going in, saying "Everything is set for you, you can go right on through." The motorman responded, "No, I'm not going through this line. I'm going back to Ohio." And he did. The next night: no train. The night after that: a settlement.

Leo Servedio (Local 202 vice-president): "That's the power of unity." Ramon: "If we go down, we go down together."

Leo: "We're soldiers in arms." That's the power of the bedrock labor principle: picket lines mean don't cross.

For a Fighting Labor Movement!

Busloads of Teamsters from Boston, Philadelphia and New Jersey arrived at the Hunts Point picket, and as the strike went on, individual workers and contingents from many unions came out in support, highlighting the importance of the battle. When union VP Servedio spoke on WBAI radio (January 22) about the strike, listeners flooded the station with phone call voicing their support, together with indignation at arrests of strikers after a scab driver tried to run over pickets. Servedio described how the bosses spent tens of thousands to hire "thug security guards to try to push us around and ... try to break us," and to sneak in scabs. After discussion highlighted the importance of the picket line, one caller summed up the sentiment of many: "May the filthy scabs carry their guilt to their graves."

Several Democratic Party politicians also showed up. First was Richie Torres, the newly elected congressman whose Bronx district includes Hunts Point. On the evening of Inauguration Day, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez came out, which brought a lot of media attention.¹ Ocasio-Cortez, the

¹ AOC said she and others did not "feel safe" at the Inauguration after the January 6 racist mob invasion of the Capitol. Revolutionary Marxists denounce the dangerous misogynist and racist threats launched against AOC, Ilhan Omar and others, at the same time as we uphold the fundamental Marxist principle of working-class political independence from and opposition to the Democratic, Republican and all other capitalist parties.

Solidarity with Alabama Amazon Workers Union Drive



At February 20 rally in New York's Union Square in support of Bessemer, Alabama Amazon warehouse workers fighting to form a union, fired Wash Supply workers came out in solidarity. "An injury to one is an injury to all!" See page 3 for article on Amazon union organizing drive.

star of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), told striking workers, "We gotta pay you like we need you, because we do." That "we gotta pay you" is more than an off-the-cuff phrase – the Democratic Party poses as "friends of labor," but its representatives uphold the interests of the employer class that lives off of exploiting the workers. It was a Democratic NY attorney general that wielded the anti-strike Taylor Law against MTA strikers in 2005, and another one (the "progressive" Letitia James) who had the CUNY union's suit against layoffs struck down last summer – the list of examples is endless.

Quite a few DSAers came out to see AOC, and the DSA issued a call to come to the lines. But as a "socialist" component of the capitalist Democratic Party, the DSA is counterposed not only to a fight for socialist revolution, but also to the militant class struggle needed to revive the labor movement. As an Internationalist sign at Hunts Point said: "Break with Democrats and Republicans, Build a Class-Struggle

Workers Party!" That means waging a fight that goes beyond strictly trade-union demands over wages and hours to pose a political struggle against capitalist exploitation and oppression. Hunts Point is a place to start. In the February 2017 "Day Without an Immigrant," hundreds of workers gathered at the market entrance chanting, "respect, respect," and it had to shut down. Then last July, Local 202 workers stood at their posts for 8 minutes and 46 seconds to protest the racist cop murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

At a post-strike press conference, Local 202 President Danny Kane said, "Workers stood up and fought. I think the workers set up a precedent. Their voices will be heard." Yes, the Hunts Point strike gave a taste of the class struggle desperately needed to organize the unorganized and fight for millions of low-wage workers, essential and "non-essential" alike. But Kane also praised not just Ocasio-Cortez but Cuomo as well, saying "It's that type

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Internationalists called to break with the bosses' parties, build a workers party.



Hunts Point strikers convincing truckers not to go into the struck market.

Mobilize Workers Power to Stop Union-Busting Campaign!

Alert! NY Laundry Workers Fight Against Firings

On February 19, in a move straight out of the union-busters' playbook, the owners of the Wash Supply laundromat on Manhattan's Upper West Side fired the courageous immigrant women workers who had organized a union. The company then abruptly closed the shop. The firings came less than a month after the successful vote for union recognition. The next day, when a team arrived with a van and a truck to remove the machines, they encountered the workers with signs saying, "Fired for Defending Workers' Rights," "We Are Not Afraid" and simply "Union."

As punishment for the "crime" of standing up for their rights – and the rights of all workers – the bosses have kicked out the women workers, as so many low-down exploiters have done before. This is a blow against all workers, immigrants, and defenders of women's rights, and it demands a hard-hitting response from the powerful New York labor movement.

The struggle of the Wash Supply workers began in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic that unleashed death and misery in the city that was its first epicenter in the U.S. On November 25, the combative Mexican women workers, accompanied by defenders of labor and immigrant rights, held a rally in front of the laundry and delivered a letter with their demands to the managers. Wearing aprons reading "We Are the Union," they gave voice to the struggle against the intolerable conditions, wage theft and abuse faced by many thousands in laundry sweatshops across the city. The action, called by the Laundry Workers Center (LWC), began with a march from a nearby park to the laundromat, to the beat of drums and with chants in English and Spanish, including "¡Arriba trabajador, abajo explotador!" (Up with the workers, down with the exploiters).

Inside the laundromat, each of the workers addressed the boss, refusing to be intimidated as they spoke about the mistreatment and violations of basic labor rights they have experienced. Their demands included an end to wage theft and discrimination, the right to a break and paid sick leave, better health and safety conditions – including providing PPE needed during the coronavirus pandemic – as well as earning the city's minimum wage. They also demanded recognition of the union they were in the process of forming.

The rally also featured the announcement that Beatriz Ramírez, who was fired in April when she sued a Queens laundry for wage theft (she was paid \$6.50 an hour for 56-hour workweeks) had won her case, recovering the wages owed her and winning her job back. Rampant wage theft has been a common theme in recent struggles in the New York area. At Wash Supply, wages varied between nine and eleven dollars per hour, well under the NYC minimum of \$15, with hardly any time to eat during the day (and without overtime pay). Some of those starvation wages were then stolen outright, and when workers ques-

tioned such blatant wage theft, they got another deluge of verbal abuse.

The laundry industry is one of many sectors in NYC and beyond that run largely on the labor of immigrants who are superexploited and without many of the legal protections nominally provided for workers. Deemed expendable and vulnerable by the bosses and the government, they often do not make even the minimum wage while facing dangerous working conditions. In the midst of the deadly pandemic this is not a matter to be taken lightly. As one of the Wash Supply workers recounted in a joint interview on the WBAI radio station: "There's vomit in the clothes, clothes with excrement, with blood and needles. I got stuck with a needle once, and what did a manager tell me? 'Nothing happened to you.'" No aid is provided for the injuries and illness that often result from such conditions. Meanwhile, alongside the fear of getting COVID-19, there was the even greater fear of spreading it to family members.

The safety conditions at work were terrible. Fires would break out. On one occasion, as reported by a worker during the radio interview, one of the machines had clothing that contained flammable substances, which caused a fire in the machine. "The most worrisome thing is that the fire extinguisher was nowhere to be found. We were running around looking for it, and the manager didn't know where it was either. Finally, one of us dealt with the fire. And it's such a small enclosed place that the smoke was trapped there. The boss made us clean up, but the smoke lingered. And she forced us to keep working under those conditions". During another fire at Wash Supply, in a chilling echo of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire of 1911 where 146 died, the emergency fire exit was blocked. The workers also spoke of their struggle on December 8 on "Frecuencia Obrera Internacionalista," the weekly radio program of our comrades of the Grupo Internaciona-

fight against the horrifying working conditions and starvation wages that prevail in the midst of the triple pandemic that is shaking capitalism with the economic crisis, unemployment and health crisis.

Because of the union organizing drive, management decided to play rough. On January 24, the employer fired Yuriana, one of the workers involved in the campaign. A protest rally was organized, where Yuriana told us that bosses claimed they fired her because she did not meet an hourly quota of 100 pounds of washed and folded clothes. She and a fellow worker, Cecilia, reported that the bosses had been harassing them all the time with the purpose of intimidating them before the imminent vote on the union. Yuriana was fired, as she related, "so that my coworkers would be afraid of voting. They tried to make an example out of me, to intimidate [my coworkers] into thinking that if they do anything they will also get fired."

This maneuver did not yield the results that the employers expected. The vote was held on January 29 and the union won. And so, three weeks later, the bosses fired all of the women workers and abruptly closed up the shop.

The bosses want to stop their courageous example from spreading to the thousands more who work in laundries and other low-wage sweatshops throughout the city. But New York is a union town. The labor movement must stand up and use its power against the union-busting drive, help win the women's jobs back and teach the labor-haters a long overdue lesson. That's why it is urgent that the unions that organize workers in industrial laundries, hotels and restaurants, transport services and telecommunications mobilize in the streets.

The link between issues facing the working class nationwide and the struggle of a band of brave women immigrant workers here in New York was dramatized when the day after they were fired, the Wash Supply workers headed down to Union Square to join a rally in solidarity with the union-organizing drive of Amazon workers in Bessemer, Alabama, many of them African American women. The demonstration, which included a substantial contingent from the Internationalist Group, *continued on page 15*



On February 20, the day after women workers from Wash Supply Laundromat were fired for forming a union, they attended a demonstration of solidarity with Amazon workers in Alabama.

lista in Mexico, broadcast from Oaxaca.

The current fight of the laundry workers is an outgrowth of prior campaigns by immigrant workers in NYC, from greengrocer and deli workers around the turn of the century and then, from 2010 on, with the Hot and Crusty bakery/restaurant, B&H Photo, Liberato Restaurant and elsewhere – many of them initiated by the LWC. The Internationalist Group (IG) and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth actively participated in these campaigns, many of them carried out by the LWC. We have always stressed the need to mobilize the power of NYC labor to defend immigrant workers. This struggle has to be waged on the basis of proletarian internationalism and the class struggle, totally independent of politicians and parties of the capitalist class, in order to forge a workers party to fight for a workers government.

Immigrant women workers who fought for their rights at the beginning of the 20th century were recognized for their struggle and sacrifice by the international socialist movement as an example for millions of workers around the world, celebrating their action and suffering every March 8 as the International Day of Working Women. Today our women comrades in struggle can also be an example for the workers who



Victory to Wash Supply workers organizing campaign!

Front-Line Workers: Essential, Yes! Expendable, No! Temporary Hazard Pay: Not Enough

Food Chain Workers: \$5/Hour Permanent Pay Raise and Vaccine Now!

PORTLAND/LOS ANGELES – On February 1, the giant grocery conglomerate Kroger announced it was closing two of its chain stores (a Ralphs and a Food 4 Less) in Long Beach, California. Why? Because of an ordinance passed by the city council last month requiring that grocery store chains pay their workers an extra \$4 an hour “hero pay” for the next four months. A company spokeswoman threatened additional store closures if mandates requiring hazard pay are passed elsewhere. This is shameless blackmail, to keep grocery workers toiling in dangerous conditions at rock-bottom wages while owners rake in billions of dollars in profits during the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the U.S., the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) says 28,700 workers in the industry have been infected and at least 134 have died from the virus.

Kroger is the largest supermarket operator in the United States, with over 2,750 grocery stores and over half a million employees in several chains, including Fred Meyer in the Pacific Northwest. Despite bellyaching about low profit margins in the industry, Kroger’s profits *doubled* in 2020 as a direct result of the pandemic, more than any other major retailer.¹ In the first three quarters of the year, they shot up to \$2.66 billion. The company complained that the \$4 hourly hazard pay amounted to a 30% wage increase. That means the average pay of Ralphs and Food 4 Less Workers in Long Beach is a little over \$13 an hour, impossible to live on in California’s high-rent cities. And while Kroger threatens to shut stores, the California Grocers Association is suing Long Beach in federal court.

This fight is not just about a particularly greedy employer raking in obscene profits while its employees risk their lives toiling in dangerous conditions – although Kroger is certainly that. It is *a class battle in which the workers movement and all working people must come to the defense of the low-wage essential workers* who are called heroes in the media while being treated as expendable by the bosses. The fight is spreading as more cities in California are passing \$4 an hour “hero

¹ This was shown in a study by the Brookings Institution, *Windfall Profits and Deadly Risks* (November 2020).



Grocery workers of Food 4 Less store in Long Beach, California, members of UFCW Local 324, protested on February 3 against closing of store by Kroger in retaliation for city ordinance requiring hazard pay.

pay” ordinances, and L.A. has mandated \$5 an hour. Similar proposals are being raised in Seattle and elsewhere in the Pacific Northwest.

But *temporary hazard pay is no solution* for brutally exploited low-wage workers. What’s urgently called for is a *massive union-led campaign* to demand an *immediate \$5/hour permanent raise for all workers in the food chain*, from farm workers and packing house workers to food distribution center, grocery, bodega and restaurant workers, *or else strike!* Not just in California, and not just one store or one chain: *include the big-box stores* (exempted from the local ordinances) like Walmart, Amazon and Costco, and *shut down all that refuse to pay up!* As we have insisted: *Low-wage workers need a whopping pay raise, and a fighting union!* At the same time, *food chain workers must be given access NOW to vaccines against COVID-19*, from which they are currently being excluded in many states.

