

For Mass Worker/Student Action to Stop Raids and Deportations

Paul Ratje / Agence France-Presse



Renae A. Hernández

Ramping up U.S. capitalism's deportation machine, the Trump administration is building on and seeking to outdo even the record of its Democratic predecessors. Left: U.S. Border Patrol attacks Haitians in September 2021. Right: July 2025, federal agents on horseback in MacArthur Park in Los Angeles.

If you're reading this paper, it's likely we agree on at least one thing: the society we live in is in a terrible crisis. "What fresh hell is this?" could sum up the questions millions ask themselves each day, when scanning the latest ways our basic rights are under attack. Raids, kidnappings and deportations by masked agents of ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement); federal troops sent to one city after another; mass firings and union-busting; the

trampling of academic freedom, trans rights, public health ... All this and more, on top of two years of unbearable images of mass murder and devastation in Gaza, "Made in USA" under "Genocide Joe" Biden and then Donald Trump — after the Democrats paved the way for him coming to power, yet again.

So yes, it seems like a new hell each day — but it didn't come from nowhere. When Trump returned to the White House in Janu-

ary 2025, we revolutionary Marxists were not alone in highlighting the "horror show of governmental arbitrariness, wanton cruelty and chaos" of his administration's anti-immigrant onslaught, which it uses as a battering ram against the fundamental rights of all working people.¹ What we say about *where this all comes from and what to do about it*, however, is radically different from the illusions promoted by backers of U.S. imperialism's Democratic Party,

including those on the reformist left. What is the origin of the accelerating drive toward authoritarian rule, backed by some of the world's wealthiest profiteers and ideologues of "free-market" dictatorship? It's not some random aberration. The concentration of vast power and wealth in the hands of this crew is the result of the *spiral*ing decay of the capitalist system of inequality, exploitation, racism and war. Today's White House rule by decree further intensifies the ongoing bipartisan drive for a "strong state" and to shore up the power of U.S. imperialism, which has lost the global hegemony it had since World War II. And the apparatus of anti-immigrant repression that Trump wields today was built up by his Democratic predecessor Barack "Deporter-in-Chief" Obama and the Biden/Harris administration.

Crucial here is the basic Marxist point that voting for or otherwise supporting Democrats (or Republicans or any other capitalist politicians) is not a "lesser evil" — it is *counterposed* to what is urgently needed, as it means perpetuating the subordination of the workers and oppressed to the government parties that administer the repressive apparatus of capitalist rule. In other words, it means class collaboration, when what we desperately need is *mass, militant class struggle* in defense of the rights of us all. The political fight to unchain working-class power is crucial to building *worker/student action to stop the raids and deportations*.

Many students and young workers are trying to figure out the burning issues of how to fight back in a situation where big threats and dangers keep mounting every day. Yet the "answers" they hear from the media, and from the leadership of social movements, labor leadership and the

¹ See "Trumpland USA: Lurching Toward Authoritarian Rule," *The Internationalist* No. 75, January-May 2025.



Part of the crowd at the September 4 Student/Labor Speak-Out in solidarity with immigrants, outside NYC's Hunter College, demanding "ICE Out of New York! Stop the Deportations!"

Join the Fight for Socialist Revolution!

For Mass...

continued from page 1

“left,” are usually worthless, or worse. In contrast, advancing the struggle to build a **revolutionary workers party** on the program of international socialist revolution is the purpose of this newspaper, published by the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth (youth section of the Internationalist Group) together with the Internationalist Clubs at the City University of New York.

The groundwork for Trump & Co.’s current onslaught was prepared in large part by the **bipartisan** campaign over the past two years to demonize, censor and repress protest against the genocidal U.S./Israel war on Gaza. This was a central topic in our previous issue, *Revolution* No. 21 (September 2024), which covered the violent repression of Gaza solidarity encampments from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) to Columbia University and CUNY. It also covered anti-censorship struggles at CUNY’s Hunter College, in which the Internationalists played a big role, including student/faculty protests that beat back a McCarthyite film ban against *Israelism* (a documentary critical of Israel’s oppression of the Palestinian people).

Facing the November 2024 elections, in articles on many topics *Revolution* highlighted the fight against the endless class collaboration tying the exploited and oppressed to their exploiters and oppressors. Putting the class-struggle program of revolutionary Marxism (Trotskyism) front and center, its front-page headline read: “All-Purpose Bigot Trump or Genocide Joe’s VP Harris? The Only Choice: Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!”

Why We Say “You Can’t Fight Trump with the Democrats”

What led to Trump’s victory in the 2024 elections and return to the White House for a second term on steroids? Centrally, the Democrats’ open indifference to, and attacks on, the working class (for example, using strikebreaking legislation to block a looming rail strike in November 2022); their mass deportations and build-up of the repressive apparatus; and the long bloody trail of U.S. imperialist wars from Iraq and Afghanistan to the U.S./NATO war in Ukraine, the U.S./Israel war on Gaza and the imperialist drive toward a third world war against China.²

² See “Only Socialist Revolution Can Defeat U.S. Imperialism’s Drive to WWII,” *Revolution* No. 20, September 2023.

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Revolution

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ICE Terror’s Toll

With White House “border czar” Tom Homan repeatedly vowing to “flood the zone” with raids and deportations, keeping track of ICE terror’s daily toll can seem nearly impossible. Here are just some of the many outrages that have occurred in recent months:

- Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian activist prominent in Gaza solidarity protests at Columbia University, was seized on March 8 as he entered his apartment building with his wife, who was eight months pregnant. His case served as a trial run for the Trump administration seeing how far it could go in revoking a permanent resident’s status. Shipped to a detention center in Louisiana, he was released three months later and, as of October 2025, is fighting a deportation order from a Louisiana judge on the baseless charge of green card fraud.

- Kilmar Abrego García, a SMART Local 100 union member in Maryland, was taken by ICE on March 12 and sent to El Salvador’s notorious CECOT “mega-prison.” Officials later called it an “administrative error,” then accused him of supposed gang affiliations. In June he was brought back to the U.S. but sent to jail on trumped-up charges. Released in August, he was detained days later at his ICE check-in and now faces deportation – to Uganda.

- Rümeyza Öztürk, a Tufts University doctoral student, was kidnapped off the street by masked ICE agents on March 25 and shuttled to the same Louisiana detention center that held Mahmoud Khalil. Her alleged crime? Contributing to an op-ed in a student newspaper, on the university’s response to the genocide in Gaza. Released in May, she still faces the threat of deportation.

- Mohsen Mahdawi, co-founder of the Palestinian Student Union at Columbia, was seized by ICE on April 14 during what

he thought was a naturalization interview but was actually a sting operation by federal agents. Released on April 30, he declared, “I am saying it clear and loud. To President Trump and his cabinet: I am not afraid of you.”

- Three young children who are U.S. citizens, one of them a 4-year-old with cancer, were deported to Honduras together with their mothers on April 25.

- Dylan López Contreras and Mamadou Diallo are NYC high school students seized in May and August respectively by ICE after routine appearances in immigration court. This fall, ICE’s notorious kidnappings in the Lower Manhattan immigration courts have escalated; agents have also attacked and manhandled court observers and journalists.

- Jaime Alanís, a 57-year-old farm worker from Mexico, fell to his death from a greenhouse roof while trying to hide during an ICE raid in Camarillo, California on July 15.

- Carlos Montoya, a 52-year-old day laborer from Guatemala, was struck and killed by a car while fleeing an ICE raid at a Home Depot in Monrovia, California on August 14.

- Pastor David Black was shot in the head by masked DHS agents with “non-lethal” munitions outside the Broadview ICE facility in Chicago on September 19, leaving him severely injured.

- Monica Moreta-Galarza was with her two children at the 26 Federal Plaza NYC immigration court when she was pushed to the ground by an ICE agent on September 25. This was shortly after federal agents detained her husband during his asylum hearing.



Victor J. Blue

Federal agents seize a man in an elevator near immigration courtrooms in the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building in New York City, July 2.

- Mario Guevara, an Emmy award-winning journalist from El Salvador who documented ICE raids, was deported on October 3, having been detained while covering a protest against Trump in Atlanta. His wife and three children remain in the U.S.

- Marimar Martínez, an immigrant rights protester in Chicago, was shot and seized by ICE agents on October 4 after authorities claimed she rammed a DHS vehicle. Body-camera footage shows an agent taunting her, saying “Do something [expletive]” moments before firing. Charged with assaulting and obstructing federal officers, Martínez was later released pending trial.

- Untold tens and hundreds of thousands of our fellow members of the international working class seized, held in ICE dungeons and deported... **Set them free, let them stay – full citizenship rights for all immigrants! Mass worker/student action to stop the raids and deportations!**

**Asian, Latin, Black and White:
Workers of the World, Unite!**

faced by those (an increasing number) who want to help organize mass struggle to stop the raids, deportations and other escalating attacks on basic rights. The first step toward overcoming those obstacles is to forthrightly tell the truth about them.

Ever since the Democrats lost last November, bemoaning their “paralysis” has been a major theme for liberal/left commentators.³ In our article on Zohran Mamdani’s NYC mayoral campaign (see page 32), we address the latest efforts to rejuvenate the Democrats. The candidacy of DSA member Mamdani has been endorsed by New York’s Governor Kathy Hochul (a major witch-hunter against pro-Palestinian protest, who also sent the National Guard into the New York subways), as well as Genocide Joe’s former vice president Kamala Harris. During a recent NYC visit, Harris said she told Mamdani: “One of the

³ A few examples: “Six Months Later, Democrats Are Still Searching for the Path Forward” (*NYT*, 25 May); “They roll right over” (*PBS News*, 3 August); “The Democrats are in deep trouble” (*Guardian*, 25 August); “Playing Dead or Really Dead? The Democrats’ Disappearing Act” (*Harpers*, August 2025). One left-liberal columnist noted: “On many of the most consequential issues ... the Democrats are not resisting Trumpism. They are participating in it. A centre-right party that shares core positions with its far-right opponent cannot mount real opposition. It can only pretend to” (“The Democrats’ resistance to Trump is a hollow performance,” *Al Jazeera*, 12 June).

reasons I am excited about your candidacy is you are bringing people in” (*CNN.com*, 24 September). Youth who really do want to be socialists need to think through what all of this means politically.

Reformist leftists seek to refasten the chains of bourgeois politics. Against this, the Internationalists stand for freeing workers’ power from those chains, so that power can be brought into the urgent fights facing us today. In January 2025, the Labor Committee to Defend Immigrants (LCDI) was founded by activists from NYC-area labor and immigrant rights groups, among them five Teamsters locals (including the Amazon Labor Union), hospital workers unions, the CUNY faculty/staff union (PSC), United Federation of Teachers, United Auto Workers, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas, Laundry Workers Center, Class Struggle Education Workers and others. The call to join the LCDI states:

“With the new administration building on the deportation record and structures ramped up by its predecessors, we can’t look to the government, police, courts or politicians of any capitalist party to protect immigrants. It is crucial to bring to bear the organized *power of labor*, and the principles of working-class solidarity, in defense of immigrant workers and their families.”

continued on page 14

“DHS/ICE, Border Patrol: Out of CUNY Now!” Student/Labor Protests Stop Immigration Cops’ Provocation

The following was first published as a leaflet by the CUNY Internationalist Clubs and the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth in March 2025.

On February 27, a campaign of protest and exposure caused the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency to cancel a special recruitment session it scheduled at one of the main campuses of the City University of New York, on Manhattan’s West Side. Together with ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement), CBP is a key part of the infamous “migra,” as the immigration police have long been known in Spanish: it is a division of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the parent body of the U.S. Border Patrol. The planned session at the John Jay College career fair was a dangerous provocation, seeking to make the largest urban public university in the U.S. a recruiting ground for the Trump administration’s “mass deportation” drive. It was stopped as the result of two protests demanding “DHS/ICE, Border Patrol: Out of CUNY Now!” in front of the campus building where the job fair was held.

The protests were initiated by the CUNY Internationalist Clubs, which put out a flier, thousands of copies of which were distributed, exposing and denouncing the incursion by DHS/ICE/Border Patrol recruiters and calling a demonstration on February 25, when the three-day “Career-Con” fair opened. Some 150 students and faculty/staff union members, joined by activists from several other NYC-area unions, rallied outside the building. Together with students, faculty and staff from John Jay, many in the crowd came from Hunter College under the banner of the Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants, and some from other campuses.

Defenders of immigrant rights had mobilized on short notice in response to the news that recruiters from the New York State division of DHS, Homeland Security Investigations (which has been prominent in a number of recent raids) and similar agencies were slated to show up at this campus where – as is the case throughout CUNY – a huge part of the student body comes from immigrant families. (While the school is known for “criminal justice” majors, about half of the students are in other fields.) At the job fair, DHS was to set up shop together with recruiters from the military who plied their deadly trade alongside those sent by a raft of prison, police and sheriff’s departments from across the country.¹

When students then discovered that CBP had scheduled a “special information [i.e. recruitment] session” for the afternoon of February 27, a new Internationalist flier

¹ The Internationalist flier for the February 25 protest noted that the job fair “even includes recruiters for the Sheriff’s Office of Loudoun County, infamous as the epicenter of ultra-racist ‘massive resistance’ to school desegregation in the 1950s – and now for its crusades against Black History teaching and against the rights of gay, lesbian and trans students.”