Grocery and other food workers are literally facing mortal danger. A study published by the *British Medical Journal* (30 October 2020) of grocery workers in the Boston area last May showed that workers with direct exposure to customers were *five times* more likely to be infected with

the novel coronavirus. Now a study by researchers at the University of California in San Francisco on heightened risks for COVID-19 among essential workers in the state, published on *medRxiv* (21 January), shows that food/agricultural workers have had a huge 39% increase in deaths during the pandemic, with 59% “excess mortality” for Latino workers in the industry, compared to a 6% increase for white working-age Californians. *Food chain workers are paying with their lives while being denied vaccines and even minimal hazard pay.*

While grocery workers have been keeping people fed even as they face dangers to their health and safety, grocery tycoons cynically praise workers, while taking hazard pay out of their pockets. Here’s Kroger’s press release from March of 2020 announcing their \$2/hr. “hero bonus”: “Our associates have displayed the true actions of a *hero*, working tirelessly on the frontlines to ensure everyone has access to affordable, fresh food and essentials during this national emergency,” said Rodney McMullen, Kroger’s chairman and CEO. “The Hero Bonus is just one more way we continue to convey our thanks and gratitude....” Some thanks! In May, the company made a one-time “thank you bonus,” and quietly ended the hourly hazard pay. As the November Brookings study put it, Kroger went “from hero pay to zero pay.”

Similarly, in March Amazon announced in a self-congratulatory press release that workers at its Whole Foods stores would receive an additional \$2/hour, only to revoke it in May. Amazon has demonstrated time and again that it will stop at nothing in its crusade to score record profits and smash any attempt at unionization (such as currently underway in Bessemer, Alabama). In Portland, Oregon when workers at several Whole Foods stores wore pins with the company’s own slogan, “Racism Has No Place Here,” management disciplined the employees by sending them home. Class Struggle Workers – Portland (CSWP) joined the picket, leading chants of “Defend black lives, Now’s the time to

unionize!” Whole Foods workers faced similar retaliation from management in Seattle as well, and the series of incidents resulted in a new “dress code” policy requiring workers to wear “solid colors” to work.

When PDX Whole Foods workers demonstrated and demanded an end to retaliation against employees for expressing anti-racist sentiment, as well as demanding improved safety protocols (including limiting the number of shoppers in the store) to help mitigate the dangers posed by the coronavirus, the company refused to hear, or even receive a petition with their demands. Instead, with workers pushed to their limit by management attacks and hazardous working conditions, even as the rate of transmission spiked in Oregon in the days before Thanksgiving, the limits on customers in the store were *increased* to unsafe although technically legal levels to accommodate holiday shoppers. This all occurred after at least one employee died last April from COVID-19 at the Pearl district Portland location. Companies’ callous disregard for the well-being of their employees, as well as public health in general, cannot be overstated.

Class-conscious workers should call on labor to bring out its ranks, along with the hard-hit Latino and African American populations, to fight the capitalist horror show being inflicted on us during the coronavirus pandemic. In Long Beach, UFCW Local 324 called a protest on February 3 outside the Food 4 Less store that Kroger said it is closing. Militants from Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1277 joined, calling “For Labor Solidarity with Grocery Workers! Stop the Closures! Hazard Pay Now!” Mayor Robert Garcia stressed that the “hero pay” was only temporary. UFCW leaders called the closures “chilling,” but took no action against any of the eight other Kroger stores in Long Beach or the dozen in Los Angeles. Against any move to actually shut down the two stores, the union and its allies should *strike or picket out every Kroger location in Long Beach, L.A. and Orange County!*

Long Beach is a stronghold of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), many of whose members live and shop in the city. In a serious fight, the ILWU and UFCW could bring the grocery bosses to their knees. *If the L.A.-Long Beach-San Pedro port shut down, see how long the threat of closures would last!* But instead of using that power to fight for permanent raises, the union tops heap praise on Democratic politicians promoting the temporary pay hikes. Andrea Zinder, president of UFCW Local 324 gushed over the “hero pay” measure in Irvine: “This temporary wage increase shows workers that their elected officials stand behind them and are grateful for the jobs they do to keep our communities fed.” Limiting demands and lowering expectations as workers face unrelenting attack is the guiding principle of a labor bureaucracy tied to the Democratic Party and the machinery of the capitalist state that the bosses’ parties administer.



Los Angeles Metro transit workers of ATU Local 1277 join February 3 protest over store closure in Long Beach. For labor solidarity with grocery workers, stop the closures, permanent pay raise now!

Kroger and the other supermarket chains are playing hardball. They don't give a damn about the good will of "elected officials" – the bosses want to use the pandemic to break the unions. The same with Amazon, which is shelling out \$3,200 a day to just one union-busting consultant to fight a union drive at one of the company's warehouses in Alabama.

As supermarket chains make billions on the pandemic, unions should use the opening of the fight over "hero pay" mandates to demand a permanent, universal and hefty pay hike for grocery and all food-chain workers. There should be a mass campaign for **\$5 AN HOUR MINIMUM RAISE** – and **VACCINATION NOW!** Along with this, since last March, the CSWP and the Internationalist Group have put forward a program for workers action in the coronavirus crisis, including the call for **union safety committees with the power to shut down unsafe operations at every workplace**, and to break with the bosses parties to **build a class-struggle workers party**.

As we headlined, the recent strike by workers at the Hunts Point food distribution center in New York City showed the potential for an upsurge of labor struggle across the U.S. *A struggle by West Coast grocery workers can be the next step.* Kroger styles itself "America's grocer" and flaunts a "Statement on Human Rights" on its web site for vendors. Yet the average pay for a cashier in Kroger stores nationwide is \$10 an hour! As local officials and grocery barons shadow-box over the conditions workers must endure, union tops don't challenge the horrendous conditions and meager pay that is standard in the industry.

We need a class-struggle leadership of labor. No amount of BS about "corporate social responsibility" and "tweaking" the capitalist system of production for profit can achieve the urgent task of boosting pay for low-paid frontline workers and putting their health and safety first. That will require a massive campaign to mobilize working-class power to *bring the grocery giants' mega-profits to a grinding halt.*

Labor must lead the way. The time to strike to win big gains for grocery workers is NOW! ■

Laundry...

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alists and Trabajadores Internacionales Clásistas (Class Struggle International Workers), gave them a warm welcome, and Yuriana, the Wash Supply worker fired in January, spoke in support of the struggle at Amazon.

Today, the fight continues. On February 27, more than a hundred protesters gathered in front of another laundry owned by the same company, Liox, located in the Lower East Side area where the struggles of the workers in the garment industry began more than a century ago. We then marched to the building where the *industrial murder* at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory took place, making a stop in front of a Whole Foods supermarket, a subsidiary of Amazon. The slogan coined in the B&H struggle sounded again in the streets, "*¡Unión, fuerza, solidaridad!*" (Union, power, solidarity!), along with "Laundromat workers, we are with you!" This is just the beginning. The struggle of immigrant laundry workers must become the cause of the entire working class.

Victory to the laundry workers! Organize the unorganized! Fight to win, workers to power! ■

Free Assange...

continued from page 2

which exposed the lies of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration about the Vietnam War, was a bombshell published by the *Times* in 1971 (after Johnson was gone). Richard Nixon's administration tried to prosecute the leaker, analyst Daniel Ellsberg, for violating the Espionage Act, but the charges were dropped because of egregious legal violations by the prosecution. More typically, the "free but responsible press" has sat on government secrets – as the *Times* did with the U.S. role in the 1954 overthrow of the government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala and preparations for John F. Kennedy's failed Bay of Pigs (Playa Girón) invasion of Cuba in 1961 – or peddled government lies, such as the non-existent "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq, used to justify the 2003 U.S. invasion.

Marxists staunchly defend the First Amendment right of freedom of expression against U.S. imperialism's attempts to limit or suppress it. If the government could stop leakers from leaking and the press from printing, we would never have known about the horrendous massacre at My Lai in Vietnam, exposed by courageous investigative journalist Seymour Hersh (who also exposed fabrications by the Barack Obama administration about who used chemical weapons in Syria). It is because of Wikileaks' exposure of imperialist crimes that Julian Assange is being mercilessly hounded today and has been for the last decade.

However, the British judge, Vanessa Baraitser, while she did stop (for now) the extradition of Assange, did *not* uphold *any* of the objections that prosecution of the Wikileaks founder would violate press freedoms. On the contrary, she defended the U.S. government's supposed right to keep its secrets secret, on the grounds that, had Assange's actions taken place in Britain, they would have violated the several Official Secrets Acts. Instead, the judge ruled that conditions in U.S. "supermax" prisons are so inhumane that it would drive Assange to commit suicide. She detailed the horrific Special Administrative Measures (SAMs) in the ADX Florence penitentiary in Colorado where Assange would be sent, and a number of its inmates have in fact taken their lives.

It should also be noted that Chelsea Manning, who obtained the damning information that Wikileaks made public when she was an intelligence analyst in Iraq, was tried under the Espionage Act and sentenced to 35 years in jail. What she obtained was massive and invaluable, providing gruesome accounts of murderous U.S. actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and exquisite detail of how the U.S. rulers control their puppets and spy on their imperialist allies. In one of his last acts as president, Obama commuted her sentence in 2017, but in 2019 she was thrown back in jail for a year for courageously refusing to testify against Assange in secret grand jury proceedings. Meanwhile, Edward Snowden has also been charged with "espionage" for revealing how the U.S. agencies have massively spied on the U.S. population. Snowden was forced to seek asylum in Russia, after the U.S. prevented him from obtaining it in Ecuador in 2013.

The Ecuadorian government of Rafael



On January 3, the Internationalist Group and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth joined a demonstration in New York City against the threatened extradition of Assange.

Correa in 2012 granted Assange asylum in its London embassy, citing his defense of freedom of expression and the danger to "his life, safety or personal integrity," after a Swedish prosecutor demanded he be extradited for questioning on a frame-up accusation of rape.¹ The Swedish extradition demand was dropped in 2017, but by then Assange risked extradition to the U.S. where the Trump administration was preparing charges. Under pressure from Washington, Correa's successor, Lenin Moreno, said in 2018 he wanted Assange out of the embassy, and in April 2019, in an act of servile submission to imperialism, the former leftist Moreno invited British police into the embassy to arrest him. On the same day, the U.S. unveiled the secret 2018 indictment of Assange for "conspiracy to commit computer intrusion" (later escalated to espionage).

So Julian Assange has been confined for a decade, whether in asylum in an embassy or in a British jail, seeking to stay out of reach of U.S. imperialism. As we wrote in 2010, "Make no mistake, Julian Assange is in real danger from the same imperialist war criminals that have Bradley [now Chelsea] Manning in a military jail. Hands off Julian Assange and WikiLeaks!"² Some of Assange's defenders, as well as in the media and among the signers of the February 8 letter to the Justice Department, had hopes that the new Democratic administration would drop Trump's extradition request and possibly even the indictment. But in its personnel and policies, the Biden administration is very much a continuation of Obama's, which prosecuted more whistleblowers than all previous U.S. governments combined (8 out of 14 cases).

The fate of Julian Assange hangs in the balance. The founder and publisher of Wikileaks, which deeply wounded the imperialist beast, is in the clutches of the capitalist "justice" system. Whether he will ever walk free again is unknown. Even if the U.S. appeal is turned down, that hardly means freedom for Assange (who is still being held in Britain's notorious Belmarsh

high-security prison). "He would have to spend the rest of his life looking over his shoulder and it would not be safe to leave the UK," said a former head of the extradition section of the Crown Prosecution Service (*Guardian*, 4 January). Recall that after Daniel Ellsberg's prosecution was dropped, the Nixon administration floated an "Ellsberg neutralization proposal" in which a dozen CIA *gusano* assets would "totally incapacitate" him at a public rally.

The Internationalist Group demands no extradition, freedom for Julian Assange and dropping of all charges against him, as well as against Edward Snowden. They and Chelsea Manning were charged with espionage, precisely for their "crime" of exposing to public scrutiny a small part of the skullduggery, bloody subversion and wanton slaughter carried out by the U.S. espionage agencies and other components of the U.S. imperialist behemoth under the cloak of official secrecy. The real criminals are the spymasters and warmongers in Washington who have launched the vendetta against these champions of our right – your right – to know what the biggest mass murderers in the world, the United States government, are up to. ■

Hunts Point...

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of politics our country needs." No, working people do not need the politics of the bosses' Democratic Party, which even when it claims to support unions only does so in order to subjugate them to capitalist "law and order." A clear example is what the Democratic mayor of Chicago, Lori Lightfoot, is doing right now, attempting to break the power of the Chicago Teachers Union.