Upon learning that U.S. immigration police agencies would be at a job fair at the City University of New York’s John Jay College, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs called a protest on February 25. After a second demo two days later, the deporters canceled a scheduled recruitment session.

was rushed out denouncing this outrage, and a second demonstration was quickly organized. As reported by the campus student newspaper:

“[News of] this event led to another protest by the John Jay community on the day of the information session as students distributed hundreds of flyers throughout the campus. The crowd spilled over the sidewalk into the street of the 59th Street entrance. Huge posters and signs addressed issues such as birthright citizenship, deportation, and immigrant rights. In deep anger, protesters chanted, ‘DHS, military, and police recruiters out now!’”

– *The John Jay Sentinel*, 3 March

Among protesters quoted by the campus paper was a member of the recently formed John Jay Immigrant Defense Committee, who said he had “talked to many students who were afraid because of these agencies and did not attend school. A professor told me how heartbroken she was when a student asked her if she is still safe on campus.” A leader of the school’s Latin American Student Organization said, “I had heard rumors but didn’t think the school would actually act that way toward students....” The “protest was so powerful and moving,” as “students and faculty came together for such an important cause,” she said.

That evening, word arrived that the CBP had cancelled its recruitment session. After the rally of over 70 demonstrators, it was confirmed that the cancellation was directly in response to the protest campaign.

“Workers and Students Unite!”

Reflecting the multinational demographics of New York City’s working class, according to City University and NYC government figures 40% of CUNY undergraduates speak a language other than English at home and 34% were born outside the U.S. mainland. At the February 25 John Jay protest, a young student told the crowd that her family had “worked in

the fields and suffered discrimination,” as the rulers of this country want immigrant workers’ labor at the same time as they deny them their basic rights.

She said it is an outrage that the DHS and its subsidiaries like the Border Patrol were coming to the college to try to recruit among the student body made up of children of the city’s largely immigrant working class. Several other John Jay students spoke, including a representative of John Jay Students for Justice in Palestine, which together with a number of other campus groups had put out a protest statement demanding “ICE and DHS off our campus!” Students from CUNY’s Hunter College, City College and Brooklyn College were also among those who spoke and helped lead chants such as “ICE Out of Our Schools, ICE Out of New York!”

Linking up with the power of NYC’s labor movement was a key theme of the protests. More than a dozen members of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) faculty/staff union came from John Jay, Hunter and other campuses of the City University, carrying union signs calling for DHS/ICE to keep out of CUNY. The PSC recently established an Immigrant Solidarity Working Group, which together with “Know Your Rights” trainings, production of a poster and “Education Not Deportation” buttons, and other activities, is organizing on cam-

puses across the CUNY system.

Among those joining students in protest outside John Jay were PSC Secretary Andrea Vásquez and former union vice president Mike Fabricant, who spoke against campus incursions by DHS and other repressive agencies. Sarah Chinn and Sándor John of the Hunter PSC chapter also addressed the demonstrators. Speaking to the February 27 rally, longtime former PSC president Barbara Bowen declared: “It is the most cynical and dishonest action to bring ICE, which represents repression, racism and destruction, to recruit here.” Denouncing attempts to portray immigrants as criminals, she said workers and students should join together, “not align with the boss who is saying to take immigrants away and deport them.” Bowen called the deportation raids a form of “kidnapping” reminiscent of the slave-catchers before the Civil War. New York’s notorious Rikers Island jail bears the name of a man infamous for using the Fugitive Slave Act to send escaped slaves back to the slaveowners, she noted.²

An organizer of the Labor Committee to Defend Immigrants (LCDI) led the crowd in an improvised version of Ray Charles’ “Hit the Road Jack,” switching the words to “Hit the road ICE, and don’t you come back no more, no more...!” Emphasizing the “indivisible” connection between defending “immigrant rights, union rights, trans rights and the rights of us all” against the reactionary onslaught, he described the LCDI’s creation in January on the basis of a series of conferences bringing together members of

continued on page 26

² Starting in 1815, Richard Riker presided over the city’s main criminal court for almost a quarter century. Becoming a prominent figure in the Democratic Party, he was infamous for rapidly issuing “certificates of removal” against runaway slaves.



Poster at May Day 2025 NYC rally shows Palestinian student activist Mohsen Mahdawi, who was seized by ICE last spring. Upon his release on April 30, he declared, “I am saying it clear and loud to President Trump and his cabinet: I am not afraid of you.”

Hunter Students Organize Against Racist Deportations

The following item was first published on 13 March 2025 on the “Revolutionaries in the Class Struggle” blog at internationalist.org. Reproduced at the end of it is the 6 November 2024 Hunter Internationalist Club leaflet originally titled “Facing Immigration Raids, Mass Deportations: We Need to Immediately Reestablish the Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants.” Since that time, the committee has organized and participated in a broad range of activities, some of which are reflected in this issue of *Revolution*.

Facing the escalating onslaught on basic democratic rights, the Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants has been organizing intensively ever since it was formed last November. On January 20, Inauguration Day, it brought out dozens of Hunter students to march behind its banner and class-struggle slogans at a protest that wound through the streets of Manhattan. Many on campus urgently want to act against Trump’s threatened mass deportations, which are now taking place. The committee has repeatedly drawn upwards of 70 students, faculty and staff to its meetings.

The Hunter committee has created its own immigrant rights defense packet for wide distribution, making available relevant articles, “Know Your Rights” information and legal aid resources. Organized into working groups – including research, education, on-campus outreach, off-campus outreach, art (to help make banners, signs, fliers, etc.) – it is establishing connections across CUNY and beyond with students, education workers, trade-unionists and immigrant-rights activists.

Right after the beginning of the spring semester, on January 30, the Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants called a “speak-out” demonstration against deportation raids, the Department of Homeland Security’s cancellation of restrictions on Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity in “sensitive locations” such as schools, churches and playgrounds, as well as the Trump administration’s assault on birthright citizenship. This fundamental democratic right, codified in the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, was gained as a result of the defeat of the slaveowners’ “Confederacy” in the Civil War, due largely to the enlistment of almost 200,000 black troops in the Union army. Despite the bitter cold, the protest brought out 150 students, faculty and staff as well as members of the Professional Staff Congress, United Federation of Teachers, DC37 and other labor organizations.

The January 30 speak-out was kicked off with a speech by Sam, a member of the Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants and the CUNY Internationalist Clubs, who pointed to Attorney General Pam Bondi’s threat to deport pro-Palestinian demonstrators who are in the U.S. on student visas. With university administrators and capitalist politicians of both big ruling-class parties pushing campus witch hunts and censorship, the Clubs have been prominent in protesting this repression. (This is seen, for example, in the new documentary *The Palestine Exception*, part of which focuses on student/faculty protest at Hunter against the then-college president’s attempt in No-



Internationalist photo

As the Trump administration began carrying out racist mass deportations from day one, the Committee to Defend Immigrants at Hunter College of the City University of New York called a speak-out on January 30 that drew 150 protesters in the bitter cold.

vember 2023 to stop the screening of a film critical of Israel).¹

These struggles are important background for activists today as Democrats and Republicans join forces to trample free speech rights and academic freedom. The fact that the Democrats paved the way for Trump, *again*, is starkly shown by his plan for forced transfer of over 2 million Palestinians from Gaza, in order to turn it into U.S.-owned “beachfront property.” The way for this genocidal horror was paved by the leveling of Gaza by bombs supplied by “Genocide Joe” Biden, aided and abetted by the rest of U.S. imperialism’s Democratic Party.

While attacks on student and faculty rights at elite schools escalate yet again this semester, new assaults on academic freedom and free speech have been targeting CUNY too. In early February, the chapter of the faculty/staff union (PSC-CUNY) at Queens College protested the chilling new restrictions on campus demonstrations de-

¹ See “McCarthyite Film Ban at Hunter College Struck Down by Student-Faculty Protest,” *Revolution* No. 21, September 2024. This was followed by last fall’s successful campaign against on-campus censorship, described in “Hunter Students, Faculty and Staff Win an Important Victory for Free Speech,” internationalist.org, October 2024.

creed by the college administration. Then on February 25, New York’s witch-hunting Democratic governor Kathy Hochul personally ordered CUNY to take down a Hunter College job posting for a professorship in Palestinian studies – a major, flagrant violation of basic academic freedom. The organization of mass student/labor protest will be vital in current struggles to defend the right to free speech and other basic rights on the campuses and throughout society. Defense of immigrant rights is a central component of this struggle.

Speaking to the January 30 Hunter rally, a Haitian American student emphasized the relation between imperialist oppression abroad and the racist discrimination immigrant workers face here: “The dominance of U.S. imperialism over Haiti, after independence was won by the masses of the enslaved, has directly affected my family. There is no safety for our Haitian brothers and sisters to return to, should they be deported back to Haiti.”

Internationalist Club activist Kaitlan talked about what these attacks on immigrants mean for the rights of us all:

“This speak-out is defending the rights of immigrants, but we should be very clear that everyone’s rights are under attack

right now. Trans people are under attack. Not too long ago women’s right to abortion was taken away. This is a multifaceted struggle, and it’s about all oppressed people. We need to talk about the issue of *class* because when we talk about the working class, we’re talking about power.”

A NYC public school teacher told rally participants:

“A lot of my students feel scared. The day after Trump was elected, some stopped coming. Meanwhile some school administrations have been trying to keep ‘Know Your Rights’ information out of the hands of students and their families. We cannot look to the administration in the New York City Public Schools, we cannot look to the mayor, and we certainly cannot look to Democratic Party.

“We have to mobilize the power of labor, we need to mobilize union power. At my school we have formed a Committee to Defend Immigrants, to defend not only students but their families and staff members.... But we need even more power. That’s why the Labor Committee was initiated. We need the transit workers out here, we need construction workers, healthcare workers. We all need to come together to mobilize the power of labor together with students, parents and all defenders of immigrants to say that we are not going to let them take our kids away from our schools! ICE is not going to come into our schools – not if we can help it!”

Capitalism in the U.S. deprives millions of immigrants of basic rights because their super-exploitation is vital for the profits of the ruling class. In New York, where 45% of the workforce was born in another country, we see this every day in the city’s construction sites, restaurants, healthcare system and innumerable other ways.

The right not to live under the daily threat of police-state repression because of where you were born or what papers you have – this is pretty basic. To win it requires power. Immigrant workers’ key role as part of the multiracial working class means enormous potential power, but to unchain it, what’s essential is class-struggle leadership, based on the program of revolutionary internationalism. ■

Facing Menace of Immigration Raids, Mass Deportations Call to Reestablish the Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants (November 2024)

After an election from hell in which U.S. capitalism’s two big parties competed as to who’s tougher on the border and “illegal immigration,” we face the prospect of major escalations in the anti-immigrant offensive. This goes hand in hand with the U.S.-backed wars abroad that fan mounting racism and repression “at home.” President-elect Donald Trump – building on and seeking to dramatically outdo the deportation records of his predecessors in the White House – “has vowed to build huge detention camps, implement mass deportations at a scale never before seen, hire thousands more border agents, funnel

military spending toward border security and invoke the Alien Enemies Act of 1798” (*Politico*, 6 November). At a mid-October campaign rally, his running mate JD Vance declared, “Our message to illegal aliens [sic] is, pack your bags, because in four months you’re going home.”

Using anti-immigrant bigotry to intimidate, divide and conquer the multiracial working class and our families – this is aimed at the rights of us all. Here at Hunter College and throughout CUNY, a huge proportion of us are the children of immigrants (and in many cases immigrants ourselves). The rest of us are classmates,

friends, teachers and coworkers of immigrants and their families. It is the responsibility of us all to stand together. Let’s make it clear that we will mobilize against attempts to drag away our classmates, students and friends. And we can resist: 40% of NYC’s entire population (and 45% of the workforce) was born in another country. At the same time, with 560,000 “undocumented immigrants” per city government statistics, the anti-immigrant threat is very real in NYC too. Yet immigrant workers are a vital part of the enormous potential power of the working class as a

continued on page 12

Immigrant Worker Organizer and Revolutionary

Remembering Our Comrade

Fernando López

As the youth section of the Internationalist Group (IG), the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth draws on the IG's history of bringing the revolutionary working-class program of Trotskyism into the struggle to defend immigrant rights. As the struggle intensifies today, part of educating ourselves is knowing this history. Our late comrade Fernando López embodied many important aspects of it, as shown in the following article that we are reprinting from The Internationalist No. 7, April-May 1999, where it appeared under the title "Fernando López, 1973-1999: Comrade, Internationalist, Revolutionary."

Our comrade Fernando López died in a tragic subway accident in New York City on 4 April 1999. Fernando was 25 years old; he was a garment worker, a union organizer, an activist in the cause of the oppressed, and a communist. He was a worker intellectual, a talented organizer and recruiter of remarkable energy and enthusiasm. As a close friend wrote in his memory: "In your short life you left your mark profoundly on all of us who had the pleasure of knowing you." A memorial meeting was held for Fernando in Manhattan on April 13, attended by 100 people, with more than a dozen speakers.

Fernando López Inzunza was born on 15 July 1973 in Huajapan, in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. As a child he moved to a small town in the state of Tlaxcala, and as a teenager went to Mexico City, where as a high-school student he developed a deep interest in mathematics and helped organize a number of cultural and political youth groups, making plans to study drama on a scholarship he had won from the Instituto de Bellas Artes (Fine Arts Institute). However, in 1994 he followed relatives who, like thousands of others from the Tlaxcala-Puebla region of Mexico, went to New York in search of work. Fernando's uncle had gotten work in a Brooklyn sweatshop (where he met and married a Ukrainian woman of Jewish origin); and soon Fernando was making his living as a sewing machine operator in the garment trade.

The conditions of merciless exploitation of the thousands of "undocumented" immigrants who, like Fernando, worked for miserable wages in dark, poorly ventilated and often unheated sweatshops aroused his indignation and spurred his developing social consciousness. He soon joined efforts to bring his fellow workers into the garment workers union (first the ILGWU and then its successor union UNITE), which had begun a number of organizing drives among immigrant workers. In June 1995 he was chosen to represent the garment workers of Manhattan at a demonstration of hundreds of workers in support of Chinese sweatshop workers in Brooklyn. In his speech, "in the name of the workers of all nationalities," he de-



In director David Riker's 1998 film *La Ciudad*, based partly on Fernando's own experiences as an immigrant garment worker, he portrayed a participant in a work stoppage to defend a seamstress abused by bosses in a New York City sweatshop.

nounced the way "the bosses and contractors exploit us mercilessly and trample our dignity and respect."

As part of a group of union activists he was later sent on a months-long organizing drive in California, and was also assigned to assist Teamster organizing efforts at a large rental car agency. With a strong sense of irony he would later display the diploma he received when the union tops sent him to a formal training course for organizers, relating how they sought to tempt him with the bureaucrats' "good life" by putting him up in a fancy hotel before sending him back to the sweatshop. At the same time, he stressed the impact made on him by a Korean American organizer he worked with, who put his knowledge of the Korean, Spanish and English languages to work to bring workers into the union movement.

When UNITE carried out a lightning purge of the group of activists and organizers Fernando was working with in New York City, he helped them found the Garment Workers Solidarity Center. In a statement to the memorial meeting held on April 13, the GWSC noted: "From the beginning he was an active member, assisting the Press and Propaganda Committee. Later, due to his knowledge of logistics and computers, he was elected to head the Organization Committee.... Fernando is an example of how a garment worker ... can develop his potential as a leader. And this is how our *compañero* Fernando came to show his many facets in the workers movement."

When filmmaker David Riker, who became Fernando's friend, made a movie entitled *La Ciudad* (The City), Fernando played a role as a sewing-machine operator who joins others in a work stoppage to defend a woman worker, a vivid depiction of the power of workers solidarity. In the real life sweatshops his fierce persistence and passion in his organizing work won him the nickname *El Tigre*.

Fernando's development into a Marxist revolutionary was thus rooted in his previous experiences and development. As a comrade from the Internationalist Group noted at the memorial:

"Fernando López decided to fight to understand the world and change it. Fernando went through the world *questioning*, always questioning. He never accepted anything simply because somebody said it was so, or because that's just the way things are. He always wanted to know *why*. He always wanted to know, what is it that we should do? And he never resigned himself in the face of injustice."

This sense comes through in a piece Fernando wrote in 1994, which was read at his memorial:

"I would like to live a thousand years/ in order to understand this world. In this game of life/ there are only two paths: That of an easy life/ and that of great sacrifices. I hope to have the happiness/ of walking along the second path, so that at the end of my existence/ I will be filled with satisfaction."

Poems about Fernando were also read by a writer of popular Mexican poetry who is a member of Unimexny, and by comrade Socorro of the Internationalist Group.

A speaker from the New York Zapatistas, to which Fernando had belonged as he politically developed toward Bolshevism, stressed his insistence on orderly and productive meetings and the enormous care and attention to organizational detail he put into every aspect of his work. Understanding the importance of organization and consciousness, and of those who march in the vanguard of their class, Fernando came to a decision rooted in his previous experiences and evolution: to become a professional revolutionary, a Leninist.

At the time of his death he had formally requested to join the Internationalist Group, section of the League for the

Fourth International, and was attending meetings and carrying out party assignments. This step came after working and studying with us intensively over the past period. He participated with the IG at marches and protests, and rallies for Mumia Abu-Jamal; intervened at a range of leftist events, chastising reformists who push petitions for "reforming" the police and centrists who cite opinion polls to justify their abandonment of the struggle for Puerto Rican independence; and began to participate in work among students facing the racist purge of minorities at the City University of New York.

An IG speaker noted Fernando's "enormous passion for ideas": "In classes over the course of 26 years, I have never seen a more enthusiastic and sincere participant or a quicker learner; and in a short time he began to give classes on various Marxist themes." In the months before his death he helped give classes on topics ranging from Lenin's pole-

mic against nationalism in *Critical Remarks on the National Question* to Engels' essay *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* and (using examples from his extensive knowledge of mathematics), the chapters on dialectics in Engels' *Anti-Dühring*. At the same time he continued to teach GED (high-school equivalency) classes for his fellow workers. One of his students recalled how he would come straight from his back-breaking job to give these classes, insisting on students applying themselves and completing their assignments.

At the memorial, another IG comrade noted that this reminded her of Trotsky's description of his son Leon Sedov:

"Leon had exceptional mathematical ability. He never tired of assisting many worker-students who had not gone through grammar school. He engaged in this work with all his energy; encouraging, leading, chiding the lazy ones – the youthful teacher saw in this work a service to his class.... Most of his time, strength and spirit were devoted to the cause of the revolution."

Fernando's tireless work to bring new people around our organization made a big impression on friends and coworkers, one of whom wrote: "You have changed a lot since you began to be part of the group of the Trotskyists. Your ideas have become clearer and better-founded. The truth is I admire you." In Fernando, the Trotskyist movement has lost a powerful comrade just as a long period of preparatory work was bearing fruit.

For Fernando solidarity was not just a word; he lived it and in reality embodied it; in his death he received it from many, as shown by the more than one hundred people, most of them immigrant garment workers, who came to pay their respects at the funeral home shortly after his death and again at the memorial meeting. Having

La Ciudad by David Riker

seen the employers seek to fan antagonisms between Asian and Hispanic workers in the garment industry, Fernando was deeply committed to the struggle to overcome racial, ethnic and national divisions among all the working people. One of his assignments for our organization at the time of his death was extensive research on the Asian immigrant worker population in the New York area.

When we met and began discussions with him in a period of demonstrations against massacres in Chiapas and immigration raids in New York, he showed a great interest in the struggle against black oppression and an understanding of its central role in virtually all social and political questions in the United States, including struggles against the oppression of women and anti-immigrant racism. Several speakers noted at the memorial that Fernando was active in the fight to free Mumia Abu-Jamal. In a poem read to the memorial, comrade Socorro recalled Fernando, “the hole in your leather jacket/covered with a button of Frederick Douglass,” as a “revolutionary with no patria” (fatherland), and quoted the Mexican revolutionary Ricardo Florés Magón. “The patria, proletarians, is something which is not ours. The patria belongs to the bourgeoisie, and thus it is they alone who benefit from it.” Long before meeting the Internationalist Group, Fernando was already calling himself “a citizen of the world.”

One of the most remarkable examples of his spirit, determination and organizing talents occurred when, together with many coworkers, he was arrested in one of a wave of Immigration and Naturalization Service raids in the New York area last year. An article on *migra* raids and deportations in *El Internacionalista* (No. 1, May 1998), the Spanish-language publication of the League for the Fourth International, begins with a description of this March 1998 raid, based on a letter Fernando wrote from jail. Twenty plainclothes INS agents blocked the doors of two sweatshops, seizing “undocumented” immigrants who worked there for minimum wage. Handcuffed and chained, the men were taken to a prison run for the INS in Elizabeth, New Jersey by the Corrections Corporation of America, the women to a *migra* prison in Pennsylvania. Because he refused to cooperate with the INS agents by giving his nationality and other information, or signing papers or stating his country of origin

(which facilitates the deportation process), and because he sought to organize others to do the same, Fernando was singled out and threatened with exorbitant bail.

In the prison for 22 days, Fernando kept a daily record of events while he kept working to organize and cheer up the others, finding ways to bridge language barriers to communicate with Chinese workers and help them with their phone calls, and intervening to assist an African prisoner driven to desperation by incarceration. After his release, on each of the occasions we accompanied him to hearings at immigration court, he ran into people he had met in the *migra* jail, all of whom greeted him effusively. When the judge finally sentenced him to what is hypocritically called “voluntary departure” (in which the deportee pays his own air fare), Fernando answered that he still had much to do here. Immediately afterwards, on the steps of the courthouse, he sold an Internationalist Group pamphlet to another defendant he had met in jail. He took particular pride in his success at distributing our publications.

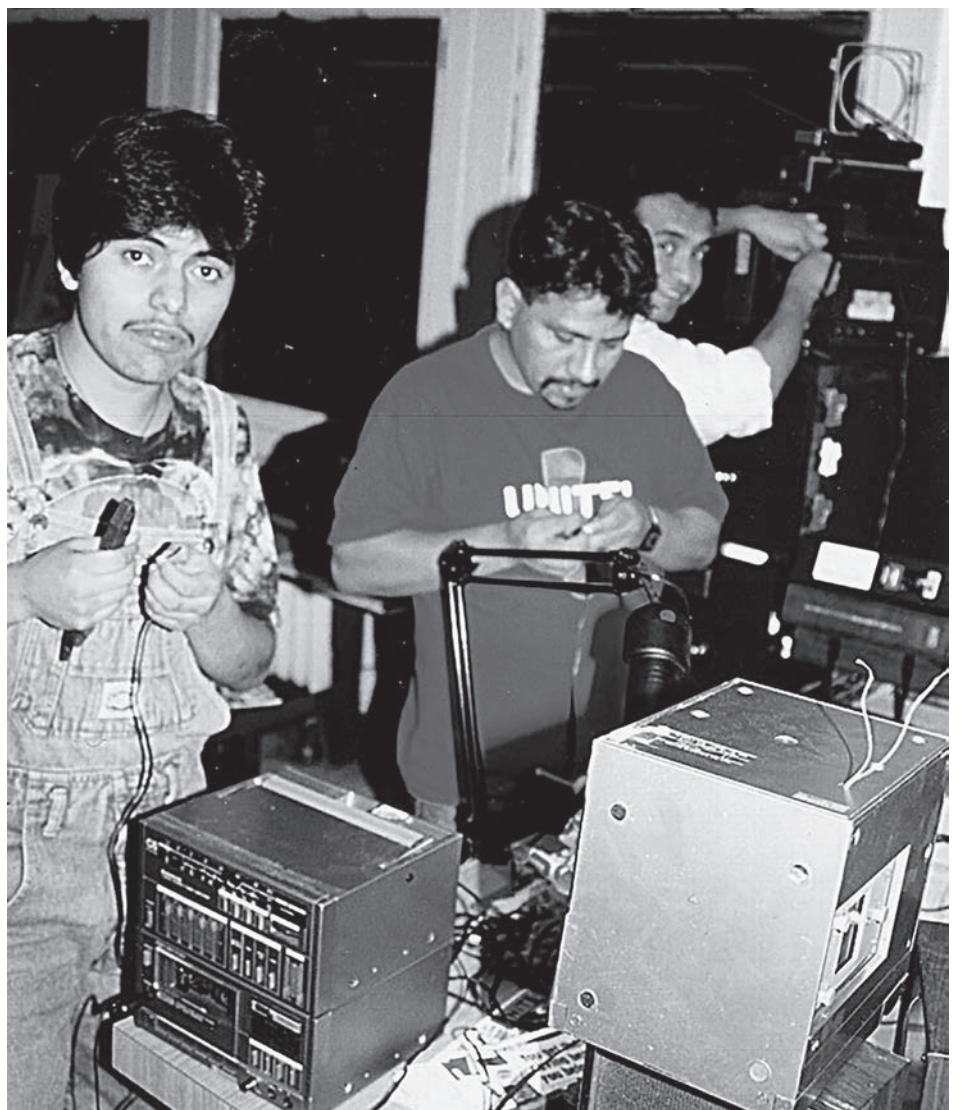
As a comrade noted at the memorial meeting for Fernando:

“The government said he was ‘illegal’ because he lacked some little papers called immigration documents. The bourgeoisie thinks it is all-powerful. But it is nothing when faced with the power of the proletariat, and its tribunals and jails will fall to pieces when the workers decide it shall be so and, having acquired consciousness of themselves as a class, take the power in a socialist revolution.”

In systematically investigating the origins of the League for the Fourth International (LFI) in the expulsion of a number of leading cadres from the International Communist League (ICL), he closely studied polemics between the two organizations. As a worker communist and internationalist he expressed bitter revulsion at the ICL’s betrayal of a hard-fought struggle to remove police from the municipal workers union in Brazil, and their degeneration into what he characterized as *revolucionarios de escritorio* (office-bound revolutionaries). At the same time he was full of optimism for the prospects of genuine Marxism; he was reading avidly about Leon Trotsky’s life and planning to visit and help work at the Trotsky museum in Coyoacán, Mexico, established at the house where the co-leader of the October Revolution – who found himself on the “planet without a visa” – was killed during his final exile.



Comrade Fernando at an organizing meeting in NYC.



As a founder of the Garment Workers Solidarity Center, Fernando’s knowledge of computers and logistics complemented his talents as a working-class educator and organizer.