For Hunts Point workers, the strike showed that it is possible to win gains, however modest, against hard-nosed bosses out to squeeze ever more profit out of the workers' toil. For our student, youth, immigrant worker and other comrades who joined in defending the picket lines, it was an energizing experience of class struggle. The task now is to organize militant struggle against the whole decaying capitalist system. To build up union power, we need to forge a class-struggle leadership of labor, break the chains binding the working class to the Democratic Party and build a workers party that champions all the oppressed in the fight for a workers government. ■

Vicious Anti-Union Intimidation at Yakima Fruit Packing Plant

MARCH 7 – On February 26, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ordered a hearing on a complaint by *Trabajadores Unidos por la Justicia* (TUI – Workers United for Justice) representing fruit packinghouse workers in the Yakima Valley, Washington. The NLRB found merit in the union’s charge that the employer, Allan Brothers, engaged in a long list of acts of coercion against the TUI and its own employees. These practices were used against the Yakima strike last spring, when the mainly women workers courageously walked out at the height of the coronavirus pandemic demanding protective gear, cleaning of the plant and hazard pay. The same dirty tactics were used again successfully against the drive for union recognition in the fall.

The effort to organize a union grew out of the historic strike wave of fruit packing workers last year at a time when Yakima County had a higher rate of COVID-19 infection than anywhere else on the West Coast. (See “Victory to Yakima Packinghouse Strikers!” *The Internationalist*, 17 May 2020). It began in the early morning May 7, when workers walked out of Allan Bros. protesting dangerous conditions in the crowded plant that led to the spread of the disease among the workers. One of the strikers, David Cruz, would later die of the disease. The strike movement quickly spread to other packinghouses in the Valley. From Naches to Yakima to Selah, workers were fed up with poverty wages and management’s disregard for their health and safety in the midst of a deadly plague.

This movement inspired workers across the country and was something the Yakima Valley hadn’t seen in decades. But as the weeks on strike wore on, the balance of forces became clear. The strikers were isolated in one of the most right-wing counties in Washington. Production and shipping continued. Unions across the state offered words of solidarity but did not mobilize to form effective picket lines. The strikes gained the verbal “support” of politicians, priests, pastors and nonprofit staffers. But Facebook “likes” and press releases don’t win strikes. Company by company, the workers agreed to return to work in exchange for promises of no retaliation, attention to health and safety, and continued negotiations over wages. As the companies gained the upper hand, they went on the offensive, showing how little their promises are worth.

The AFL-CIO bureaucracy left the strikes to wither on the vine. Only at Allan Brothers was there a formal attempt to gain union recognition. Yet by the time the vote was held according to the schedule set by the NLRB, months after the last strikes had folded, the companies had the momentum and a captive audience for their union-busting pitch. The anti-union campaign was unrelenting and unconstrained by legal formalities. Workers were threatened that the union would check their immigration papers. They were offered Wal-Mart gift cards as bribes, managers “helped” fill out election ballots. Union supporters were



“Join the union!” Activists of Yakima packinghouse workers union, *Trabajadores Unidos por la Justicia* (Workers United for Justice), campaigning for union recognition in October.

silenced and kept off company property while full-time company “consultants” covered every shift, every day, subjecting workers one by one to whatever promises or threats might bend their will.

The vicious union-busting campaign helps explain the outcome of the NLRB-supervised representation election, whose results were announced on December 29, in which the TUI lost badly, by a vote of 25 for the union and 234 against. The lopsided vote in itself was suspicious, as more than 100 workers actively joined in the May-June strike. The board found that Allan Brothers, by threatening to fire employees if they paid attention to strikers; denying off-duty workers access to non-work areas to distribute union materials; taking down license plate numbers and surveilling union supporters; threatening to and calling police to stop distribution of union literature, and prohibiting employees from talking about the union while in the plant, was “interfering with, restraining and coercing employees” in exercising their labor rights.

In addition, it found that other actions by the employer could be grounds for overturning the election, including harassing and threatening union activists; telling employees it was futile to form a union because the company would not negotiate in good faith with a union anyway; selectively enforcing a no-talking rule against union supporters; circulating an anti-union petition during worktime when the TUI was denied any access; holding an anti-union raffle during the election period; bribing employees with \$100 gift cards and filling out and mailing ballots with “no” votes were particularly outrageous. Elsewhere, known and suspected union activists at several plants have been fired and blacklisted, while the few holdouts face daily harassment from supervisors. So much for “democracy” and the “right to organize” in the workplace!

The fact is, companies use such blatant threats, reprisals and hardball tactics all the time to prevent unionization, even when they are supposedly illegal. They figure, so what if, months or years later, the NLRB might end up slapping the company for some of its more blatant offenses? It’s just

a cost of doing business. Touch the vital interests of capital and the capitalists will remind you that this is their dictatorship, and they will defend it by any means necessary. Had the union won the vote, the legal obligation to bargain “in good faith” is no guarantee that the workers would have gained anything. Whether the workers or the bosses prevail in the class struggle is determined by power, and the root cause of the TUI defeat in the vote is that the potential power of the working class was never put into action.

At the outset of the strike, we wrote (in “Victory to Yakima Packinghouse Strikers”): “Strikes must aim to shut the packing houses tight until the owners cede to the workers and their eminently modest demands. Key to that is organizing solidarity – not words, but action.... unions across the state must mobilize now to **build mass picket lines to win the strike**...” They did not. In the fall, the campaign for union recognition was largely left to local union activists. The pro-capitalist labor leaders’ eyes were fixed elsewhere: on winning gains for their masters in the Democratic Party at the November elections. Any struggle going beyond symbolic protest and moral witnessing would have risked embarrassing the Democrats who run the state.

Despite the courage and determination of the strikers who led the strikes and went on to campaign for a union at Allan Bros., the AFL-CIO tops stood back and played by the rules while the bosses waged a take-no-prisoners counterattack in the months leading up to the election. As warned last May:

“Almost 25 years ago, the Teamsters and United Farm Workers with great fanfare launched a joint organizing drive in the valley’s farms and packing houses. The bosses were able to neutralize the campaign, knowing that the system of NLRB-regulated unionism could ensnare and wear down any union that stuck to its rules, especially in an industry with a seasonal workforce. Play by the bosses’ rules and you’re bound to lose.”

Now the NLRB hearing is set for May 4. Despite the defeatist, legalist policies of the official labor leadership, the fight is not

over and there may now be another chance to mobilize to unionize the valley. But that requires a very different kind of trade-unionism, one based on hard class struggle rather than the class collaboration of the present labor officialdom.

In their loyalty to the capitalist state, the misleaders of labor guide every attempt at organizing the workers not by the laws and tempos of the class struggle, but by the regulations and calendar decreed by the NLRB. These standard procedures are designed to tame the working class, to tie up the unions in chains that prevent the workers from exercising their power. So long as the workers are not in a position to break these chains once and for all, the Board and its rulings cannot simply be ignored, and real openings for struggle must be made use of. But the fact that Democrat Joe Biden has replaced Republican Donald Trump will not change the fact that the NLRB is an agency of the *bosses’* government, an instrument of the ruling class.

As we wrote at the end of the May strikes, “Yakima Strikes: The Battle Has Just Begun” (*The Internationalist* No. 60, May-July 2020): “A successful union-organizing drive extending to the Tri-Cities area to the east will require a leadership that goes beyond narrow ‘business unionism’ to defend all oppressed groups.” An all-out fight for unions in this rancher-dominated area would surely be met with attacks by the I.C.E. immigration cops (who use Yakima as a staging point for deportation flights) and by the fascistic and outright fascist thugs who infest the region. Thus workers’ power must be mobilized as well in struggles against raids and deportations, for full citizenship rights for all immigrants, and for defense of Latinos, African Americans and Native Americans against police repression and racist attacks.

To undertake genuine class-struggle unionism, forging a revolutionary leadership is key. What is essential now for the worker militants of Yakima is to draw the lessons from their battles over the last year, in order to go forward in the next round. Some will drop by the wayside, as often happens after setbacks. It’s those with the sticktoitiveness, class consciousness and determination to win who are decisive. James P. Cannon, the founder of the Trotskyist movement in the U.S., who came out of the I.W.W. syndicalists that were strong in the Pacific Northwest, summed up the perspective that guided the strikes that established the Teamsters as a powerful industrial union in 1934:

“Our people didn’t believe in anybody or anything but the policy of the class struggle and the ability of the workers to prevail by their mass strength and solidarity.... They knew that power, not diplomacy, would decide the issue.”

–“The Great Minneapolis Strikes,” in *The History of American Trotskyism* (1944)

“Our people” are to be found today among the heroic women workers of the Yakima valley. The task now is to win the most determined and dedicated militants to the struggle to build an internationalist workers party fighting for a workers government. ■

Amanda Ray / Yakima Herald-Republic



Racist rioters brandished the battle flag of the slaveowners' Confederacy and the KKK terrorists.

Capitol Riot...

continued from page 1

"The president incited the mob. The president addressed the mob. He lit the flame."

Scripted Mayhem, Police Connivance

The mayhem was scripted by the president himself, though of course the cowardly macho-man reneged on his vow to march with his followers to the capitol. "A senior White House aide said Trump wanted his supporters to swarm the Capitol and protest loudly all day," the *Washington Post* (7 January) reported. But, the aide was quoted as claiming, "There was no plan for them to go inside." In fact, the mob was milling around outside on the balcony and steps for an hour before managing to get in the building. Once they were inside, Trump watched on television for over two hours until people were starting to leave, when he posted a (pre-recorded) video saying it was time to go home. In that video he proclaimed his "love" for the "very special" rioters, insisted that the election was stolen and told them to "Remember this day forever!" Which they will, of course. The fact that they stormed the U.S. Capitol and got away with it will embolden racists and fascists for years – and not just to vote for Trump or his surrogates, but also to attack black people, immigrants and all who would block their drive to "take back" what they proclaim is their country.

That the assault was facilitated by the police is also beyond doubt. The cops and military were obviously monitoring the social media where the fascists were openly talking of plans for the armed assault. Moreover, ultra-rightists' armed takeover of the Michigan legislature last May had already set the pattern. From the outset in Washington, rioters surged past barriers and up the steps with scarcely any serious opposition from the Capitol Police. Subsequently videos have surfaced showing police opening barriers and standing back to let the mob in. A livestream video by the fascists shows an invader taking a selfie with a police officer. There are a few photos of scuffles over barriers and a brief standoff in the basement, but once the crowd was in, the very few police outside disappeared. Inside, the cops let the rioters have the run of building, invading and rifling offices, taking over the Senate, and then let them leave unhindered.¹ "Law enforcement experts said they were mystified by the tactics that police used once the mob

was already inside the Capitol," the *Washington Post* reported. That the police weren't just "overwhelmed," that police collaborated with the mob, that this was policy, is clear. The only "mystery" – so far – is who decided it.

You couldn't miss the stunning contrast between this "kid glove" treatment on January 6 of the white supremacist mob and the wanton brutality unleashed against Black Lives Matter demonstrators peacefully protesting on June 3 in Lafayette Park, a public space, against racist police murder. It immediately struck us, along with countless other activists (and even the bourgeois media and politicians) – if black and other anti-racist demonstrators had sought to redress their grievances by converging on Congress, much less storming the building, they would have been shot down. It's all one more confirmation that the police at every level are a white supremacist institution, and have been since their inception as slave patrols in the early 19th century. Nor was this equivalent to the workers' occupation of the Wisconsin state capitol in 2011 (which we enthusiastically participated in) to protest a vicious anti-labor bill. This was a racist mob bent on destruction and seeking to halt one of the functions of Congress with the most far-reaching consequences, which the mob did with impunity.

When the *New York Times* (7 January) writes of "violent clashes between protesters and law enforcement," those few incidents cannot obscure police connivance with the rioters. When the D.C. National Guard arrived at the end – after Trump and his Army and Defense secretaries had earlier blocked a request by the city to mobilize it – there were very few arrests, mostly for curfew violation. But now that Democratic mayor Muriel Bowser has issued a public emergency order until after Inauguration Day (January 20), it will surely be used against any anti-fascist protesters. Meanwhile, as Twitter and Facebook temporarily blocked Trump's accounts, various pundits and legal beagles are flirting with curtailing First Amendment rights ("Have Trump's Lies Wrecked Free Speech?" *New York Times*, 6 January). Again, you can bet that any bans on "extremists" will be used against leftists and anti-racists far more than against the fascists who openly organized their Capitol bash on Parler and other right-wing social media.

That the attack on the U.S. Capitol was led by fascists is also undeniable, although barely mentioned in the bourgeois media. They had to notice that the first rioters who stormed into the Capitol were brandishing the Confederate battle flag, though they left unsaid that this banner of slavery is also that



This was a racist lynch mob. Rioters erected gallows, threatening to "hang traitors."

of the racist terrorists of the Ku Klux Klan. There were also numerous QAnon flags, and the green "Kekistan" flag (based on the WWII German battle flag) used by fascists. There were gallows with a hangman's noose – a threat of lynching – set up outside. Nazi provocateur Tim Gionet (aka "Baked Alaska") was livestreaming from inside the building. Inside the Capitol, one of the fascists wore a sweatshirt hailing the Nazi death camp Auschwitz. And prominent among those at the front of the rioters were III Percenters (who brag about their connections to police and military), Oath Keepers and Proud Boys, wearing a different uniform than usual, with orange caps. Orange armbands and tags were also noted in similar pro-Trump mobs in state capitals in Arkansas, California, Minnesota, Oregon and elsewhere.