As the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, section of the LFI, wrote in a “post-humous tribute to a young revolutionary”:

“Fernando was dynamic and full of life. His struggles and his communist ideals made a profound impression on us, and we believe they are cause for pride for those, such as we of the League for the Fourth International, who knew him and felt the sincere way in which he spoke, lived and fought to put an end to discrimination against immigrants, racism, machismo, homophobia and all forms of bigotry, pointing out that only international proletarian revolution will emancipate humanity from these and all other evils afflicting the exploited and oppressed. Courageously, Fernando raised his fists and gave voice to this call in the very entrails of today’s most powerful capitalist country, the United States of America.”

In remarks in Spanish to the April 13 memorial meeting, composed primarily of immigrant workers, an Internationalist Group spokesman noted:

“For the bosses, as you *compañeros* are very much aware, the worker is worth less – much less – than a machine. For them, the workers are nothing more than raw material for exploitation. They view the working man and woman, the black person and Latino, the Indian, the white worker or the worker from China, Korea or India, as nothing more than a source of profit.

“For this reason, the bourgeoisie would like the workers to remain obedient, silent, with their backs bent, bodies tired and spirits fatalistic, heads bowed and empty or filled with prejudices, superstitions and dark hatreds against those of other races or nations. For the capitalists, when the workers are not slaving at their machines they should be on their knees before the masters of this world: divided, atomized, deceived and believing themselves to be worthless.

“But Fernando, who questioned everything, did not agree. In you, comrades, in the workers of the garment industry, in the immigrant workers from Latin America, from China, from Africa – like Amadou Diallo – and so many other places; in all the workers and oppressed of this planet, Fernando saw something different, something special.

“Fernando saw in every working man and woman the ability to think with his or her own head, to understand their own situation, that of their class and that of society as a whole; to enter into history, geography and politics – in other words, a limitless potential. He wanted the workers to question, debate and understand, to appropriate for themselves and their children the fruits of civilization and of their own labor. It was thus that through many experiences and battles he reached the conclusion that together the workers can transform this world by taking it into their own hands....

“He had come to the understanding that the international working class has a mission, which is not simply to win a piece of bread which is a little bit bigger, but to emancipate all humanity, all those who labor, all the exploited and oppressed. Fernando was definitely a radical: he wanted to find the root of problems; he wanted to uproot exploitation and create a classless society. Because the proletariat is the class with radical chains, and by breaking them it breaks the chains of all the oppressed of the entire earth. Because of this Fernando was an internationalist; he was a revolutionary, and he became a Marxist, a communist....

“We will always remember him with love, with grief and with joy. It was an honor to have known him, to have fought at his side and to have become his friend and comrade. His ideas and example will always live with us all.” ■

On “Home Front” of U.S./Israel War on Gaza

Congressional Witch Hunt

Comes to CUNY

by Carmen and Jacob

“So will this person be fired?” demanded one of the lead inquisitors at a Congressional hearing on July 15. In this episode of the witch hunt staged by the House of Representatives’ Committee on Education and the Workforce on Capitol Hill, the City University of New York and two other universities were the targets. The witness being interrogated: CUNY chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez. The inquisitor: self-styled “ultra-MAGA” Representative Elise Stefanik, from upstate New York. The person she wanted fired: CUNY Law professor Ramzi Kassem. His supposed offense: serving as a lawyer helping to defend Mahmoud Khalil, the Palestinian rights activist that the Trump administration is hell-bent on deporting.

Professor Kassem was doing his job as a lawyer and the founding director of CUNY CLEAR (Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility), which since 2009 has provided free legal representation and other services to communities, movements and activists targeted by government repression. It was this that made him one of the targets – though far from the only one – in scenes that evoked the red-scare rantings of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the notorious hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1950s.

Three university heads took the witness stand in the windowless Congressional chamber on July 15: Matos Rodríguez of CUNY; Rich Lyons, chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley; and Robert Groves, interim president of Georgetown University. The hearing, titled “Antisemitism in Higher Education: Investigating the Role of Faculty, Funding, and Ideology,” was the latest in a series aimed at regimenting and purging colleges and universities, while providing opportunities for right-wing politicians to advance their careers by browbeating “eggheads” (as the McCarthyites used to call liberal academics) on TV. It was the ninth such hearing to take place over the past two years.

The pretext for this ongoing witch hunt is the vile *slander* that it is “antisemitic” to protest the genocidal war on Gaza, defend the Palestinian people or oppose Zionism (the official ideology of the state of Israel).¹ At the July 15 hearing, this smear was repeated *ad nauseam*. One after the other, Republican committee members hurled hostile queries and accusations at the university administrators. The interrogation often consisted of the kind of “questions” framed in such a way that the witness is made to look “guilty” no matter how they answer. (The classic example of this kind of loaded question is, “Have you stopped beating your wife, yes or no?”)

¹ This smear is systematically unmasked in the article “Genocide Defenders Slander Anti-Zionists as ‘Antisemitic,’” *The Internationalist* No. 72, January-May 2024. Also see articles in this issue of *Revolution* on the drive to regiment colleges and universities, and on McCarthyite censorship and police repression against pro-Palestinian protesters.



Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez of the City University of New York (second from left) testifies at House Committee on Education hearing, 15 July 2025, flanked by Georgetown’s Robert Groves and Rich Lyons of UC Berkeley. McCarthyite spectacle evoked 1950s “Un-American Activities” inquisition.

So it was no surprise when Stefanik asked: “Chancellor Matos Rodriguez, does CUNY have an antisemitism problem, yes or no?” Congressman Rick Allen of Georgia was intent on finding out “Were they [student protesters] put in prison?” Committee chairman Tim Walberg of Michigan asked: “How many students has CUNY suspended or expelled for antisemitic conduct” and “Does CUNY have any antisemitic faculty?” The grotesque nature of the barrage is highlighted by the record of the accusers, many of whom have trafficked in actual antisemitic themes wielded by “great replacement theory” promoters, Christian nationalists, anti-immigrant bigots and white supremacists. (See accompanying box.) Moreover, equating opposition to the Gaza genocide with antisemitism can only help breed actual antisemitism.

While the witch-hunters, with their blatant bullying and theatrics, made no pretense of “fairness” or objectivity, there was a clear purpose to the charade. As Rep. Burgess Owens of Utah put it at the beginning of the hearing: “The message to college administrators is very simply this: either eradicate this cancer, or there will be consequences. This is coming from the top down.” In other words, it’s part of the drive for U.S. universities’ forced “synchronization” – *Gleichschaltung* in German. (See “Trump, White House Witch-Hunters Besiege Academia: The *Gleichschaltung* of American Universities” on page 9 of this issue.)

In obviously well-rehearsed statements, the university heads answered their inquisitors by demonstrating their commitment to witch-hunting pro-Palestinian speech and activism on college campuses. Confronted with the nationwide wave of pro-Palestine solidarity encampments in the spring of 2024, the administrations of each school scrambled to show their compliance with ruling-class demands for repression on the home front of the U.S.-armed and funded war against the Palestinian people. New regulations were promulgated at each school restricting protest and

beefing up disciplinary measures against campus activists – a point each of the administrators was at pains to emphasize before their belligerent inquisitors.

Of the three university tops, Chancellor Matos Rodríguez of CUNY was most eager to highlight the measures taken against student protest. He testified that since calling in the New York Police Department in April 2024 to disperse the Gaza solidarity encampment at City College, resulting in 170 arrests,² CUNY has developed a “zero tolerance policy” against encampments, sharply increased the numbers of “security” personnel and conducted trainings for the campus cops specifically on “how to handle demonstrations and protests.”

Bipartisan Repression and Censorship

At protests and speak-outs at the City University of New York (many of which have been initiated by the CUNY Internationalist Clubs), and elsewhere, we denounce the blatant *McCarthyism* of the ongoing repression and censorship offensive. Others denounce the “new McCarthyism” too – and of course it’s good that they do. But as Marxists who call for building a revolutionary workers party, we make a point that others often leave unsaid: what’s commonly called “McCarthyism” did not start with Republican senator Joe McCarthy in the 1950s.

At what is now the CUNY system, the 1940s kicked off with the bipartisan Rapp-Coudert hearings that witch-hunted hundreds of “subversive” faculty members, students and staff at Brooklyn, City, Hunter and Queens colleges.³ Before the end of WWII, liberal Democrats like Minnesota’s Hubert Humphrey launched red-baiting and anti-communist purges, which directly paved the way for McCarthy’s Cold War red scare. (Humphrey went on to sponsor the Commu-

² See “Speak-Out Against Repression of CCNY Gaza Solidarity Encampment,” *Revolution* No. 21, September 2024.

³ See “Real Reds Don’t Bow to Anti-Communist Bans,” *Revolution* No. 18, September 2021.

nist Control Act of 1954 and serve as Lyndon Johnson’s VP during the Vietnam War.)

And today? At the July 15 hearing on Capitol Hill, Democratic members of the House committee criticized the ravings of their Republican colleagues. But the witch hunt against pro-Palestinian demonstrators has been very much a bipartisan effort, which from the beginning came “from the top down.” This fact was front and center at the height of the Gaza solidarity encampments last year. At an event in the U.S. Capitol on 7 May 2024, Democratic president “Genocide Joe” Biden unleashed a torrent of denunciations and smears against the campus protests, calling them part of a “ferocious surge of antisemitism.” Side by side with Biden (literally) at the same event was hard-right Republican House speaker Mike Johnson, who followed him at the podium, ranting that campuses had been infected by an “antisemitic virus.”

In late April 2024, Johnson had gone to Columbia University to call for the National Guard to be sent in against the Gaza solidarity encampment there. This was preceded by a deluge of statements from Democratic officials smearing the protest encampment as “antisemitic,” including Governor Hochul and Mayor Adams, senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Chuck Schumer, attorney general Letitia James, House Minority leader Hakeem Jeffries and representatives Jerry Nadler, Adriano Espaillat and Dan Goldman, plus various city council members (*Columbia Spectator*, 23 April; cityandstate-newyork.com, 29 April 2024). On April 29, 21 House Democrats sent Columbia a letter stating: “It is past time for the University to act decisively [and] disband the encampment.... The time for negotiation is over; the time for action is now.” The major NYPD operation sweeping the Columbia and CCNY encampments came the next day. So yes, the vicious slander, mass arrests, beat-downs and expulsions of NYC students – for *protesting genocide* in Gaza – were truly an example of Democratic/Republican bipartisanism in the service of U.S. imperialism.

The repression and demonization of pro-Palestinian protest by Biden & Co. in 2023-24 is one of the many ways in which the Democrats paved the way for Trump – again. Now he wields ever-widening executive orders, decrees and witch hunts to make educational and cultural institutions obey his administration’s reactionary ideological dictates. Liberals hoped and prayed that university administrators would stand up to Trump – but these capitalist appointees were already working to curb free speech rights and academic freedom well before then. Now one liberal university head after another – CUNY’s chancellor being a prominent case in point – scrambles to display their willingness to partner up with MAGA against basic rights of the “university community” they claim to speak for.

In New York State, witch-hunting has yet again come “from the top,” with a leading role repeatedly played by Governor Hochul (who recently bestowed her endorsement for NYC mayor on fellow Democrat Zohran Mamdani). In December 2023, the day after

Haiyun Jiang / The New York Times

Faced with months of extortionate threats from the Trump administration, in late July Columbia University reached a settlement with the federal government. The feds' blackmail campaign against the Ivy League school weaponized the bipartisan smear that campus protests against the U.S./Israel genocide in Gaza were "antisemitic." Already last year, Columbia's then-president quit after a Congressional goon squad (headed by "ultra-MAGA" Rep. Elise Stefanik) got her to grovel in front of a TV audience of millions. Now, despite Columbia's continued escalations of repression against pro-Palestinian protesters, it was being pilloried for supposedly showing insufficient zeal for torching basic rights – and threatened with the loss of \$400 million in federal funding. So Columbia agreed to add more fuel to the fire.

In addition to agreeing to ramp up even further the violation of free speech rights of students, faculty and staff, Columbia will also roll back "diversity" initiatives in hiring and admissions. While ritually stipulating that it admits no fault, the administration agreed to cough up a \$200 million fine to the government (which said it will restore the university's access to frozen federal research funds) and to pay another \$21 million over the next three years. The "Resolution Agreement Between the United States of America and Columbia University" (23 July) was signed by U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi, Secretary of Education Linda McMahon, Secretary of Health (*sic*) Robert F. Kennedy Jr., as well as a representative of Columbia's Board of Trustees.

In other words: Columbia caved. What a surprise! The haughty Columbia tops are notorious for lording it over Harlem residents, unleashing police violence against student protesters and trying to starve out striking unionists. But when faced with brutish demands from on high for even more censorship and repression, they crawl. Unfortunately, the consequences of Columbia's

Smears and Inquisitions Columbia Caves

capitulation will be borne by its faculty, students and staff – and those at universities and colleges throughout the country.

As discussed in the article on page 9, the use of executive powers to compel ideological adherence actually goes much farther than the United States' historical experience with McCarthyism, resembling the Nazis' *Gleichschaltung* (enforcement of ideological uniformity) in the schools. For the Trump administration, the Columbia settlement and the purges that will follow are a model for what they intend to carry out across the higher education system and beyond.

Aiding the censor-and-slander offensive, days before the settlement Columbia announced that it had adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's pseudo-"definition" of antisemitism, which grotesquely conflates criticism of Israel with hatred of Jews. Of course, the fact that many Jewish students and faculty have been part of the campus protests doesn't faze the witch-hunters. (Rep. Stefanik's campaign materials have echoed the "great replacement theory," and other leading lights in the smear campaign have long trafficked in that and other antisemitic themes.)