There was a surreal quality to aspects of the fascist-led assault, including a QAnon "shaman" with a horned helmet made of fur pelts, stars-and-stripes face paint and Norse tattoos. Another rioter with a fur pelt and a fox skin on his head stood out among the camouflage jackets and MAGA caps. But it was no joke: the invaders were armed and dangerous. During the storming, two pipe bombs and a cooler full of Molotov cocktails (gasoline bombs) were found on Capitol grounds. One of the camo-clad rioters had a handful of zip ties, indicating intentions of taking hostages, again echoing the events in Michigan last May. Had they gotten their hands on Nancy Pelosi or one of the "Squad" (Ilhan Omar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley and Rashida Tlaib) vilified by Trump, or others, these fascist and racist terrorists could well have carried out their murderous fantasies to "hang traitors."

After the rioters left, the assembled senators and representatives resumed "debate" on certifying the electors' votes for president state by state. While a few dropped their plans to challenge electors reflecting the popular vote (like Georgia, where the Democrats just won a by-election, replacing two Republican senators with two Democrats, giving the incoming Biden administration control of the Senate as well as the House), most did not. As the night wore on, there was one pious, nauseating speech after another praising the "bipartisan" rejection of "violence," "insurrection" and "sedition," instead endorsing "civility," "decency" and, of course, "our democracy." Of course, the rioters were foot soldiers for the blatantly anti-democratic ploy by the Republican defeat deniers to throw out tens of millions of votes – disenfranchising the voters of Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada and Pennsylvania. In

the end, Biden's victory was confirmed, but more than half of House Republicans voted not to recognize its legitimacy.

Repeatedly over the past weeks, media pundits have waxed lyrical about how the only thing holding the line for democracy has been the "good will" of a handful of officials, both Democratic and Republican. This despite all the civics lessons about checks and balances, the power and majesty of the Constitution, and the rest. What this underscores in reality is the crucial Marxist point that the state is fundamentally armed force in the service of the socially dominant (ruling) class. In capitalist society, that is the class of owners of the wealth and means of production. It is *their* (bourgeois) "democracy," and when their interests demand it, they can dispense with these forms and resort to untrammelled naked force. Countering the patriotic fairy tales of bourgeois ideology is an important part of unshackling the working-class power so urgently needed in defense of the rights of all.

As for bourgeois politicians' cloying appeals for bipartisan harmony and the rest of it as the pro-police duo of Biden and the vice president-elect, Kamala Harris, prepares to take charge of administering U.S. imperialism – the biggest and most dangerous enemy of the oppressed worldwide – Marxists stand in *irreconcilable opposition* to this and all administrations of the capitalist state. To unchain the power of the working class from capitalism's parties, politicians and institutions is the urgent task in order to defend the rights and interests of all the exploited and downtrodden, and to put an end to the depredations of U.S. imperialism once and for all.

What Next for U.S. Capitalism?

In the aftermath of the January 6 riot in the Capitol, key sectors of the U.S. ruling class are worried about Donald Trump remaining in office, even for the 13 days left of his term. An alarmed National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), the U.S.' premier business lobby and longtime Trump ally, denounced "mob rule," declaring that "The outgoing president incited violence in an attempt to retain power." The NAM called on Vice President Mike Pence and the cabinet to exercise the 25th Amendment, which would allow removal of Trump as president for being "unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office." Unsurprisingly, Pence refused. Today the two top Congressional Democrats, Senator Chuck Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, called for the impeachment of Trump for inciting armed insurrection. MSNBC host and former Republican Congressman Joe

¹ One of the rioters was shot and killed as they sought to break into the House chambers. A Capitol police officer has reportedly died of injuries.

Scarborough called for Trump, Giuliani and Donald Jr. to be arrested on the same charges. Several Trump administration officials have resigned, rats leaving a sinking ship.

Yet Trump is not the only one responsible for inciting the mob. There are quite a few Trump sycophants and enablers in Congress, some of whom have now opportunistically turned on him (like the execrable neo-Confederate senator Lindsay Graham), but who are all accomplices and co-conspirators. Ultimately, they – together with their Democratic rivals and colleagues – are all bourgeois politicians, representing the same class interests. Recall Barack Obama’s words following Donald Trump’s victory in the 2016 election: “We have to remember that we’re actually all on one team. This is an intramural scrimmage.” Obama said then that what he heard from Trump was “Respect for our institutions. Our way of life. Rule of law.” Really? So was January 6, an “intramural scrimmage,” marked by respect for the “rule of law”? Leading spokesmen for capital have concluded that Trump is an unhinged adventurer, prepared to sacrifice the interests of their “team” for his own, and that he must be stopped before he does more damage to “our institutions.” At this point, they’re just not sure how to do it.

The capitalist establishment has some problems in that respect: 74 million people voted for Trump, three-quarters of all Republicans say he was robbed of victory by (non-existent) massive voter fraud, and he now has a potential party fighting force of some tens of thousands, many of them heavily armed, fanatically devoted to him. While bourgeois detractors often portray him as just a crazy person, in denial about the election, he has created an organizing myth, the “stolen election,” akin to Hitler’s use of the myth of the “*Dolchstoß*,” the supposed stab in the back by Jews and communists, to explain Germany’s loss in World War I. Trump does not head up a mass fascist movement such as arose in Italy and Germany after WWI, and the motley crew that stormed the Capitol on January 6 aren’t disciplined shock troops like Mussolini’s Black Shirts and Hitler’s Brownshirts. They more closely resemble the rabble that Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, then president of the French Second Republic, gathered around him as he sought to become emperor in 1851.² Like the little Napoléon, Trump would like to use the January 6 mob as his private army for his next adventure.

Many liberals think Trump wants to be like Putin in Russia or Erdoğan in Turkey, an authoritarian elected president. But being an emperor would be more fitting for his grandiose self-image. As if. Over the weekend, Trump begged Republican officials in Georgia to fix the votes for him so *he* could steal the election (while accusing the Democrats of doing so). But he had no quid for the quo,

² Louis Napoléon was the nephew of Napoléon Bonaparte, who proclaimed himself emperor in 1804 after putting an end to the ten years of turmoil following the French Revolution of 1789 with his Coup of 18 Brumaire (9 November 1799, according to the French revolutionary calendar). Karl Marx, in his famous pamphlet, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), described the lesser Napoléon’s ragtag crew (the Society of December 10) as made up of “vagabonds, cashiered soldiers, ex-convicts, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, idle riff-raff, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, pimps, brothel keepers, porters, literati, organ grinders, ragpickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars.” This *lumpenproletariat*, or proletariat in rags, Marx wrote, was called upon “to play the part of the people” in Louis Napoléon’s various schemes.

The Opportunist Left: Still Tailing the Democrats

So what has “the left” to say? Those who openly called for votes for Biden, like the Maoist-derived cult of the RCP/Refuse Fascism, naturally repeat the Democrats’ talk of a “coup attempt by Trump” and call “for the ‘decent people’ to make clear their determination to stop this fascist danger” (revcom.us, 6 January). The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) call for “mass mobilization in the streets” and “Building a movement to fight the far right” (*Jacobin*, 7 January). Socialist Alternative, which makes ritual criticisms of the Democrats, also talks of “Trump’s coup attempt” and also calls to “Build a Movement to Defeat the Far Right” (*Socialist Alternative*, 7 January). This is your classic “fight the right” *popular front* of class collaboration. Opportunist leftists are always on the lookout for a new “movement” – antiwar, antifascist, antiimperialist – so as to cobble together a “coalition” with (sections of) the capitalist Democrats. It’s what they do: it gets you big marches, goes nowhere, and then it’s on to the next movement.

The Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) is currently taking a somewhat more leftist tack: no “coup” talk, instead declaring, “The menace of the far right can only be decisively defeated by a militant, united front of the multinational working class” (*Liberation*, 6 January). So they have class-angled it. What’s absent is any mention of (a) the Democratic Party, and (b) revolution. Workers World Party (WWP) issued a brief call (6 January) ending, “Fascist Coup NO! General Strike YES!” If there were a labor movement in the U.S. worth its salt, one could call for it

to smash the fascists, in which case the workers would also be confronted by the police and military backed up by the Democrats. But that militant workers movement doesn’t presently exist. In practice, both PSL and WWP are angling for a “united front” with pro-Democratic Party labor and community groups, as these Stalinoid reformists used to do when they were in one organization building antiwar popular fronts with “progressive” Democrats like Jesse Jackson.

In one way or another, directly or indirectly, the overwhelming bulk of the U.S. left lined up with Biden and the Democrats in the election. Now they have won and in much of the country, the Democratic Party has control of the capitalist state from top to bottom, from mayors and city councils, to governors and state legislatures, to Congress and the White House. Yet, as we in the Internationalist Group have underlined, the Democratic Party paved the way for Trump. Obama’s mass deportations of millions of immigrants fed the anti-immigrant hysteria that Trump whips up and exploits. Clinton’s “free trade” pacts are responsible for the shutdown of industry in the “Rust Belt,” which led many workers to vote for Trump with his fool’s gold of nationalist protectionism. And as we keep repeating, in every big city in the U.S., “Democrats are the bosses of the racist killer cops,” while Biden proclaims himself the cops’ best friend. Any real fight against fascist and racist attacks must be *explicitly waged against the Democratic Party*. As we wrote prior to the election, “You Can’t Fight Trump With Democrats,” and:

“Revolutionary Marxists must make it crystal clear that we would oppose the

attempt to install an authoritarian government by extra-legal means but do not call for Biden taking office, from which he will repress the working people, telling his pals the cops to shoot us in the leg while Harris moves to lock us up.” –“Repression Elections 2020,” *The Internationalist* No. 61, September-October 2020

Positioning itself on the left flank of the reformist left, the Left Voice group (affiliated internationally with the misnamed Trotskyist Faction) issued a statement on January 6 in which it criticizes the “electoral strategy” which has aligned the left with the Democratic Party and “siphoned our energy away from the streets and the workplaces.” While calling to break with the Democrats, it pushes for “massive demonstrations in the streets” and workplace actions “to fight back against the right wing and Trumpism.” This is the same “fight the right” line in different packaging. LV says: “we cannot trust the police or the National Guard to protect our rights and our lives.” Not *trust* the police or the National Guard? *It’s necessary to mobilize the power of the working class in the face of those racist repressive forces answering to the Democrats.*

Left Voice also says nothing about a revolutionary workers party, while anyone looking for calls for socialist revolution will encounter pleas to “tax the rich,” the common platform of social democrats and liberal Democrats. As for the very ex-Trotskyist Spartacist League, endless crisis and political degeneration have brought it to an apparent death spiral that echoes in sepulchral silence. ■

and was publicly humiliated as the tape of his wheedling, threatening call was released. So Trump turned to his last-ditch ploy, whipping up a mob, but he failed once again. That the powers that be knew it was coming was shown by the extraordinary January 4 letter by ten former secretaries of defense reminding the military that any effort to “involve the U.S. armed forces in resolving election disputes” would be “dangerous, unlawful and unconstitutional” and any officials involved would face “criminal penalties, for the grave consequences of their actions on our republic.” The Pentagon snapped to attention.

When Louis-Napoléon staged his December 1851 self-coup proclaiming himself French emperor, he had the backing of top generals. In the U.S. today, Trump only had the convicted ex-general Michael Flynn to conspire with about invoking the Insurrection Act of 1807 to impose martial law. The Pentagon generals fight for Wall Street. They got their tax cuts and are done with Trump. They have no appetite to stick their necks out for President Bonespurs (Trump got a medical deferment from the Vietnam draft by claiming bone spurs on his feet).

Biden wants to form a bipartisan Party of Order. But his lame calls for “decency” and unity, for “reaching across the aisle,” fly in the face of the everyone-for-himself, “*sauve-qui-peut*” (save yourself if you can) mentality of today’s bourgeois rulers. Capitalists flip from one bubble to the next, looking for speculative profits before they burst, as the capitalist system is putrefying before our eyes. They are cashing out

of many companies and with their “golden parachutes” buying retreats in New Zealand and Patagonia, as far from Wall Street as they can get. Likewise, the “take no prisoners” style of Republican politics goes hand in hand with the outlook of many lawyers, epitomized by Giuliani but far more widespread, whose attitude toward the “rule of law” is to grab anything they can get away with, and the stability of the system be damned. They all fit well with a would-be authoritarian megalomaniac who holds that the truth is whatever he says it is, and that as president he could do anything he wants. But if he no longer can, many jump ship.

U.S. rulers are deeply split, reflecting the declining fortunes of American capitalism. The “American century” that began when the U.S. walked away with the victor’s spoils in World War II was to be followed by a “New World Order” of unchallenged U.S. imperialist hegemony after the counterrevolution that swept the Soviet bloc in 1989-92. Instead, there was world disorder, of “wars without end,” and the devastating consequences of the 2007-08 financial crash that unleashed a decade-long worldwide capitalist depression. That led to deepening social decay, reflected politically in the Tea Party movement and socially by the ravages of the opioid crisis, both fed by despair of ruined petty bourgeois and permanently unemployed workers. That is also a major factor in lower-middle-class and working-class votes for Trump. And now the coronavirus pandemic, the worst plague in a century that has killed 363,000 in the U.S. and 1.8 million+ worldwide, has set off an

even deeper economic crisis, whose effects are only beginning to be felt.

While denouncing Trump, the Democrats avidly uphold the extraordinary, and deeply anti-democratic, powers of the presidency, built up even further during the Obama years. So how can Biden “unite the nation”? We have warned that war with China is a prime option: trade war, economic war against Chinese companies, and possibly provoking some military skirmishes in the South China Sea. It would cement ties with the Pentagon, which has been planning for this since Obama’s 2012 “pivot to Asia,” which never got off the ground because the U.S. was bogged down in the Middle East. Senate Republicans, who have promised to grill Biden cabinet choices on their position on China, would quickly jump on board. So would the misleaders of labor, who have long pushed poisonous anti-China protectionism. The opportunist left, which falsely calls China capitalist and even imperialist (and hailed the U.S.-backed “democracy” riots in Hong Kong, would barely object. Public opinion is primed with war propaganda blaming China for COVID-19, although it contained the plague while the response of the capitalist West has been a deadly disaster. But Biden would be playing with fire.

In the face of this wall-to-wall anti-China front, *the Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International call to defend China – a bureaucratically deformed workers state – against imperialist attacks and threats, and against the danger of internal counterrevolution.*

After January 6: What Is To Be Done?

The mob storming of the national Capitol is a first-ever in U.S. history, and has shaken the entire country. The capitalist ruling class is seeking to regroup. The Republican Party could split, or not. The Democratic Biden administration will militantly enforce its right-wing policies in the name of “bipartisan” unity with “moderate” Republicans. There will likely be increased repression against the left and movements for black rights, as the police are chafing at the bit after the millions-strong protests against racist cop repression last summer. Soon, with millions barely living off of unemployment insurance and unable to pay their rents, the bite of the coronavirus economic depression will come, as vast numbers face joblessness and homelessness. Thus a strategy for working people and the oppressed today can by no means be limited to “fight the far right.” Reformist tinkering (“Green New Deal,” “Medicare for All”) with bankrupt capitalism will go nowhere. What’s needed is a **strategy leading to socialist revolution**.

What does that mean in the concrete? For the last four years, the outsize figure of Donald Trump has dominated U.S. politics. Rejecting the racist, xenophobic, misogynist hater-in-chief, many young people, working people, African Americans, Latinos and immigrants have their hopes pinned on the Democrats. When Biden’s victory was announced, there was massive

spontaneous rejoicing, with horns honking and dancing in the streets in cities across the country. But Marxists most decidedly did not join in – the Democrats are a party of Wall Street, they are a party of racist repression, a party of imperialist aggression, a crucial pillar of the whole system of capitalist exploitation that has bred stratospheric inequality and mass misery, paving the way for Trump. Most of the U.S. wars of the last century (WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Syria) have been waged by Democratic administrations. The Democratic Party, no less than the Republican, is our class enemy, and in many ways, it is the more dangerous enemy, as people’s illusions in it are systematically fostered and used for subjugating the working class to its exploiters and oppressors. So, crucially and key to everything else, it is necessary to **break with the Democrats**.

What then? Just organizing in the streets? By itself, that amounts to pressuring the Democrats, a dead end. Look at what happened with the Black Lives Matter protests last summer. When after the cop murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis millions went into the street, week after week, to denounce institutionalized racism, Democratic mayors and city councils promised reforms of the police. The protests were deflected into appeals to “defund the police,” and in the end nothing has changed. Racist cops still kill with impunity. “Speaking truth to power,” appeals to conscience and moral suasion will get nothing. Against a powerful enemy, and

the Democrats under Joe Biden are exactly that, we need to mobilize a greater power, and that is the power of the working class. So a key task is the fight to **build a workers party**, a party with a program for class struggle to defend all the oppressed. We need a party that fights for full citizenship rights for immigrants; a party that defends women, demanding free abortion on demand and free 24-hour daycare; a party that fights against any and all discrimination and victimization on account of sexuality.

This fight cannot just be waged on paper. With the fascists on a tear, there must be a concerted effort to build **workers defense guards** and **mobilize workers action against racist attacks**. The Left Voice statement on the January 6 events ends with an abstract call to “develop our self-defense based on the democratic organization of the working class and the oppressed.” The real way to stop the fascists and racists is with **workers power**. The Internationalist Group and our comrades in Class Struggle Workers – Portland have for years fought to bring out labor to stop the likes of the mob that stormed the Capitol. After Trump’s 2016 election, we initiated resolutions passed by seven area unions (and subsequently by the International Union of Painters nationally) calling for “mobilizing against the clear and present danger that the provocations of racist and fascist organizations pose to us all.” In August 2016, Portland Painters Local 10 passed a resolution calling to break with the Democrats and Re-

publicans and for a class-struggle workers party. And following murderous fascist attacks, Portland Labor Against the Fascists brought out hundreds of union supporters on 4 June 2017.

More broadly, there is an urgent need to **organize the unorganized** in a fight for unionization of plants and workplaces across the country. A particular focus should be giant corporations such as Amazon, which has hired hundreds of thousands of workers as package delivery skyrocketed during the pandemic. A class-struggle campaign there can highlight the explosive growth of inequality, as Amazon profits have soared. The net worth of its owner, Jeff Bezos – \$180 billion, making him the richest man in the world – has increased so much that it has been calculated that he could pay \$105,000 to each of his employees (most of whom barely make the minimum wage) and still be as filthy rich as he was before the coronavirus hit.¹ Meanwhile, as of October 1, almost 20,000 Amazon employees have fallen ill with COVID. Such figures can drive home the vicious exploitation and disregard for workers’ safety. But the hard work of organizing requires a class-struggle program independent of the Democratic Party and which takes on the pro-Democrat labor bureaucracy which has blocked a successful union organizing drive. ■

¹ Oxfam, *Power, Profits and the Pandemic* (September 2020).

Capitalist “Democracy” Is Bankrupt – For a Workers Government!

Marxists could clearly see yesterday’s fascist/racist mob attack coming. A year and a half ago, as campaigning for the 2020 election got underway, we warned, “The intensity of political clashes in the ruling class recalls the period leading up to the U.S. Civil War.... Today, the intensity of the political clashes in Washington and the provocations of violent racist and outright fascist groups raise the spectre of civil war. Certainly, sectors of Trump’s most rabid base yearn to avenge the defeat of the vile Confederacy. Yet there are fundamental differences from the U.S. of a century and a half ago” (“Dangerous Racist Provocations in Pre-Election Maneuvering,” *The Internationalist* No. 57, September-October 2019). “The frenzy of bigotry from the highest levels of government underlines again the connection between anti-black racism and anti-immigrant racism,” we wrote, underscoring that “Would-be leftists who sow illusions in Democratic ‘resistance’ can only help disarm real struggle against racist reaction.”

There have been a lot of comparisons between the present crisis and what followed the presidential elections of 1876. Yesterday, the *New York Times* (6 January) ran an article with the headline, “You Think This Is Chaos? The Election of 1876 Was Worse.” That contested election led to the rotten “Compromise of 1877” which gave the presidency to the Republican in exchange for abandoning Reconstruction and pulling U.S. troops out of the occupied former Confederacy. That signal betrayal of the former slaves, on top of the failure to expro-

priate the slaveowners’ lands after the abolition of slavery, led to the rise of the KKK terrorists and then the Jim Crow segregation that institutionalized white supremacy and black subjugation in the South for another 90 years. Those are the “good old days” that the mob of fascist-led racists who stormed the U.S. Capitol yearn for. African Americans and all working people are still paying the price for the failure to rip out the slave system by the roots following the Civil War.

Today the legacy of slavery is still with us, particularly in the racist death penalty, mass incarceration and wanton police murder of black people. It is also enshrined in the institutions of what pious liberals and labor officials praise as “our democracy.” Among the most flagrant examples are the Electoral College and the Senate, along with the Supreme Court. (See “Slavery and the Constitution,” *Revolution* No. 17, August 2020.) Even consistent bourgeois democra-

cy (“one person, one vote”) would demand the abolition of these reactionary bodies. Yet capitalist “democracy” is so corroded and hollowed-out by the gangrenous rot of capitalist society that the only real defense of democratic rights for the masses lies in the fight for the proletarian democracy of a workers government. This would not be based on the cynical charades of the puppets of capital – whose campaigns depend on billions from Wall Street (over \$500 million in the Georgia runoffs) – but on workers councils chosen directly by the working people.

Labor bureaucrats or reformist leftists may call to “fight the far right” in the name of “defense of democracy” Against fascist and racist marauders, and against the constant murderous violence of the bourgeois state, Marxists are the most intransigent defenders of democratic rights. In fact, all the democratic liberties of the mass of the population were won by bitter struggle against

the ruling class. But to defend those rights, it is crucial to state clearly that this is not “our democracy.” The owners of wealth, of land, of the means of production, transport and communications can sweep away all constitutions and legal guarantees if they decide their interests demand it – as has happened so many times in history, from Italy (Mussolini’s fascists) and Germany (Hitler’s Nazis) to Chile (Pinochet’s military junta) and elsewhere. In fact, bourgeois democracy is a cloak for the dictatorship of the exploiting class against the workers and oppressed.

In the lead-up to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, V.I. Lenin stressed, citing Friedrich Engels, that the core of the capitalist state consists of “special bodies of armed men” protecting the power and property of the ruling class. It cannot be reformed away or pressured into becoming an instrument of “the people” – mass struggle by the workers and oppressed, culminating in socialist revolution, must sweep it away to make way for a workers government, the proletarian democracy of workers councils (soviets). Right-wingers ludicrously condemn the Democrats – the oldest capitalist party in the world – as “socialists” and even “communists.” To defend the lives, most basic interests and hard-won rights of the workers and oppressed requires above all a struggle to forge a **revolutionary workers party** based on the genuine communist program of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, the program of international socialist revolution. In these times of a deadly coronavirus pandemic, racist attacks by the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state and its fascist auxiliaries, and another capitalist depression, forging that party is key to winning a real future for workers and youth, here and around the world. ■



Police treated fascist-led white supremacist rioters with kid gloves. Contrast that to how thousands of federal agents were mobilized in riot gear to prevent Black Lives Matter demonstrators from protesting racist cop murder. Above: Bureau of Prison police without insignias at Lincoln Memorial, 4 June 2020.

Win McNamee/Getty Images

Mobilize the Power of the Working Class to Stop Racist/Fascist Terror! The Left Party Is a Reformist Dead-End – Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!

German Capitalism Prepares for Class War

Bourgeois Consensus Closes Ranks Behind Fascist-Infested Police and Army

The following article is translated from *Permanente Revolution* No. 5, Spring 2021, published by our comrades of the *Internationalistische Gruppe in Germany*.

“Dividends rising, proletarians falling,” wrote the revolutionary Marxist Rosa Luxemburg during the slaughter of the First World War. A century later, amid the Corona pandemic, 75,000 have died of the disease in Germany (as of March 25) – a death toll that has more than doubled since January 1 – out of 2.7 million worldwide. Yet the dividends of the 30 blue chip firms on Germany’s DAX stock market index shot up to 37 billion euros at the end of 2020, rising 14% over the previous year. Although full economic recovery is not expected until 2022, the business press noted that German industrial exports have been “resilient.”

Up until the summer, Germany seemed to have limited the spread of the virus with its testing and isolation program and a relatively high ratio of doctors and hospital beds to the population. Ultimately, the “lockdown light” measures proved insufficient, not just because of summer vacations, or because of party-goers in Berlin or any individual comportment. The “second wave” was particularly due to state and federal government lifting travel restrictions and allowing broad reopening of commerce in response to pressure from capitalist interests, and to the fact that millions of workers are laboring in major plants under unsafe conditions, with wholly inadequate personal protection.

This has led to major outbreaks, notably at Tönnies meatpacking plants, as well as in Amazon distribution centers, which in December become “hot spots” with a quarter or more of the workers infected in Bavaria (Bayreuth) and Baden-Württemberg (Graben), as the company simply dismissed toothless complaints by the Ver.di union. Even the renewed “hard lockdown” of Winter 2020-21 exempts such firms. In the United States, where Amazon has reported over 20,000 COVID cases, our comrades of the Internationalist Group and Class Struggle Workers – Portland have agitated for workers to take action through workplace safety committees to shut down unsafe operations, as well as for a battery of transitional demands.¹

The new coronavirus wave emphasized the gap between private wealth and public poverty by testing the limits of hospital capacity. In this context, it was a cold-blooded provocation when the Bertelsmann Foundation – those high priests of the profit system who seem to inspire Free Democratic, Christian Democratic (CDU) and Social Democratic (SPD) party programs – reiterated its calls to further reduce that capacity by clos-

¹ See “CSWP Calls for Workers Action in Coronavirus Crisis” (18 March 2020), reprinted in *The Internationalist* No. 59 (April-July 2020).



Right-wing protesters in Berlin wave German imperial flag outside the Reichstag Building, 8 August 2020.

ing more than half the hospitals in Germany, from 1,400 to 600, while complaining that, “In Germany there are still too many patients coming into hospitals” (*tagesschau*, 28 December 2020)! Well before the pandemic, the bourgeoisie was floating plans to cut back health care and raise the age of retirement.