Why did Columbia cave in so blatantly to the demands of the White House, which so flagrantly violate the most elementary precepts of academic freedom and free speech rights? Most fundamentally, because it is a core institution of American capitalism. The university is a business, as reflected in Columbia's own July 23 statement on the settlement, which repeatedly refers to what it calls "our research enterprise." This top-tier ruling-class institution also has many links with U.S. capitalism's repressive agencies. Last spring, Columbia announced a new co-chair of its Board of Trustees: Jeh Johnson, formerly the head of the Department of Homeland Security during the administration of Barack Obama, which set an

all-time record for deportations.¹

Each capitulation to the new McCarthyism stokes the witch-hunters' insatiable appetite for more. The document codifying Columbia's deal with the White House stipulates that its "senior vice provost" will become a special inquisitor who "will conduct a thorough review of the portfolio of programs in regional areas across the University, starting with the Middle East" to "review all aspects of leadership and curriculum," ensure that courses are "balanced," and so on *ad nauseam*.

Columbia also promised the White House that it will "take steps to decrease financial dependence on international student enrollment," which accounts for approximately 40% of the student body. International students who are admitted will be subject to greater scrutiny, including "questions designed to elicit their reasons for wishing to study in the United States." In other words, they will be submitted to an ideological purity test.

According to a Columbia official cited by Bloomberg News (1 August), the university will also help the government police international students by reporting arrest information to the Department of Homeland Security's web-based Student and Exchange Visitor Information System. Among the reportable offenses are infractions like trespassing, the charge on which 78 pro-Palestinian student protesters were arrested for occupying a university library in May.

Further highlighting that repression is the name of the game, the settlement document warns that "demonstrations and other protest activities that occur inside academic build-

¹ Johnson, who as DHS head vowed to send a message that "if you come here, you should not expect to simply be released," faced protests (including a hunger strike by 22 asylum-seeking mothers) as he oversaw a dramatic increase in the detention of immigrant families and strenuously pursued the deportation of Haitians displaced by Hurricane Matthew in September 2016 ("Defeat the War on Immigrants," *Revolution* No. 15, September 2018).

ings and places where academic activities take place present a direct impediment to maintaining Columbia's core academic mission" and "are not acceptable" under university rules. The ambiguity of what constitutes "protest activity" can be used to crack down on fliering, tabling, hosting meetings or other activities that government or campus authorities want to go after.

Yet another branch of the inquisitorial expansion mandates the appointment of a third-party "Resolution Monitor" who will, together with an assistant attorney general of the United States, receive "regular reports" from the Columbia administration. Armed with his own staff and a whistle-blower hotline, this chief witch-hunter will investigate alleged breaches of the agreement. Among the items Columbia agreed to "provide the Resolution Monitor and the United States" are "admissions data ... showing both rejected and admitted students broken down by race, color, grade point average, and performance on standardized tests." Chillingly underlining the government's direct intrusion into university affairs, the agreement states that "the United States and its consultants and agents will have access to all Columbia staff, employees, facilities, documents, and data related to the Agreement."

The man designated for the job of "Resolution Monitor" is Bart Schwartz, chairman of Guidepost Solutions, a private investigation and security agency whose website proclaims that its staff includes many "former federal prosecutors, intelligence officers, and special agents from prestigious agencies such as the CIA, FBI, DHS," etc.

Clearly, the stakes go far beyond the ivied walls of Columbia U. Trump went after elite schools as part of his push to mold a new, rightist elite. But the assault on democratic rights has direct effects on society's working-class majority disdained and feared by all sectors of the capitalist ruling class. And only through the power of the working class, and on the basis of a revolutionary program, can the capitalist offensive against our basic rights be defeated. ■

Elise Stefanik led the interrogation of the Harvard, Penn and MIT presidents, Hochul jumped on the bandwagon, stating she was "shocked" by their testimony and would carry out a probe of CUNY and the State University of New York, pledging "aggressive enforcement action" against antisemitism, which she claimed was rife on their campuses.

The following year saw Hochul avidly advocating the repression of campus protests, then this year in late February, her office announced that "Governor Hochul directed CUNY to immediately remove" a job posting for a Palestinian studies position at Hunter College and to "conduct a thorough review of the position to ensure that antisemitic theories are not promoted in the classroom," adding, "Hateful rhetoric of any kind has no place at CUNY or anywhere in New York State." Why? Because the job posting "called for scholars who could 'take a critical lens' to issues including 'settler colonialism, genocide, human rights, apartheid' and other topics," as reported by the *New York Times* (27 February).

In response to the Democratic governor's flagrantly anti-democratic order, the

American Association of University Professors declared that "political interference into academic research, scholarship, teaching, and academic decision making violates basic principles of academic freedom and governance," adding: "If academic freedom in teaching and scholarship can be overridden by the dicta of politicians and administrators, then the right to learn will not survive our present moment."

Hochul's egregious diktat definitely was a sign of the times – and the assault on education workers' rights goes beyond higher education. A bipartisan bill (AB-715) for censorship in California's K-12 schools has been promoted under the guise of "antisemitism prevention." In May, the state Assembly passed it in a 68-0 vote; the state Senate followed suit with a 35-0 vote in September. In early October, Democratic governor Gavin Newsom signed it into law.

The California Faculty Association (CFA) joined the California Teachers Association, the ACLU and other labor and civil liberties groups in opposing AB-715. The CFA warned that it will "have a chilling impact on classroom teachers who are already

facing lawsuits, censorship, and threats to their ability to facilitate critical discussions on important and timely current events." A CFA spokesperson, quoted in the union's 18 September statement, said that the law means:

"Teacher discourse on Palestine or the genocide in Gaza will be policed, misrepresented, and reported to the antisemitism coordinator. Today, it's Palestine. Tomorrow, will it be the 'rainbow flag,' your 'Black Lives Matter poster,' or your 'ICE out of LA' t-shirt? The question of equal protection for all students remains a concern."

As the assault on educational rights continues to broaden, it's important that students, teachers and staff organize and connect up with the power of the multiracial working class. To bring out that power requires a political struggle, since labor – from strategic blue-collar sectors to university unions like the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) at CUNY – continues to be hitched to the cart of the bosses' Democratic Party. Events keep underlining the elementary Marxist point that **breaking from the parties and politicians of capital** is crucial to the fight to defend our rights.

"Beyond the Ivy League"

When the Congressional inquisitions on higher ed revved up in December 2023, the focus was on prestigious elite private universities. In the first hearings, the presidents of Harvard, MIT and the University of Pennsylvania were called before the committee. Subsequent pressure from politicians and alumni donors led two of the three to resign. In April 2024, the then-president of Columbia, Minouche Shafik, appeared before the Washington witch-hunters. Her groveling testimony rewarded purveyors of rightist "populism" while revolting large numbers of students (as well as faculty and staff) across the country, fanning the flames of discontent amidst the wave of encampments against the genocidal war on Gaza.

Though Shafik's genuflections did not save her from the same fate that befell her Ivy League peers – she resigned her post that summer – the televised rituals of humiliation and repentance signaled further escalations of repression against pro-Palestinian demonstrators. In total, 3,100 people would be arrested at the campus protests

continued on page 20

Trump, White House Witch-Hunters Besiege Academia

The Gleichschaltung of American Universities

First published in The Internationalist No. 75, January-May 2025. Gleichschaltung (literally synchronization) was the German Nazis' term for enforcing ideological uniformity of the whole of society.

It began on March 8 with the seizure of Mahmoud Khalil, a politically moderate Palestinian graduate of Columbia University, by federal agents as he was entering the door of his apartment building with his wife, who was eight months pregnant. Khalil was spirited away almost 1,500 miles to a remote Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention center in Louisiana. After first saying that his student visa was canceled (he didn't have one), the feds announced that his permanent residency was revoked. The very next day President Donald Trump announced that \$400 million in federal grants to the school would be cancelled. Showing its obeisance to the new regime, Columbia that same day suspended, expelled and revoked the degrees of 22 students for pro-Palestinian activism.

The Trump administration's drive for mass deportations, reprisals against pro-Palestinian demonstrators and assault on U.S. universities was coming together. As the City University of New York (CUNY) Internationalist Clubs put it in a sign at an April 17 demonstration in defense of higher education: "First They Came for the Palestinians... Free Mahmoud Khalil!" In the following weeks, while pushing to deport international students, the federal government launched an assault on academic freedom and freedom of speech on campus that is intended to be much more deep-going than even the McCarthyite witch hunts of the 1950s. Washington is seeking control over hiring, enrollment, governance and course content, while demanding the expulsion of liberal "activist" faculty and students. They started out with spectacular demands on top universities, in order to intimidate the rest, a typical Trump ploy.

This was truly a purge foretold. A year ago, as the U.S./Israel war on Gaza raged on and a wave of student protest swept



NYPD arrests pro-Palestinian demonstrators sitting in at Barnard College at request of university administration. Mahmoud Khalil joined them in solidarity. Three days later he was seized by federal agents for deportation.

universities across the country, college administrators and capitalist politicians of both major parties cynically framed opposition to the Zionist genocide as antisemitism, in order to justify police repression and censorship. In April 2024, Democratic president Joe Biden "condemn[ed] the antisemitic protests," declaring that the demonstrations "must stop" and "order must prevail." After visiting Columbia, where the first Gaza solidarity encampment was taking place, New York Democratic governor Kathy Hochul tweeted the vile "antisemitism" smear against anti-Zionist protesters. Republican Speaker of the House Mike Johnson chimed in, calling for the deployment of National Guard troops to quash protest.

On the campaign trail in May 2024, Trump vowed in a closed-door meeting with donors that with "any student that protests," he would "throw them out of the country." The Republican National Convention in July included in its platform a call to "Deport pro-Hamas radicals and make our college campuses safe and patriotic again." Then in January 2025, during

his second week in office, Trump signed Executive Order 14188, ordering investigations of universities on fallacious charges of antisemitism, and for the Department of Homeland Security and State Department to collaborate in deporting pro-Palestinian international students. So when protests erupted anew at Columbia in March, federal cops began Gestapo-style abductions and federal funds were pulled from elite private universities where demonstrations took place.

Since Columbia buckled under the pressure of the federal government, the administration has turned its attention to Harvard. It started with an April 11 letter demanding a change in campus governance "reducing the power held by students and untenured faculty" and of any faculty involved in "activism"; a ban on students "hostile to American values" and an ongoing audit of the political ideology of students and faculty to ensure "viewpoint diversity"; shuttering "all diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs" and policies; and more. When Harvard refused to comply, three days later the administration

announced it was withholding \$2 billion in federal funding. This was followed by freezing \$1 billion in National Institutes of Health research funds and \$450 million in multi-agency grants, and disqualification from all future federal grants.

The administration followed up with a letter from Department of Homeland Security (DHS) head Kristi Noem accusing Harvard of having "created a hostile learning environment for Jewish students due to Harvard's failure to condemn anti-semitism" – which Harvard, of course, had condemned long ago. The letter demanded individual reports on students, including on their "participating in protests." Then on May 22, Noem informed Harvard that it would no longer be allowed to enroll international students. That evening, the administration formally accused Columbia of violating Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act through "deliberate indifference" toward harassment of Jewish students. But the whole construct is a lie: the supposed harassment of Jewish students was non-existent.

Similar threats of funding cuts have been made or are in the works for other universities on administration lists of suspect campuses. One list is of 60 universities being investigated by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) on suspicion of "antisemitism." Another 131 colleges with endowments of over \$1 billion are potential targets of an ED investigation over DEI programs, under a January 21 Trump executive order. Of those schools facing fund freezes, Cornell, Northwestern, University of Pennsylvania, Brown University and Princeton stand to lose at least \$2.5 billion between them. In short, blacklists are back, with a vengeance. When Senator Joe McCarthy (R, Wisconsin) was witch-hunting "reds" on campuses in the 1950s, hundreds of professors lost their jobs. Now it's whole universities that are losing billions in funding.

The escalation of McCarthyism today, in conjunction with the U.S.-armed Zionist war of extermination against Gaza, is not only bipartisan – as were the "red hunts" of



Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants and CUNY Internationalist Clubs at April 17 NYC rally for right to learn, part of national day of action.



Protesters on April 17 called for Trump to keep "hands off" academia. Democrats took the lead in witch-hunting universities over Gaza solidarity actions.

the late 1940s and early '50s – it is emanating straight from the White House, with the full force of the federal government behind it. We wouldn't be surprised to see students or faculty members hauled before inquisitorial investigative panels tomorrow to answer, "Are you now, or have you ever been, a pro-Palestinian protester?" And this time, the aim goes beyond punishing or purging some hundreds or thousands of academics. As the U.S. lurches toward authoritarian rule, we are facing a drive to control all education, whipping educators into line to march in lockstep with the MAGA agenda, imitating the German Nazis' *Gleichschaltung*¹ of the schools.

U.S. universities are under attack like never before. This assault cannot be diverted with passive resistance, nor can it be defeated by academia alone. It is being driven forward by the forces of xenophobia, bent on driving out millions of immigrants and ripping up the social fabric of the country, as well as by the misogynists who would force women back into the home, obligated to produce the next generation of wage slaves. It is led by virulent racists hell-bent on eliminating any measures to address social oppression, by (genuinely antisemitic) Christian-nationalist fanatics who would impose a messianic theocracy, by ultra-rightists seek to decimate the left, and by labor-haters who yearn to use the repressive powers of a Bonapartist "strong state" to crush the unions. Combined with the push for "patriotic education," it is a drive to regiment society for war.