These plans have now been concretized by the steel and auto industry cartel Gesamtmetall’s “Proposals for the 2nd and 3rd Phase of the Corona Crisis” of May 2020. In the plan, the metalworking industry chiefs demand that there be “no tax increases” and “no new tax burdens,” particularly environmental charges. It opposed planned limits on short-term job contracts and insisted on the right to end contracts or temporary jobs for any reason (all in the name of “flexibility”). It calls to put an end to retirement at age 63, to lower the minimum pension rate and to end the “enormously expensive” pensions for mothers! These are certainly “social cuts of historic dimensions,” as Hans-Jürgen Urban of the IG Metall union accurately called them.

The metal bosses’ demands for a “tax-burden moratorium” were addressed to the ruling CDU-SPD coalition, but in view of the increasing probability of its replacement by a CDU-Green lash-up, it should be remembered that the last dramatic austerity measures of “historic dimensions” – embodied in the Hartz IV program of 2004 that introduced forced labor (1 euro jobs) and steep benefit cuts for the unemployed – was the work of an SPD and Green government. The Left Party is likewise complicit in the administration of capitalist austerity in various states, including the slow destruction of public transport through privatization in Berlin.

The German bourgeoisie is projecting a new offensive against workers’ living standards combined with major increases in military spending. It is anticipating and

preparing to crush social revolts – the new “anti-terror” armored cars displayed by the special units of various state police forces are weapons for internal war, as was the case with the police arsenal brought out during the 2017 G20 Summit in Hamburg (see “G20 Summit Police State Terror in Hamburg” (July 2017) reprinted in *The Internationalist* No. 50, Winter 2017). This is why all the bourgeois parties, and both social-democratic parties (SPD and the Left Party), have rallied to give police forces certificates of good conduct (*Persilscheine*), despite the almost-weekly revelations about their infestation with fascist elements.

Meanwhile, the coronavirus continues to spread with elevated positivity rates so that the tightened lockdown has now been extended in more limited form to the end of March, while virologists say that the first half of 2021 will be “complicated” – i.e., bad, and worse. And the vaccine rollout is a mess, with delivery delayed, inadequate quantities ordered and only half of the amounts on hand administered. Contrast this to China, with its socialized planned economy, where the virus was effectively contained with strict quarantine, isolation and treatment for all infected persons, along with lightning-quick construction of full-scale hospitals to treat thousands of COVID patients. This enabled the country to cautiously reopen early on, with less than 4,800 deaths out of a population of 1.5 billion.

The corona crisis is the proof: capitalism kills. We need to fight for revolution!

Fascist Infestation in the Police, Army, Intelligence Agencies

News reports about fascist or fascistic police officers, soldiers, Bundeswehr (Army) officers, Verfassungsschutz (VS – Office for the Protection of the Constitution)² officials, *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND – Federal

² Germany’s equivalent of the FBI in the U.S.

Intelligence Service)³ officials and prosecutors keep appearing week after week, month after month. In every branch of the police, military and intelligence apparatus, in every part of Germany: clearly, it is an infestation. Of course, they are only classified as “rightist,” “far right” or “extremist.” And the only measures taken are cosmetic, if that. Cabinet ministers, counterintelligence agencies, special investigators all vow: zero tolerance. But almost always the racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi officials stay. And quite often, the whistleblower who exposed the scandal goes, transferred or cashiered.

Last summer, there was the case of the secretive KSK (Kommando Spezialkräfte), an elite unit of the Bundeswehr that has been deployed with NATO forces in the Balkans and Afghanistan. Reports surfaced in 2017 about a party where members of the unit gave Hitler salutes as fascist music played. As a result of tips in early 2020, MAD (military counterintelligence) eventually searched the home of a sergeant-major (who had been under surveillance for three years) where they found Nazi literature and dug up an arsenal of weapons, explosives and a huge stash of munitions stolen from army stocks. The sergeant-major was arrested, KSK commander Markus Kreitmayr declared the affair “shocking,” an investigating commission was named and it was revealed that the MAD had 20 KSK soldiers under investigation for far-right ties.

Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer announced “Operation Iron Broom” to clean up the mess. In record time, a report was handed in, it was publicly announced that there were 48,000 rounds of ammunition (since raised to 85,000) missing from special forces stocks along with 62 kilos of explosives. On June 30, Kramp-Karrenbauer announced that one of the four companies of the KSK would be dissolved, and the special forces would have until October to reorganize, as a “last chance.” *Der Spiegel* (4 July) headlined: “Brown Hotspots.” But in November, an “interim report” by the general inspector of the Bundeswehr declared that most of the missing munitions were due to “miscounting” or “improper bookkeeping.”

Still, new revelations keep on coming. In September, 29 police officers in the state of Nordrhein-Westfalen, mostly in the city of Essen, were suspended for spreading swastikas, pictures of Hitler and drawings of immigrants in a gas chamber in five different Nazi chat groups. Also in September, the head of the MAD was dismissed for failing to detect “extremists” in the military. In October, the Verfassungsschutz issued a 98-page report recording more than 1,400 cases of suspected “right-wing extremists” in the military, police and intelligence agencies. Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, insisted that there was “no struc-

³ Germany’s equivalent of the CIA in the U.S.

tural problem,” but the report he presented declared that the presence of highly trained far-right officers constituted a “a significant danger for the state and for society.”

Then, promptly for New Year’s 2021, came the news that a German fascist gang was being supplied with heavy machine gun ammunition by a police weapons manufacturer – albeit an Austrian one this time. It’s not just a matter of missing munitions and fascist infiltration. A number of people have received death threats signed “NSU 2.0,” using information drawn from police data bases. Those targeted include the lawyer Seda Basay-Yildiz, a defender of the victims of the National Socialist Underground, the Nazi terror group which killed at least nine immigrants between 2001 and 2007, and the journalist Deniz Yücel. The authors of the death threats are still unknown, but the affair led to the discovery of a network involving dozens of cops.

In addition, there is the whole complex involving the right-wing survivalists known as “preppers.” This involves police and members of the army reserve, and extends into the KSK. Marko G., a sharpshooter with a Spezialeinsatzkommando (SWAT team) of the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern state police, led a “Nordkreuz” (Northern Cross) prepper chat group that was preparing for “Day X” in which the social order collapses. The group included a lawyer and detective chief commissioner who spoke of “rounding up and killing” leftist immigrant supporters on that day. They had already purchased dozens of body bags (with more on order), compiled enemies lists and stockpiled 40,000 rounds of ammunition. Several of these chat groups were moderated by a certain “Hannibal” – KSK soldier André S. – who also led Uniter, a paramilitary group of elite soldiers, cops and security guards (“The Enemy Within,” *Der Spiegel*, 8 August 2020).

Then there is “Franco A.,” an army officer suspected of preparing a provocation disguised as a refugee, who had attended Uniter meetings and was arrested retrieving a gun he had hidden in the Vienna Airport. He had carried out detailed reconnaissance preparing to kill a prominent Jewish anti-racist activist, Anneta Kahane. His anti-Semitic views (saying that the Old Testament was a blueprint for world domination by Jews, “the biggest conspiracy in the history of humanity”); his denunciation of immigration as preparing “genocide” by diluting racial purity; and his openly pro-Nazi sympathies were set out in a master’s thesis, which was flagged by officials at the French military academy at Saint-Cyr he was attending. But Bundeswehr officials only gave him a reprimand and didn’t bother to inform the MAD.

The latest revelation (from the NDR and WDR radio-TV networks) is that at the beginning of last year, the KSK command called for members of the elite unit to return stolen munitions “without consequences for the soldier concerned.” Tens of thousands of rounds ended up in the “amnesty boxes,” far more than had been reported missing (*tagesschau*, 21 February). But even after that, huge weapon and ammo stashes were found in the possession of far-right and fascist members of the military and police.

The pervasive indifference to and downright sabotage of investigating these cases is why solely blaming Interior Minister Seehofer (as various opportunist leftists do) for refusing an inquiry into German police racism amounts to an alibi for the bourgeois state. It turns out there are also fascist

cells in the Verfassungsschutz, for example, in Nordrhein-Westfalen (where they were in charge of monitoring... the fascists). And they have enjoyed protection from the highest levels of the state apparatus. VS chief Hans-Georg Maaßen was eventually forced to resign for defending the racist pogroms in Chemnitz in 2018. Now the CDU interior minister of the state of Sachsen-Anhalt, Holger Stahlknecht, is gone, for openly championing a coalition with the fascistic Alliance for Germany (AfD). And the CDU interior minister of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is out, as he personally bought a weapon from the “prepper” network there.

As we noted in the last issue of *Permanente Revolution* (Nr. 4, Winter 2019), the program of the majority of the German bourgeoisie is converging with that of the AfD. Thus Friedrich Merz, one of the main contenders in the succession war to replace Angela Merkel as federal chancellor (prime minister), demanded a full stop to admitting any more refugees, dragging out the rancid fascist propaganda line that there is a direct relation between the number of refugees and the number of German unemployed (*Die Welt*, 16 December 2020).

Imperial War Flag at the Bundestag

On August 30, while thousands of protesters against the coronavirus lockdowns marched on Unter den Linden, a motley crew of reactionaries and “Reichsbürger” fascists,⁴ brandishing the German Imperial war flag as an ersatz swastika, charged the seat of the Bundestag (federal parliament) in the Reichstag building (seat of the parliament of the German Empire) in Berlin. It was an international embarrassment for the CDU-SPD GroKo (Grand Coalition) regime, even if a handful of cops sufficed to drive them off.

This has been the pattern again and again. While heterogeneous, including a spectrum of eccentrics and faddists that the bourgeois press delights in labelling “hard left”, the “Querdenker” (maverick) movement is increasingly permeated by a range of anti-Semitic reactionaries and outright fascists. Given the whole history of police toleration of racist anti-immigrant, anti-refugee mobilizations, up to and including actual pogroms (as in Chemnitz 2018), the police attitude towards “Querdenker” is unsurprising. The anti-lockdown demonstrators were allowed to run amok in Leipzig on November 8; in Berlin ten days later, the cops’ water cannons, which can blind and even kill (e.g., Günter Sare, Frankfurt/Main 1985) were set to gently sprinkle the protesters.

Earlier, on May Day 2020, an anti-lockdown protest was allowed at Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz while that night police brutally attacked the “Revolutionary May 1” march of several thousand in Kreuzberg, with dozens of arrests, for violating a ban on large gatherings during the coronavirus lockdown. Significantly, while May Day demos were allowed in many cities, the ban on left-wing protests was enforced by the social-democratic/Green city government of Berlin. And again this past January 10, Berlin police repeatedly attacked the annual demonstration honoring the Communist leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht with baton charges and pepper spray.

The list of events banned ostensibly for public health reasons includes (among others) an attempted commemoration of

⁴ The *Reichsbürger*, or imperial citizen, movement rejects the legitimacy of the present German state, seeking to revive Imperial Germany.

the fascist massacre six months earlier in Hanau; a commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Friedrich Engels in the Ruhr; and a demonstration in Frankfurt/Main in April 2020 demanding that refugees from the Mediterranean be let in, which was brutally attacked by the cops. More recently party meetings of the fascistic AfD in Braunschweig were allowed to proceed, yet mobilizations of antifascists continued to be shut down on “public health” grounds.

The partial, stop-and-go lockdowns by capitalist governments, along with a hospital system that avoids collapse by pushing patients out, have been wholly insufficient to stop the spread of COVID-19. But while we oppose the reactionaries who reject necessary public health measures, and point to the success of China in mobilizing the resources to contain the spread of the virus, revolutionary Marxists are against calling on bourgeois governments to curtail or ban political protests. Whatever the stated reasons, we know full well from experience – and the nature of the capitalist state – that such measures will be used far more against leftists and revolutionaries than against murderous fascists.

Police Provocations

The wave of antiracist protests that engulfed the U.S. after the police murder of George Floyd in May 2020 had repercussions in Europe. Protests denounced racist police violence in France and the colonialist heritage of Britain and Belgium. However, the echo was quite short-lived in Germany, as an all-party consensus including the “left” social democrats of the Left Party (Die Linke) rejected the notion that there is such a thing as structural racist police violence. It’s all part of a drive of the parties that “uphold the state,” using police-state methods to beef up the repressive apparatus in anticipation of revolts by the downtrodden “have-nots” against the well-to-do “haves.”

Early on in the pandemic, police in Stuttgart provoked a revolt aimed at showing that they were the indispensable guardians of order. On June 20, cops harassed some youth and searched a 17-year-old for joints in front of the State Opera. (Only a few short years ago, the Greens, then in the government, were still promising to “de-

criminalize” the use of cannabis). Fighting erupted, police cars and some stores were trashed. The situation was “completely out of control,” claimed the police. The next day the bourgeois media screamed in unison that this was a “level of violence never before experienced.” Nonsense. In 2010, Stuttgart cops unleashed an orgy of violence against demonstrators who were protesting the replacement of the historic S21 train station, clubbing and pepper-spraying teenagers, and effectively blinding one man with a police water cannon.