The onslaught against American academia can only be defeated by a powerful class struggle by the workers movement in the lead of all the oppressed.

Behind the Trump Game Plan to Attack Elite Universities

Today some academics, including the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), look to the leadership of deep-pocketed elite universities like Harvard to shield higher education from state reprisals. This is illusory. All universities collaborated with local, state and federal authorities to clamp down on student protest and pro-Palestinian activism. Harvard president Alan Gabard was appointed after the resignation of his predecessor Claudine Gay, crucified at a Congressional hearing over the handling of Palestinian protests. Today he postures as a proponent of free speech, yet it was only last year he had the Palestine Solidarity Committee suspended, Harvard Yard closed and the diplomas of students who participated in encampments withheld – not to mention trying to quash graduate student unionization as provost in 2016.

On April 21, Harvard went to court, accusing the federal government of violating the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Yet Harvard has repeatedly tried to cave in. On April 29, it published a report on supposed antisemitism and "anti-Israel bias," which among other things accused Jewish Israeli professor Atalia Omer over her course on Palestinian and Israeli history.² On May 8, reports surfaced that top Harvard administrators were con-

sidering seeking a deal with the federal government. And on May 12, Harvard's president Gabard published a letter saying the university has "common ground" with the Trump administration. But it was never enough, so Noem, the sociopath head of DHS, issued her decree that Harvard could no longer enroll international students, whose tuition provides about a quarter of the university's overall funds.

In filing its suit against the administration, both lead lawyers representing Harvard have prior links to Trump, reflecting divisions in the upper levels of the ruling class. Robert Hur, a senior Justice Department official in Trump's first term, was the Special Counsel investigating President Biden's handling of classified documents; William Burck represented several Trump officials during the Robert Mueller "Russiagate" investigation. But the attacks on free speech began under the previous Democratic administration. Along with supplying the weapons for the U.S./Israel genocidal war on the Palestinians in Gaza, in November 2023 Biden initiated the Education Department probe into schools on bogus charges of antisemitism. A month before that, NY governor Hochul launched an investigation into pro-Palestinian activism at CUNY.

Those witch hunts led to the December 2023 Congressional star-chamber hearings of university presidents, orchestrated by "ultra-MAGA" Republican congresswoman Elise Stefanik. And it was largely Democratic governors and mayors who, in tandem with the Biden White House, brought police onto campuses to smash student protests last year, resulting in over 3,000 arrests nationwide. More recently, in February 2025, Democrat Hochul intervened directly to demand Hunter College withdraw a posting for a Palestinian studies job. This unholy alliance also includes ultra-rightists and hardline Zionists driving around "doxxing trucks" to smear defenders of the Palestinians as "antisemitic," while the fascistic Zionists of Betar announced that they had turned over to the Trump administration a list of pro-Palestinian activists to deport.

The Trump administration's attacks on pro-Palestinian dissent are part of an insidious long game plan to purge the universities, strategized in advance by the president's billionaire cabal and think-tank courtiers. In July 2023, Trump posted a video statement on his Agenda 47 campaign website on the topic of "Protecting Students from the Radical Left and Marxist Maniacs Infecting Educational Institutions." The video laid out plans to use the college accreditation system as a "secret weapon," purging the accreditation agencies in order to clean out "Marxists" from universities, setting "standards that will include defending the American tradition and Western civilization," while using the Department of Justice to litigate against schools with diversity programs.

Similarly, in April 2023, the conservative Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 published a playbook for Trump to follow in anticipation of his victory in the 2024 elections calling to "defang and defund the woke culture warriors who have infiltrated every last institution in America." The basic outlook of the administration can be summed up by the title of the keynote speech delivered by current vice president JD Vance at the 2021 National Conserva-



Senator Joe McCarthy (left) and his hatchet man Roy Cohn during April 1954 hearing of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Cohn was a mentor to Donald Trump, whose witch-hunting poses existential threat to universities.

tism Conference: "The Universities Are the Enemy." Vance and the right-wing Silicon Valley clique of tech billionaires and venture capitalists to which he belongs cynically seek to exploit popular resentment of the privileges of the elite universities in order to wage ideological war against the liberal wing of the U.S. bourgeoisie, and ultimately replace it with right-thinking reactionaries.

In an interview with the *New York Times* (13 June 2024), the fascistic ideologue Vance cited the unrepentant Nazi jurist "Carl Schmitt – there's no law, there's just power." While Vance tried to pin this on liberals, it is clearly the operating protocol of the Trump crew. Schmitt opposed the Weimar Republic, advocating the program of General Kurt von Schleicher, the last German chancellor before Hitler, for an authoritarian (Bonapartist) presidential regime with unlimited powers.³ In a 1921 treatise, *The Dictatorship*, Schmitt put forward a judicial principle of a "state of exception" (*Ausnahmezustand*) in which the sovereign could transcend the "rule of law." After joining the Nazi party in 1933, he justified the 1934 SS murder of leading generals (including von Schleicher) on the principle of the "leader order" (*Führer-Ordnung*).⁴

Schmitt's program for Bonapartist rule is the underpinning of the more ideological elements of the Trump regime – and of the "theory of the unitary executive" which has long been pushed by the right-wing jurists of the Federalist Society, and which in June 2024 was embraced by the Supreme Court. A 2005 post on the blog of Yale Law School professor Jack Balkin, titled "The Return of Carl Schmitt," noted that the arguments of John Yoo, a legal official in the George Bush II administration, justifying the use of torture in Iraq despite prohibition by the Geneva Conventions, were derived from Schmitt. In his torture memos, Yoo grounds his legal reasoning in the power "which the Framers [of the U.S. Constitution] vested in a unitary executive." An article in *Rolling Stone* (11 July 2024) notes that "Trumpworld sees him [Yoo] as a guiding light."

³ See "Fascism, Bonapartism and Donald Trump," in *The Internationalist* No. 75, January-May 2025.

⁴ After the war, Schmitt refused even the superficial "denazification" program of the American victors, remaining an unrepentant fascist to his death.

McCarthyism, Then and Now

The reactionary efforts to stifle dissent and root out leftist activists today, as in the 1940s and '50s, are motivated by the drive of the ruling class toward war. As U.S. imperialism revved up the Cold War against the Soviet Union, it pursued members of the Communist Party, left-liberals and "progressives" as the "enemy within." Today, the immediate targets are the pro-Palestinian protesters. But the genocidal war the U.S. and Israel are jointly waging on Gaza is a way station on their war drive aiming at capitalist counterrevolution in China, threatening a nuclear World War III in the process. (In fact, a bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in December calls to develop anti-communist and anti-China propaganda materials to be disseminated and taught in the classroom.)

The post-World War II red hunt got its name from the infamous Republican senator from Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy, whose demagogic antics were emblematic of Cold War hysteria. In reality, today as during the McCarthyism of the 1950s, the interrogations, inquisitions and purges *are being driven by both Democrats and Republicans*. McCarthy, in fact, was a close friend of the Kennedy family, and helped future president John F. Kennedy and attorney general Robert F. Kennedy get their start in politics as aggressive Cold Warriors, hiring Robert as assistant counsel on his Senate Permanent Investigations Subcommittee. RFK would go on to serve as chief counsel in the McClellan hearings to go after the power of the Teamsters union and wiretap Martin Luther King.

McCarthy was neither the first nor the last cynical politician to use the legislature as an inquisitorial body. There was the 1918-19 Senate subcommittee led by North Carolina Democrat Lee Slater Overman to root out "Bolshevik elements" in the U.S. in the first years after the Russian Revolution. A Special Committee on Communist Activities led by New York Republican Hamilton Fish III was formed in 1930, seeking to bolster immigration and deportation laws to target radicals and labor activists. And, of course, the notorious House Committee on Un-American Activities, or HUAC, established in 1938

continued on page 27

NYC Higher Education Unions Rally Against Attacks on Universities, Immigrants

Hunter Internationalist: “We Are All Under Attack!”

The following first appeared on *internationalist.org* (May 2025).

Starting on day one, the second Trump administration issued a raft of executive orders to carry out “the largest deportation” of immigrants “in U.S. history.” By early March, it expanded this to target universities, seeking to terrorize and silence student activists and all those who speak out against the U.S./Israeli genocide of the Palestinians. The arrest of Columbia graduate Mahmoud Khalil, who was picked up for being a principal spokesman and negotiator for last year’s Gaza solidarity encampments, sent shock waves around the country. Hundreds protested in Lower Manhattan, and in Portland, Oregon construction unions demanded that Khalil be freed.¹

A couple of weeks later, Rümeysa Öztürk, an international student from Turkey, was abducted by six masked plainclothes agents of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). A surveillance video shows her screaming “What is going on?” while a bystander is heard asking, “Is this a kidnapping?” and “Why are you hiding your faces?” Öztürk was bundled into an unmarked black SUV and driven off to be quickly transported to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deportation facility in Louisiana, 1,500 miles away. The searing video of this “snatch and grab” operation, viewed by millions, recalls scenes from a military dictatorship.

The seizure of Khalil came a day after the administration canceled \$400 million in federal funding to Columbia University, demanding that it intensify repression of student protests it falsely claimed were antisemitic, and that the school’s Middle East studies program be purged. Columbia University capitulated and agreed to Trump’s terms, but Washington said it was not enough, forced out the university president and threatened billions in further cuts. Then by early April, federal authorities began canceling international students’ visas over any protest activity, any brush with the law or for no known reason. Universities were in an uproar.

While Columbia was the staging ground, the campaign of intimidation extended to the City University of New York (CUNY), the largest urban public university in the country, and to other universities nationwide. On April 9, the CUNY administration announced that 17 international students had had their visas revoked. In response, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), representing 30,000 faculty and staff at CUNY, called an emergency demonstration for the morning of April 11 at Foley Square in Lower Manhattan opposite the Federal Building which houses the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and ICE.

¹ See “Resolution – Free Mahmoud Khalil,” by the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT) Local 10 on the web site of Class Struggle Workers – Portland (<https://cs-w-pdx.org/>). A similar motion was passed by Iron Workers Local 29.



Speaker for the Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants and the CUNY Internationalist Clubs at the April 17 rally by NYC-area faculty/staff unions against attacks on higher education.

The immediate action by the CUNY faculty/staff union was vital, particularly after Columbia’s capitulation. The PSC flier for the protest denounced the “escalating attacks on immigrants and our democratic rights,” and demanded “No Deportations! Restore Their Visas NOW!” At the rally, PSC president James Davis highlighted that the PSC has established an Immigrant Solidarity Working Group and urged other unions to do likewise. Over 60 protesters came out on short notice, many mobilized by the CUNY Internationalist Clubs, whose flier noted that CUNY students are “children of the multinational, multiracial working class” whose “enormous potential power must be brought into the fight to stop deportations and defend immigrants and international students.”

On the following Thursday, April 17, a rally of several hundred was held, again at Foley Square, by a number of NYC-area university faculty and staff unions. That protest was part of a National Day of Action organized by the Coalition for Action in Higher Education together with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which included events at more than 100 locations. The NYC “Rally for the Right to Learn: Hands Off Higher Ed! Hands Off Our Students!” brought out faculty from several local AAUP chapters (NYU, New School, Columbia, Rutgers) and the PSC, as well as United Auto Workers (UAW) locals representing student workers at several area campuses.

Grant Miner, the president of Student Workers of Columbia, UAW Local 2710, spoke at the rally, saying “At Columbia University, we received a \$400 million ransom note with a whole set of demands like ‘put this department under academic receivership,’ ‘expel these students’” (*The Independent*, 18 April). Miner was expelled, and thus fired, in retaliation for participating in the protest movement against the genocide in Gaza. He noted that he and 21 other students were expelled, suspended or had their degrees revoked all on the same day, which was also the day that Columbia received the Trump administration letter cutting funds and the day before Mahmoud Khalil was arrested.

At the rally, a large contingent of ac-

tivists from the Hunter College Committee to Defend Immigrants (HCDI)² stood alongside healthcare workers, teachers and Teamsters, supporters of the Labor Committee to Defend Immigrants, which was established to bring to bear the power of organized labor to fight attacks on fellow workers. The following is a speech by Chantal of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs and HCDI, which received an enthusiastic reception from the crowd. A video of her speech can be seen on *internationalist.org*.

Rally MC: You all know, when it comes to radical organizing, when it comes to powerful standing up for what’s right, you all know how our colleagues at Hunter College get down. I want to bring to you Chantal Rios, a student at Hunter College and a member of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs.

Chantal: **We are all under attack.** Did you hear me? **We are all under attack.** Higher education across the city, across the country, is under attack. The basic rights of immigrants, both documented and undocumented, are under attack. The rights of trans people, of workers and of us all are under attack.

We at the City University of New York are in large part the children of this city’s multinational, multi-ethnic working class. Just last week, 17 of our fellow CUNY students had their visas revoked. And as a student at CUNY’s Hunter College, as the child of working-class immigrants, as the friend of, the student of, the teacher of immigrants, these moves by the Trump administration have set a level of fear in me for my whole family, for my friends, and for our communities. But we are not going to let fear paralyze us.

At Columbia, there was Mahmoud Khalil. At Tufts University, there was Rümeysa Öztürk. Students snatched from their homes and off the streets by DHS and ICE for expressing their right to protest the genocidal war in Gaza.