This time around, the police (and the rightist tabloid *Bild Zeitung*) were disappointed that there were so many German citizens among the arrestees. So they conducted what became known as “genealogical research” in order to determine if their parents, or even grandparents might have come from the Near East or North Africa! A CDU spokesman in the Bundestag, Mathias Middelberg, warned against “inappropriate parallels” being drawn between German and U.S. cops: “The ideological rabble-rousing against our police must be put a stop to” (*Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung*, 23 June 2020). Not to be outdone, Dietmar Bartsch, head of the Left Party fraction in the Bundestag, while criticizing the “genealogical research” as “racist,” tweeted his condemnation of the “disgusting behavior” and “ruthless violence” *against the police* (*Spiegel On-Line*, 24 June 2020)!

Not only in Stuttgart, the most affluent city in Germany, the richest country in Europe, have the authorities resorted to such racial profiling. In late October, as the coronavirus swept through the Berlin district of Neukölln, its deputy mayor, Falko Liecke (CDU), posed for photos in front of a sports car (a yellow Lamborghini on the Sonnenallee) which was festooned with decals of fake bullet holes. This feeble-minded stunt was a prop in a CDU election campaign that promised to sweep “criminal clans” from the streets of Berlin. This is part of a years-long campaign directed against so-called “Arab clans” which has translated into police raids in immigrant neighborhoods in the Rhineland and the Ruhr as well as Berlin.

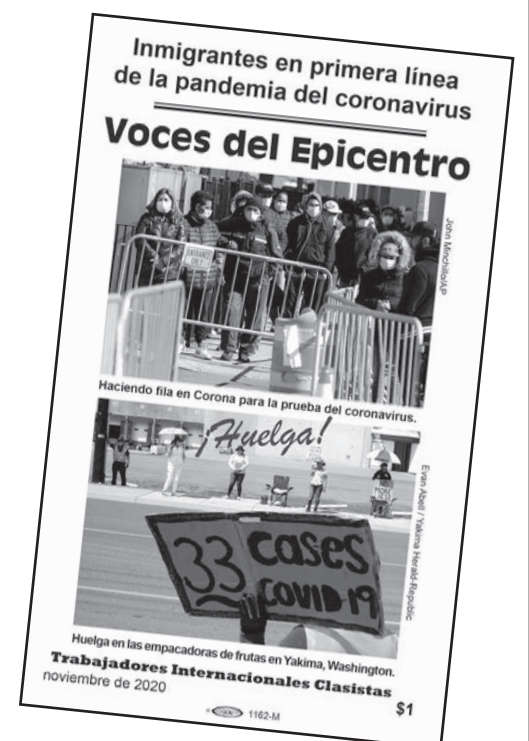
Nor is it only the CDU and the racist Springer press (owners of the conserva-

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As the coronavirus pandemic erupted in the United States, the first epicenter was in the neighborhoods of New York City with the highest number of immigrants, where **Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas (Class Struggle Immigrant Workers)** has been active. Read the reports from TIC activists and teachers in **Class Struggle Education Workers** on the impact of this capitalist disaster, and the lessons to be drawn from it. Also reports from the strike of packinghouse workers in Yakima Valley, Washington. (In Spanish)

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Police attacked the January 10 demonstration commemorating Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (revolutionaries also commemorate V.I. Lenin at this annual event).

tive *Die Welt* and *Bild*) who are baying for blood; most of the German “quality media” is also on board. And the repression is being carried out by the SPD as part of a coalition with the CDU in cities like Essen, and by the coalition of the SPD, Greens and Left Party in Berlin. When the pandemic broke out, Berlin cops announced there would be no letup in the repression of the “clans” – and there has been none. Various extended families, mainly Lebanese – and not only Arabs but Turks or Kurds as well – have been labeled criminal gangs. And since the families have names like Chahrour, about as common among Lebanese as Schmidt and Müller among Germans, and as almost any degree of kinship will do, potential suspects number in the thousands. They are presumed guilty, according to a principle akin to the Third Reich’s “*Sippenhaftung*” (clan liability).

Mobilize the Power of the Working Class!

Particularly since becoming part of the government of the capital city, the Left Party has repeatedly pledged its loyalty to the bourgeois state and its police. Thus, a September 2019 joint declaration of the red-red-green coalition parties in Berlin called to “reinforce the police” and for the “systematic building up of the security agencies.” The strange double logic that this entails was on display in an article in *Neues Deutschland* (30 December 2020). The title reads, “No Reliance on the State,” while the text calls for “pressuring for the denazification of the agencies.” Yet any reliance on the police against the fascist threat, even after a bogus campaign of “denazification” such as was carried out in West Germany after the fall of the Third Reich in 1945, is ultimately suicidal. Rather, what is necessary is to mo-

bilize the workers and oppressed in the face of attacks by the fascist-infested “security agencies.”

Of those groups claiming some connection to Trotskyism, Solidarität,⁵ one of two successor groups to Sozialistische Alternative Voran (SAV) inside the Left Party, likewise tells us not to rely on the bourgeois state – and then proceeds to outline a detailed plan of reliance on the bourgeois state. “For Genuine Control of the Police!” proclaims an 18 October 2020 SAV article, which peddles the deadly illusion that the cops are going to let an “independent” body composed of trade unionists, migrants, social workers and other sectors of the population investigate them, and then hire and fire them. After the February 2020 fascist murders in Hanau, Solidarität briefly took up the idea of protest strikes, asking in its typical faux naïve style:

“Or really, why not for once stop work to protest against rightist terror? After all, there were (symbolic) work stoppages against the RAF in the 1970s and after the attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001.”

–SOL leaflet of 20 February 2020

What a statement! The German Trade Union Federation (DGB) showed its indignation at the assassination of top industrialist and ex-SS-Hauptsturmführer Hanns Schleyer by the Red Army Faction in 1977 with a work stoppage, and again following the 9-11 attack which led to the imperialist invasion/occupation of Afghanistan, including by the German Bundeswehr. Both of these work stoppages were declarations of loyalty to the capitalist-imperialist order. A clearer declaration of Solidarität’s fundamental political identity with the anti-communist DGB tops would be hard to imagine.

Solidarität and all the other organizations

⁵ Affiliated with the Committee for a Workers International led by Peter Taaffe.



Internationalistische Gruppe at march on the one-year anniversary of the 20 February 2020 massacre in Hanau, where a fascist gunman killed nine people.

coming out of the Labour-loyal tradition of the British Militant group claim that cops are workers rather than hired guns of the bosses. The Revolutionäre Internationalistische Organisation (RIO)⁶ is only fooling itself (and others) when it pleads with Solidarität to join with it in calling to remove the cop “unions” from the DGB. Moreover, RIO calls to fire Seehofer, as they previously called to remove Maaßen, as if this would make the slightest difference. In the summer of 2020, RIO played around with calls “for abolition of the police, as the progressive parts of the movement in the U.S. have long been calling for” (*Klasse gegen Klasse*, 10 July 2020). For the fundamentally reformist nature of this demand, see “‘Abolish the Police’ Under Capitalism?” *The Internationalist* No. 60, May-July 2020. But by the fall, RIO was content to demand an “independent” inquiry into racist police attacks, their more “militant” variant of the Left Party’s constant calls for parliamentary commissions of enquiry (*Klasse gegen Klasse*, 23 October 2020).

The Internationalistische Gruppe has always called to “Stop the Fascists with Worker-Immigrant Mobilization!” As we wrote in 2019 (“Halle Was an Attempted Fascist Massacre,” in *The Internationalist* No. 57, September-October 2019):

“The multiethnic working class in Germany is being ground down, yet its power is intact. The key is leadership. What’s needed is a *mass mobilization of workers power to crush the fascists*, their uniformed protectors and their capitalist sponsors, part of a struggle to *build a workers party that fights for international socialist revolution* to bring down the bloody rule of capital and sweep away its enforcers.” ■

⁶ RIO is affiliated internationally with the misnamed Trotskyist Faction, which at the end of the 1980s split from the pseudo-Trotskyist tendency led by Nahuel Moreno.

Trabajadoras...

sigue de la página 24

transmitido desde Oaxaca.

La lucha actual de trabajadoras de lavanderías es producto de campañas anteriores de sindicalizar a trabajadores inmigrantes en Nueva York a principios de los años 2000, en los delis y las tiendas de verduras y frutas, y más tarde en los 2010 en la panadería Hot and Crusty, el restaurante Liberato y la empresa B&H Photo. En estas campañas, muchas de ellas iniciadas por el LWC, han participado activamente el Grupo Internacionalista (GI) y la Juventud Internacionalista Revolucionaria. Señalamos siempre la necesidad de movilizar toda la fuerza del movimiento sindical neoyorquino en defensa de los trabajadores inmigrantes. Esta lucha tiene que librarse sobre la base del internacionalismo proletario y de la lucha de clases, con absoluta independencia de los políticos y partidos de la clase capitalista, para forjar un partido obrero que luche por un gobierno obrero.

Las trabajadoras inmigrantes que lucharon a principios del siglo XX por sus derechos fueron reconocidas por su lucha y sacrificio por el movimiento socialista internacional como ejemplo para millones de trabajadores y trabajadoras en todo el mundo, celebrando su gesta y su martirio cada 8 de marzo como el Día Internacional de la Mujer Trabajadora. Hoy nuestras compañeras en lucha pueden ser también un ejemplo para los trabajadores que luchan contra las espeluznantes condiciones labo-

rales y salarios de hambre que prevalecen en medio de la triple epidemia que sacude al capitalismo actual con la crisis económica, el desempleo y la crisis sanitaria.

Justo por lo anterior, la patronal decidió jugar rudo. El 24 de enero, la patronal despidió a Yuriana, una de las compañeras involucradas en la campaña de sindicalización. Se organizó una manifestación de protesta, en la que Yuriana nos contó que la gerencia dijo haberla despedido por no cumplir con una cuota de 45 kilogramos de ropa lavada y doblada por hora. Ella y otra trabajadora, Cecilia, informaron que los patrones habían estado hostigándolas todo el tiempo con el propósito de amedrentarlas ante la inminente votación sobre el sindicato. Yuriana fue despedida, como ella misma dijo, “para que mis compañeras tengan miedo de votar.... Quisieron ponerme como ejemplo para intimidarlas, para que pensara que si hacen cualquier cosa las van a correr”.

Esta maniobra no rindió los frutos que la patronal esperaba. La votación se realizó el 29 de enero y se ganó la unión. Por eso, a las tres semanas, los patrones despidieron a todas las trabajadoras y bajaron la cortina.

Con esta movida los patrones quieren acallar el ejemplo de estas trabajadoras para impedir que se extienda a los miles de trabajadores que laboran en lavanderías y otros talleres del sudor por toda la ciudad, donde los que ahí laboran reciben salarios de miseria. Nueva York es una ciudad altamente sindicalizada. El movimiento obrero debe desplegar su poder en contra de esta campaña rompesindicatos, obligando a los patrones a recontratar a las trabajadoras despedidas y dando a los explotadores la lección que se merecen. Para esto urge movilizar en las calles los sindicatos que organizan trabajadores de las lavanderías industriales, de hoteles y restaurantes, de servicios, del transporte y las telecomunicaciones.

El vínculo entre los problemas que aquejan a los trabajadores a escala nacional y la lucha de un grupo de valientes trabajadoras inmigrantes en Nueva York quedó de manifiesto de una manera impactante cuando las trabajadoras de Wash Supply se dirigieron hacia Union Square para sumarse a un mitin en solidaridad con la campaña de sindicalización en Bessemer, Alabama, emprendida por trabajadores de Amazon, muchos de los cuales son mujeres afroamericanas. La manifestación, que incluyó un contingente considerable de internacionalistas y de nuestros compañeros de Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas, les dio una calurosa bienvenida, y Yuriana, la trabajadora despedida en enero, dio un discurso en apoyo de la lucha en Amazon.

Hoy en día, la lucha continúa. El 27 febrero se reunieron más de cien manifestantes frente a otra lavandería de la misma empresa, Liox, ubicada en la misma zona de Loisaída donde nacieron las luchas de las trabajadoras de la industria de la costura hace más de un siglo. Marchamos luego hasta el edificio donde ocurrió el *asesinato industrial* de la fábrica Triangle, haciendo una parada frente a un supermercado Whole Foods, sucursal de Amazon. Sonó nuevamente en las calles la consigna acuñada en la lucha de B&H, “¡Unión, fuerza, solidaridad!” y también, “Trabajadoras de las lavanderías, ¡estamos con ustedes!” Esto es sólo el comienzo. La lucha de las trabajadoras inmigrantes de las lavanderías debe convertirse en la causa de toda la clase obrera.

¡Victoria a las trabajadoras de las lavanderías! Sindicalizar a los no sindicalizados! ¡Luchar, vencer, obreros al poder! ■

The Internationalist

How the “World Scab Web Site” Aids the Bosses

There it is, in your face, so stark that you can’t miss it: as we have repeatedly warned, the grotesquely misnamed World Socialist Web Site serves union-busting bosses against the unions. The (latest) proof: on January 15, an article posted on the “World *Scab* Web Site” calls to “Vote ‘No’ to the UFCW-backed union at Alabama Amazon facility!” So, acting in tandem with Amazon boss Jeff Bezos, the richest man in the world, the political bandits of David North’s WSWs are actively trying to *prevent the organization of a union* at the viciously anti-union e-commerce monopoly’s Bessemer, Alabama, warehouse. It’s far from the first time: the WSWs has likewise opposed unionization of auto parts plants in the past.¹ Revolutionary socialists have a diametrically counterposed position: we say emphatically “yes” to unions, while fighting to forge a class-struggle leadership.

North is listed as chairman of the International Editorial Board of the WSWs, as well as national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and leader of an “International Committee of the Fourth International” (ICFI, one of three different groups that go by that name). In the late 1970s, his outfit, then called the Workers League, sponsored a lawsuit trying to get the bourgeois courts to oust the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party – just one of the grotesque and sinister operations for which “the Northites” became notorious. In recent decades, they have been obsessed with a number of bugbears. One is any recognition that systemic racism exists in the U.S. – that is, the fact that racist American capitalism structurally oppresses black people in particular, as it has since the days of slavery. The WSWs/SEP routinely labels any struggle against this special oppression “racialist,” a nefarious plot to divide the working class. Another special object of their ire is labor unions.

This is no accident. In addition to his aforementioned titles, North, a.k.a. David Green, was for years the Chief Executive Officer of Grand River Printing and Imaging, a multimillion-dollar *non-union* printing company in the Detroit, Michigan area. For the last three decades, North’s political mouthpieces have vituperated against unions, declaring them to be bourgeois (capitalist) institutions. Typically, the WSWs postures as a left-wing critic of the sellouts by the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy. That can fool some people until they look more closely. Behind that façade, these scab “socialists” actually side with the bosses in trying to destroy unions, the mass defensive organizations of the working class under capitalism. That was its role during the 2019 California teachers strikes in Los Angeles and Oakland, that’s what it did in the recent Hunts Point Market strike in New York and what it is doing now in opposing the union organizing drive in Bessemer.

In this latter case, the fake-socialist

swindler North, d.b.a. “International Amazon Workers Voice,” was outraged that for the first time in the U.S. a major union organizing campaign is in progress at an Amazon “fulfillment center.” Starting on February 8, workers at Amazon’s BHM1 warehouse in the Birmingham suburb of Bessemer, a former center of the steel industry, will cast a mail ballot in an election under the auspices of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), on whether they wish to be represented by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU), a division of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). The company is urging its “associates” to vote “no,” as is the WSWs gang of would-be union-busters.

To be perfectly clear, the leaders of the RWDSU and UFCW are classic union bureaucrats who use their posts sitting atop the labor movement to push policies of class collaboration. They have not shut down unsafe operations at the packing-houses which they have organized. In addition, RWDSU leader Stuart Applebaum is a linchpin of the subordination of labor to the capitalist Democratic Party (he is a member of the Executive Committee of the Democratic National Committee). Applebaum is also a top-flight operative of the AFL-CIO’s American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS),² which dispatched him to keep unions in Tunisia in line in the 2011 “Arab Spring.” Revolutionary Marxists call on the unions to *break with the Democrats* and on the union ranks to *oust the bureaucrats*, who chain the working class to its exploiters, and to build a *class-struggle workers party*. This is in fact key to the fight to *defend the unions*, which have been under sustained attack from the bosses, who seek to destroy them – as do the pseudo-socialist swindlers of the WSWs.

Workers at Amazon’s Alabama warehouse badly need a union. Workers are required to pick items at breakneck speed – eight seconds each – to fulfill quotas of 400 items an hour, 2,500 a day. While the plant is ultra-modern (it has been open less than a year), the pace is so brutal that the turnover rate for employees is sky-high, with “at least 50 new people coming through every two weeks,” according to one worker (*The American Prospect*, 23 December 2020). Workers are supposed to be thankful for receiving a starting wage of \$15 an hour. Meanwhile, the net worth (wealth) of Amazon owner Bezos has soared from \$113 billion at the start of the pandemic to \$184 billion as of December 7, according to a report by Americans for Tax Fairness (8 December 2020). With illusions of grandeur, Bezos has long yearned to build space “colonies for two or three million people” (and no doubt an Amazon sweat-

shop or two) on the moon.³

As any talented “union avoidance consultant” would, Mr. North of the WSWs seeks to make hay from the many betrayals of the union bureaucrats, which he crassly identifies with the unions as such. This means pitching the anti-labor line that the very existence of unions is to blame for labor bureaucrats’ dereliction of duty as the coronavirus pandemic makes life hell for “essential” workers, all while the top capitalists like Bezos live a parasitical existence, living off the proceeds of the toil of their wage slaves. In line with this, the WSWs shamelessly amplifies the complaints of backward workers about union dues. (The slick slogan of Bezos’ official union busters in Bessemer is *#doitwithoutdues*.) Organization costs money.

And that raises the question, who is paying for Mr. North’s apparatus? There is a history to this: beginning in the 1970s, the ICFI led by North’s mentor Gerry Healy received over 1 million British pounds from bourgeois Arab regimes (Kuwait, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Iraq, PLO and others) to act as their paid publicist while spouting off about a mythical “Arab Revolution.”⁴

A history of funding from capitalist sources, running a non-union printing company, using the bourgeois courts against left groups, siding with the bosses in opposing unionization – these are only some of the crimes of David North & Co. as he places himself on the opposite side of the class line from the workers movement.⁵ To hide this, he blows some smoke about phantasmagorical “rank and file committees” and counterposes these to real organizations of millions of workers. In line with the actual views, tradition and practice of revolutionaries from Marx, Lenin and Trotsky on, the Internationalist Group says that it is necessary to fight *within* the unions against the

³ *Miami Herald*, 20 June 1982.

⁴ See “Where Were You, David North?” *The Internationalist* No. 29, Summer 2009

⁵ Others include whipping up a witch hunt in the right-wing tabloid press against British mine workers leader Arthur Scargill during the 1984 coal strike, alibiing the execution of 21 Iraqi communists and turning over names and photos of Iraqi dissidents in London to the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.

betrayals by the sellout, pro-capitalist bureaucracy and to build a leadership based on a fighting program of class struggle. You can’t do that by allying with the bosses – it’s as simple as that.

Voting in the NLRB-supervised union-recognition election is by mail ballot, set to begin on February 8, with votes to be counted on March 30. Needless to say, revolutionaries don’t recognize the pronouncements of the NLRB as the last word, and frequently oppose the rulings of this agency of the bosses’ government. Moreover, a “yes” vote does not in itself promise victory to the workers in their struggle against the exploiters. But of course workers should vote “yes” – and even a bureaucratically “*mis-led*” union offers important protections against arbitrary actions by management. A victory for the union would be a powerful sign that the 6,000-plus workers in Bessemer are coming together and finding their voice, and it could spur unionization efforts at Amazon plants everywhere. A “no” vote, on the other hand, would be a setback to efforts to organize the workers in Alabama, throughout the South and across the country. That is just what Jeff Bezos wants, with David North eagerly playing second fiddle to the bosses’ anti-union tune.

Class-conscious workers say “union yes,” and condemn North and his crew as the low-down scabs that they are. ■

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¹ See “SEP/WSWS: Scab ‘Socialists’,” *The Internationalist*, December 2007.

¡Movilizar el poder obrero para poner alto a la campaña antisindical!

¡Alerta! Trabajadoras de lavanderías de NY en lucha contra despidos

El 19 de febrero pasado, en una acción sacada del manual de operaciones rompesindicatos, los dueños de la lavandería Wash Supply en el Upper West Side de Manhattan, Nueva York, despidieron a las valientes trabajadoras inmigrantes que se han organizado en un sindicato y súbitamente cerraron el negocio. Los despidos acontecieron a menos de un mes de la exitosa votación por el reconocimiento oficial del sindicato en el taller. Cuando a la mañana siguiente llegó un equipo con un van y un camión para sacar las máquinas, se encontraron con las trabajadoras portando pancartas que decían, “Despedidas por defender derechos laborales”, “No tenemos miedo” y simplemente “Unión”

Como castigo por el “delito” de alzarse para defender sus derechos —y los derechos de todos los trabajadores— los patrones echaron a las trabajadoras, buscando derrotarlas por hambre como han hecho tantas veces los explotadores de su calaña. Se trata de un golpe en contra de todos los trabajadores, los inmigrantes y defensores de los derechos de la mujer, y exige una respuesta contundente del poderoso movimiento obrero neoyorquino.

La lucha de las trabajadoras de Wash Supply comenzó en medio de la pandemia del coronavirus que desató muerte y miseria en la ciudad que fue el primer epicentro en los EE.UU. El 25 de noviembre del año pasado, acompañadas de defensores de los derechos de los trabajadores y de los inmigrantes, las combativas trabajadoras de origen mexicano realizaron un mitin frente a la lavandería y entregaron su pliego de peticiones a la gerencia. Vestidas con mandiles que decían “Somos la unión”, dieron voz a la lucha en contra de condiciones de trabajo intolerables, robo de salarios y abusos a manos de los patrones que enfrentan miles de sus compañeras en otras lavanderías en



Trabajadoras despedidas de Wash Supply, organizadas por el Centro de Trabajadores de Lavanderías, se reúnen con Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas el 7 de marzo en el sitio del incendio de la fábrica Triangle Shirtwaist de 1911.

Nueva York. La movilización, convocada por el Centro de Trabajadores de Lavanderías (LWC, por sus siglas en inglés), comenzó con una marcha desde un parque cercano hacia la lavandería al ritmo de tambores y de gritos, en inglés y en español, de “¡Arriba trabajador, abajo explotador!”

Entrando a la lavandería, cada una de las trabajadoras se dirigió a la gerente, rechazando toda intimidación de su parte mientras relataban los malos tratos y violaciones de derechos laborales elementales que han sufrido. Entre sus exigencias: poner fin al robo de salarios y la discriminación; el derecho a un tiempo

de descanso y a tener licencias por enfermedad con pago; mejores condiciones de salud y seguridad, incluido el equipo de protección personal requerido en medio de la pandemia así como el pago del salario mínimo de la ciudad. Exigieron también el reconocimiento del sindicato que estaban en proceso de conformar.

Durante el mitin se anunció que Beatriz Ramírez, quien fue despedida de una lavandería en Queens después de que demandó a sus patrones por robo salarial (recibía un pago de 6 dólares y medio la hora trabajando semanas de 56 horas) había ganado su juicio, recuperando los salarios que le debían y consiguiendo su reconstrucción. El descarado robo salarial ha sido uno de los problemas comunes que han sido denunciados durante las recientes luchas laborales en Nueva York. En la lavandería Wash Supply los salarios variaban entre nueve y once dólares por hora, muy por debajo del salario mínimo oficial en la ciudad, que es de 15 dólares la hora. Asimismo, las trabajadoras apenas tenían tiempo para comer y no recibían pago de horas extras. No sólo se trata de salarios de hambre: los patrones con frecuencia los robaban a las trabajadoras. Cuando ellas cuestionaban semejante robo flagrante, recibían otro diluvio de abuso verbal.

La industria de las lavanderías es uno de los muchos sectores que funcionan en Nueva York con mano de obra predominantemente inmigrante que es superexplotada y que carece de muchas protecciones legales supuestamente garantizadas para los trabajadores. Considerados por los patrones y el gobierno como dispensables y vulnerables, no ganan ni siquiera el salario

mínimo y enfrentan peligrosas condiciones de trabajo. En medio de la mortífera pandemia esto no es un asunto que pueda tomarse a la ligera. Una de las trabajadoras de Wash Supply contó en una entrevista colectiva transmitida por la estación de radio WBAI, “Va la ropa vomitada, con excremento, con agujas, con sangre. Yo me enterré una aguja. ¿Y qué me dijo la manager? ‘No te pasó nada’.” Ante lesiones y enfermedades provocadas por trabajar en estas condiciones, no se contaba con ninguna ayuda. Además del miedo de contraer el coronavirus, las trabajadoras han tenido que enfrentar el miedo aún mayor de contagiar a sus familiares.

Las condiciones de seguridad en el trabajo eran terribles. En el taller estallaron incendios. En una ocasión, como relató una trabajadora en la entrevista radial, en una de las máquinas había ropa que contenía sustancias inflamables, lo que ocasionó un incendio en la máquina. “Lo más preocupante es que no tenían los contraincendios a la mano. Todos corriendo buscando dónde estaban. El manager no sabía ni qué hacer: mejor una compañera fue [a apagarlo]. Por el mismo espacio pequeño el humo se queda ahí. La señora hace que uno limpie, pero se queda el olor a humo y nos hizo trabajar así [la patrona]”. Durante otro incendio la salida de emergencia estaba bloqueada, recordando al terrible incendio en la fábrica Triangle Shirtwaist de blusas en 1911, con su saldo de 146 muertos. Las trabajadoras también contaron de su lucha el 8 de diciembre en Radio Frecuencia Obrera Internacionalista, el programa radial semanal del Grupo Internacionalista de México, *sigue en la página 22*



“Despedida por organizar un sindicato.” Trabajadoras de Wash Supply en mitin de solidaridad con la campaña de sindicalización de Amazon, el 20 de febrero.