This kind of oppression is directly connected to the war on Gaza and how students who protested in defense of the Palestinian people were slandered as being antisemitic. And Democratic Party politicians actively promoted this, as did many of our university administrations. And this is now used by actual antisemites and anti-immigrant racists to fuel the current administration’s escalated attack on the universities to attack academic freedom, and to attack free speech. These are active attempts to scare us, to paralyze us.

So while this administration of right-wing racism and reaction is mobilizing to scare us, will you give into their scare tactics? (Crowd shouts “No!”) Will we give into their scare tactics? (Crowd shouts “No!”)

That’s right. We have to mobilize to fight back. What we need to do as students is unite with labor. And for labor to use its enormous potential power in the struggle to defend immigrants and to stop the raids, to stop the deportations, to stop the kidnappings of our students.

In this city, nothing, nothing moves without the working class. This city would not function without immigrant labor. I’m talking restaurants, construction, hospitals, maintenance, transportation. We need to bring that power out now in the streets and in the workplaces. Even one walkout by workers against the attacks on immigrants would electrify students and workers across this country. This is a power that doesn’t look to the very people bowing down to these racist and reactionary measures, but on the contrary, fights against them.

Together with us, students, the power of labor must be used to stop the deportations. Like that of Kilmar Abrego García, who is a union member. We demand that he be brought back and freed now. And we demand that Mahmoud Khalil be freed now. And we demand that Rümeysa Öztürk be freed now, and anyone targeted by DHS and ICE.

A couple weeks ago, there was a mobilization of students, faculty and staff that stopped the DHS Customs and Border Patrol’s attempt to recruit at one of our CUNY colleges. CUNY has made history in many struggles, and together with you all, at Columbia, at NYU, we will continue to.

At Hunter College, we’ve established the Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants. Committees like these to defend immigrants have been established at John Jay and at D.O.E. [New York City Department of Education] public schools through the work of our committee, but also through the Labor Committee to Defend Immigrants.

That being said, I want to urge everyone here – all right? – *everyone* here to start up a committee of your own, at your school or your workplace, independent of the administration and the bosses and instead oriented towards the very real power of labor.

I want to end with a chant that we do in all of our protests. **ICE out of our schools! ICE out of New York!** Thank you.

Hunter Students, Faculty and Staff Win an Important Victory for Free Speech

The following was first published as a leaflet by the CUNY Internationalist Clubs on 16 October 2024.

From the Internationalist Club to our fellow students and to Hunter College faculty and staff:

At a time when pressures have been mounting to severely curtail or eliminate the right to protest on campuses nationwide, the widespread support for the intensive free speech campaign at Hunter College, which has been carried out since the beginning of the semester, won an important victory last week for the rights of all of

us who study and work here.

On October 9, it was formally announced at a meeting of the Hunter Senate that the college administration had agreed to the key demands of the campaign against limiting (censoring) the content of posting on campus. Over the course of a month, leaflets were intensively distributed; a petition was signed by over 2,000 Hunter students, faculty and staff members; a resolution was submitted to the Senate, and contingents of students brought protest signs to Senate meetings. Activists systematically ex-

plained and built support for the campaign's call to overturn the policy restricting free expression by prohibiting students from posting anything but flyers about campus activities.

The college website's publication of that restriction on August 28, the first day of the Fall 2024 semester, came after last May's threat to suspend the Internationalist Club for an academic year because a flyer of a Club statement titled "At Hunter, CUNY and Other Campuses: Drop the Charges and Disciplinary Measures Now!" had been posted on campus bulletin boards in response

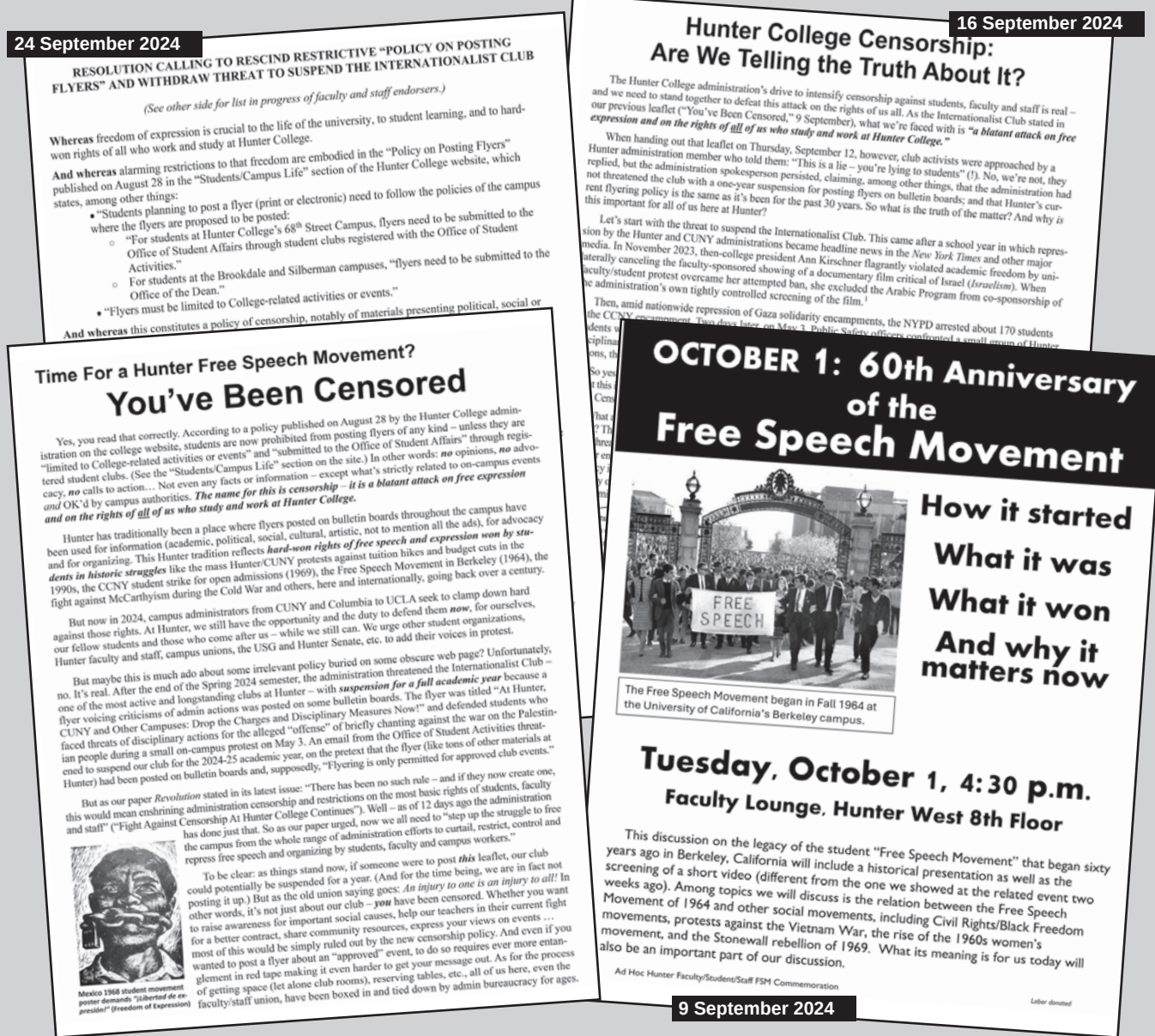
to suppression of actions in solidarity with the Palestinian people.¹ If the restriction and suspension threat had been left unchallenged and not been rescinded, they would have enshrined political censorship. Thus, as we emphasized, what was at stake was not just the rights of one club, but those of all Hunter students, and this was necessarily a topic of concern to faculty and staff as well.

On October 7, the administration met with Internationalist Club activists and campaign supporters who delivered the 2,000 petition signatures and energetically pressed for the demands of the campaign. At the end of the meeting, the administration agreed to take the steps that were then announced at the Senate meeting on October 9. In response to that announcement at the Senate, an Internationalist Club representative made the following statement, which was met with enthusiastic applause:

"I want to thank the students, faculty, and staff that signed the petition and supported the struggle to defend free speech. The call to delete the sentence in the flyering policy which stated 'Flyers must be limited to College-related activities or events' and the call to withdraw the threat of suspension of the Internationalist Club have both been met. This is an important victory for the rights of us all and an important precedent in the event that opponents of free expression aim more repressive attacks against Hunter and CUNY as a whole. It is also an important example of students, faculty and staff standing together, and I hope that it will be inspiring to people at other campuses. Thank you." ■

¹ Last school year [2023], when the then-president of Hunter cancelled the faculty-sponsored screening of a documentary critical of Israel (*Israelism*), this stark violation of academic freedom highlighted the need to defend free expression and oppose censorship as part of resisting the drive against student and faculty/staff rights at colleges and universities around the country. For more on these topics, see “McCarthyite Film Ban at Hunter College Struck Down By Student-Faculty Protest,” “Fight Against Censorship at Hunter College Continues,” “Speak-Out Against Repression” and other articles in the CUNY Internationalist Clubs’ newspaper *Revolution* (September 2024).

Spreading the Word



Committee...

continued from page 4

whole. Without their labor, the ruling class couldn't run this city for a single day. Plus New York is a union town, and at CUNY union members are crucial for putting into practice the meaning of solidarity: an injury to one is an injury to all.

Seven years ago, in response to the grotesque “Muslim ban” that Trump ordered at

the start of his term in January 2017, Hunter students, faculty and staff formed a committee that demanded that CUNY not give any federal agency any information that would directly or indirectly reveal immigration status; that no immigration authorities be allowed on any CUNY campus and that CUNY personnel engage in no collaboration with them (whether or not they claimed “legal” sanction for their actions); and that CUNY provide lawyers for emergency

contact for all immigrant and international students. The committee also organized the well-attended March 2018 CUNY-Wide Conference in Defense of Immigrants, promoted the formation of rapid-response networks, and helped organize students and faculty to accompany students threatened with deportation to immigration hearings.

Today, many students, faculty and staff are asking what can be done. Here at Hunter, at CUNY and in New York City

generally, we have a real basis to begin organizing now before a new drastic escalation of anti-immigration attacks takes off. We call on students, faculty and staff who want to do that (whether or not you agree with our views in general) to join us in reestablishing a Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants, now. If you would like to do this, talk to us in person or write to cunyinternationalists@gmail.com. Further steps will be announced very soon. ■

Racist “Reproductive Servitude” in Georgia

Adriana Smith and the Brutal Reality of Abortion Bans

By Mateo and Sade

Early this February, Adriana Smith, a registered nurse and mother of one in the Metro Atlanta area, went to a local emergency room because she was experiencing severe headaches. Given Tylenol – but not a CT scan that could have detected the blood clots present in her brain – the 30-year-old black woman was sent home. The next morning, her boyfriend woke up to find her gasping for air and unresponsive. She was taken to a different medical facility and then transferred to Emory University Hospital, where she worked.

After a scan revealed the blood clots, Adriana’s mother gave doctors permission to perform an emergency procedure to try to save her life. They were unable to do so and on February 19 Adriana Smith was declared brain-dead. This, the irreversible cessation of all brain function, is a legal and medical standard for declaring death throughout the United States.

Yet without Adriana Smith’s consent, nor the consent or involvement of her family, her body was attached to a ventilator for “life support.” Why? Because she was about 8 or 9 weeks pregnant – and hospital personnel feared being accused of violating Georgia’s barbarous anti-abortion and “fetal personhood” laws. With pregnancy tissue too small at that stage (approximately one inch long) even to be seen or identified by the naked eye, they planned to keep the “life support” of Smith’s lifeless body going for another six months.

In other words, Adriana Smith was turned into a human incubator. This macabre “reproductive servitude” is yet another result of the anti-abortion crusade in racist, capitalist America. A Caesarian section wound up being performed on her body on June 13. The baby survived but as of late June was still in the neonatal intensive care unit. In line with the profit-driven madness of the U.S. healthcare system, Smith’s family was left facing enormous medical bills.

Weaponizing Dogma to Enforce Pregnancy

As of today, three years after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, only 9 states and the District of Columbia do not restrict abortion on the basis of the duration of gestation (the length of time a person has been pregnant). Eleven Southern states plus Idaho have a total abortion ban. As for Georgia, it bans abortion after approximately 6 weeks’ gestation, as do Florida, North Carolina and Iowa. Georgia’s anti-abortion H.B. 481 law, passed in 2019, is also known as the LIFE (Living Infants Fairness and Equality) Act. It quickly went into effect the following year, after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973, which had established abortion as a constitutional right.

The reactionary Georgia law is sometimes referred to as the “Heartbeat Bill.” Weaponizing religious dogmas, it classes as “homicide” abortions carried out on “unborn children” that have a “detectable

heartbeat.” What the law calls a heartbeat is in reality a small “flutter” of electrical activity in the area of the fetal tissue that eventually becomes a heart. This activity is sometimes detectable through vaginal ultrasound as early as six weeks into a pregnancy – well before many women even know they’re pregnant.¹ But negating science, in the service of enforced religious dogma and the suppression of the pregnant person’s most fundamental rights, is integral to a law that decrees that an incipient fetus has legal “personhood,” that “an unborn child at any stage of development who is carried in the womb shall qualify as a dependent minor,” be included in state population counts, etc.

The term “personhood” is also used to expand the implications of abortion bans into such areas as the regulation of fertility treatments and, in some cases, the criminalization of pregnancy complications like stillbirth and miscarriage. This has included investigations and prosecutions for “culpable conduct,” ranging from drug use to physical trauma (falling down stairs, being in a fight) or not following medical advice. One horrific example of this took place in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 2007, 18-year-old Dominican immigrant Amber Abreu had a miscarriage after taking a medication that is a component of the RU-486 abortion pill. Prosecutors threatened to charge her with murder, but decided they couldn’t make the case to a jury. Instead, she faced 7 years in jail under an 1845 law against “procuring a miscarriage.”² (The law was only repealed in 2018.) After a campaign in her defense, Abreu did not go to jail – though the law remained on the books until 2018.

The use of Adriana Smith, a brain-dead woman kept breathing by mechanical ventilation in order to serve as a human incubator, is a barbaric expression of the “logic” of women’s oppression. Anti-abortion laws are not a mere result of “overzealous” religious ideas of sin and the “protection” of the unborn; they are the grotesque manifestation of a class society that needs women’s subjugation to persist. The nuclear family is a building block of capitalist society, key both to the bourgeoisie passing property on to its heirs and to the reproduction of the proletarian workforce. As it is the central institution of women’s oppression, even the elementary democratic right to abortion, finally codified in the early ’70s at a time of enormous social upheaval, was always tenuous and reversible – as occurred three years ago. And while Democrats seeking to gain votes denounce the Georgia law, for this party of “faux friends” of women, abortion rights are a political football. Notoriously, Jimmy Carter and Joe Biden both played a central role in the Hyde Amendment that essentially banned poor African American,

¹ “Is a ‘fetal heartbeat’ really a heartbeat at 6 weeks?” *livescience.com*, 4 August 2022.

² See “Criminalizing Pregnancy Loss,” *Regulatory Review*, 8 February 2022, and “Defend Amber Abreu!” *The Internationalist* No. 26, July 2007.



Adriana Monet Smith
1994-2025

Latina and working-class women on Medicaid from getting abortions.³

Horrific measures like Georgia’s LIFE/Heartbeat law express and intensify not only women’s oppression in general, but the *double oppression* of black women in particular. As we have detailed in our press, the history of abortion bans is deeply racist. It is no coincidence that states of the old slaveholding “Confederacy” are among those with the harshest anti-abortion laws. A number of fatalities resulting from these laws over the past years have become known, but there can be little doubt that others remain unknown. Among those specifically in Georgia that have received media attention, there is the August 2024 case of Amber Nicole Thurman, a 28-year-old medical assistant who took an abortion pill and had a rare complication in which her body was not able to expel all the fetal tissue. The routine procedure she needed, dilation and curettage (D&C), had been turned into a felony, with doctors facing up to a decade in prison. She was unable to receive this procedure, and when – after 20 hours – she was finally operated on, it proved too late. She died from septic shock.

Today, much of the anti-abortion crusade is motivated by rightists’ push for the U.S. to produce more white babies. At the same time, it’s important to remember that the history of abortion bans intersects that of chattel slavery, which was central to capitalism’s rise in this country and to the shaping of U.S. racism. Under slavery, child-bearing by black women was a source of immense profits for the master class. The doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrem* (“that which is born follows the womb”) was adopted in colonial Virginia in the late

³ See “Free Abortion on Demand: How Revolutionaries Fight for It” and related articles in *Revolution* No. 19, September 2022.

1600s, in South Carolina in 1712, in Georgia in 1770 (and over time in many slave codes across the Americas). It established that children of enslaved women would also be slaves. Forcing enslaved women to carry out pregnancies meant continual production of lifelong enslaved laborers. Centuries later amidst racist backlash against the civil rights movement, right-wingers seized on reactionary opposition to *Roe v. Wade* as a key part of their political strategy. Pregnancy was to be enforced, women were to be made to fulfill the “duty” to bear children, whether they want to or not.

Adriana Smith, Amber Abreu, and Amber Nicole Thurman were all black women. Today, the deep inequality of healthcare in the United States is tightly intertwined with the racial and gender oppression fundamental to U.S. capitalism. This is literally deadly for many black women, who “are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women,” as the CDC (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) reported last year. It was the availability of D&C procedures that was key to reducing the rate of maternal deaths for African American and Latina women by up to 40% after the first year of legal abortions following the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. Abortion bans and restrictions affecting working-class and poor women have a particular impact on those for whom women’s oppression is compounded by racial oppression. Around 75% of women seeking abortions are low-income, with almost half living below the poverty line. As of 2019, legal abortions obtained by black and Latina women made up over 59% of all abortions.⁴

Unsurprisingly, Georgia – a state plagued by the living legacy of slavery and racism, including its anti-union “right to work” laws and anti-abortion “right to life” laws – has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the U.S. (with the overwhelming majority of cases deemed preventable). What it did to our black working-class sister Adriana Smith makes the blood boil with indignation at the depravity of class, race and gender oppression in this country, oppression that in fact has been getting worse for a long time now. It is high time for the multiracial working class to use its power to overthrow this system.

What’s needed for this to happen is revolutionary leadership. Women’s oppression, bound up with capitalism, can only be erased through revolutionary class struggle. The right to abortion, to **free abortion on demand, unrestricted, no questions asked**, will not be secured in the capitalist courts, nor will it be protected by the Democratic Party of U.S. imperialism. Today, as we remember Adriana Smith and so many others, we link together the struggle for women’s liberation and for black liberation – through **socialist revolution**. ■

⁴ “The Impact of Legal Abortion on Maternal Mortality,” *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, August 2024; CDC data; Institute for Women’s Policy Research report, October 2019.

Defend Immigrants

**Break with the
Democrats and Republicans**

For a Class Struggle Workers Party

FARMERS AND WORKERS PARTY
FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES
1904

Revolution photo

Paul Frangipane

Capitalism and Slavery in NYC: A Review of *The Kidnapping Club*

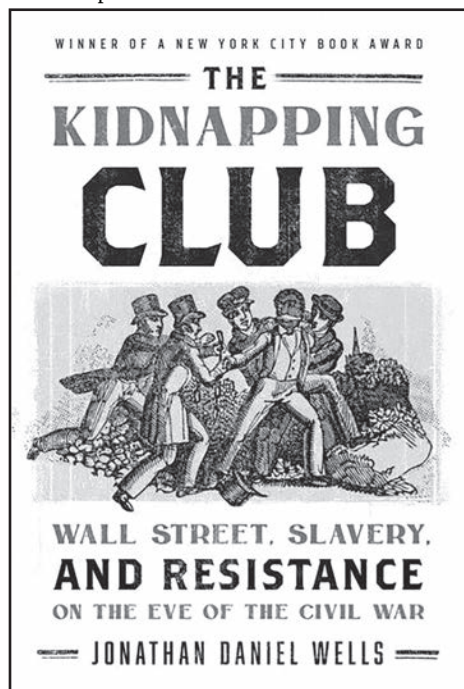
Wall Street's Slave Catchers and the Fight for Black Freedom

By Jacob

Today, as masked Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents conduct raids across the United States, kidnapping people and taking them away in unmarked cars, one can hear the echoes of the slave catchers who in the decades before the Civil War prowled through the streets and alleyways of New York City. Agents of ICE, the Border Patrol and other federal agencies lurk outside courtrooms where they tear immigrants away from their families. Recalling the bounty hunters that chased down runaway slaves, newly enrolled ICE agents can get a signing bonus of up to \$50,000. In the United States of 2025, undocumented immigrants are a millions-strong labor force crucial to the capitalist economy but deprived of basic rights, a condition enforced by police-state terror that evokes slavery days in antebellum America.

Below immigration courts in downtown Manhattan where harrowing abductions transpire daily lies New York's African Burial Ground, discovered in 1991 when construction was underway for a new Federal Building at 290 Broadway. Thousands of bodies were buried there in the late 17th and 18th centuries, after enslaved Africans were banned from the city's public burial ground. Though 160 years have passed since chattel slavery was abolished, the bedrock racism of American capitalism continues to underlie the inequalities of the present. This is the legacy of 1877's "compromise" between the Democratic and Republican parties that still rule the U.S. today, in which the representatives of Northern capital agreed to Southern ex-slaveowners' demand to end post-Civil War Reconstruction, betraying the war's promise of black freedom.¹

¹ See "The Emancipation Proclamation: Promise and Betrayal," *The Internationalist* No. 34, March-April 2013.



The Kidnapping Club (2020) tells a true story about capitalism's history and about struggles against racist repression – a story highly relevant to those we face today.

Manhattan financiers were among those who most strongly opposed measures favoring the masses of former slaves in the South. Echoing the Confederate sympathies many had voiced during the Civil War, they mainly cheered the end of Reconstruction, having long feared that slavery's abolition, and demands for distributing ex-slaveholders' land to those they had enslaved, could lead to further inroads on capitalist property. Those fears had been heightened by the Paris Commune of 1871, in which the workers of France's capital seized power before their revolution was drowned in blood at the end of May 1871. Less than a month later, a Southern correspondent for the *New York Tribune* (21 June 1871) wrote that "many thoughtful men are apprehensive" that poor whites and former slaves "might form a party by themselves as dangerous to the interests of society as the Communists of France."

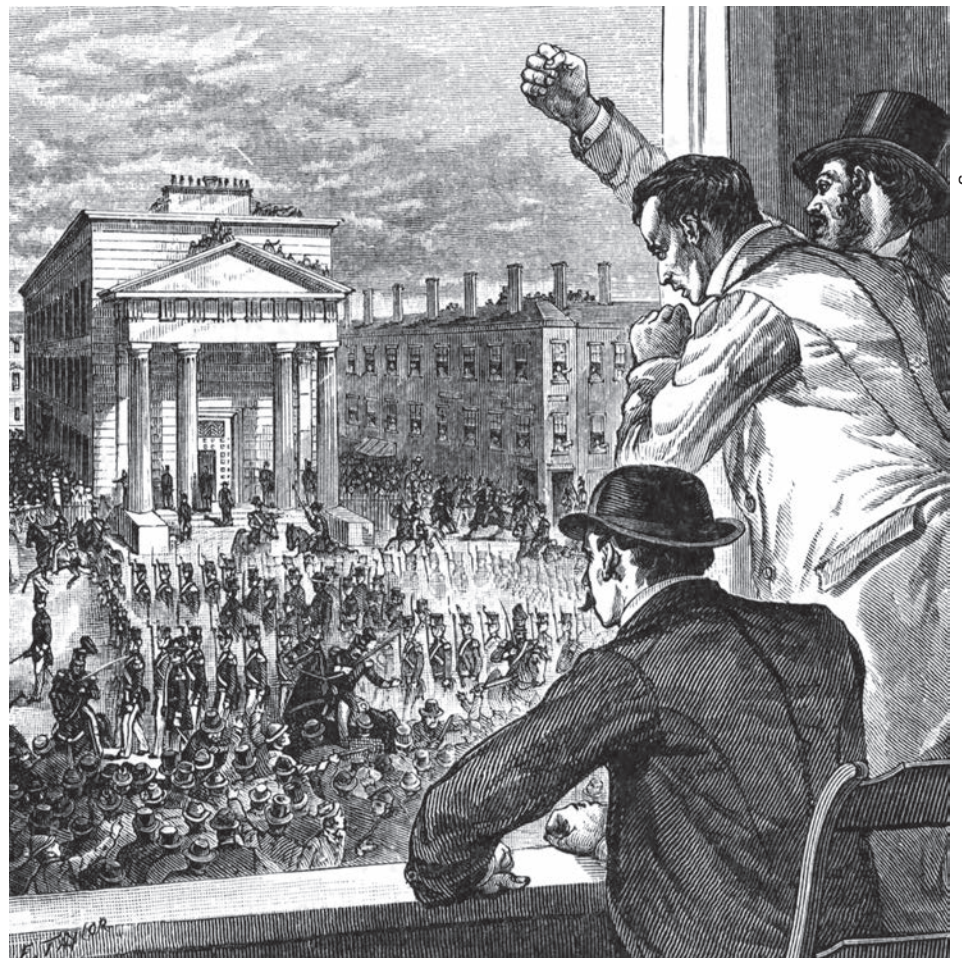
Close connections between New York's ruling circles and the Southern slavocracy had actually been central to the city's economics and politics going back long before the Civil War. This theme, which is highly relevant for *Revolution* readers amidst today's struggles against racist repression, is brought to life in *The Kidnapping Club: Wall Street, Slavery, and Resistance on the Eve of the Civil War* (2020), an important and engaging book by historian Jonathan David Wells.

Unearthing the connections that ran from Wall Street bankers to Tammany Hall (the notoriously corrupt Democratic fraternal society that ran NYC), to the cops that worked hand in glove with Southern slave catchers and sold free black New Yorkers into slavery, *The Kidnapping Club* tells a true story that is largely unknown but closely linked to the reality we're living today. At a time when references to the history of slavery are being "scrubbed" from innumerable public places, textbooks and websites – and efforts are afoot to stop the teaching of that history – knowing the truth about it is all the more important.

"Capitalism Is Freedom"?

Generations of Americans have been taught that capitalism means freedom. The claim is most famously advanced in *Capitalism and Freedom* by "free-market" icon Milton Friedman –who designed the economic "shock treatment" for Chile's military dictator Augusto Pinochet. First published in 1961, it is pitched today as a veritable classic.

In the world's still-leading center of finance capital, a few blocks from the African Burial Ground, the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) occupies a massive stately building on Wall Street, facing a large statue of the U.S.' founding slaveowner, George Washington. The exchange's website proclaims: "The NYSE is capitalism at its best." As for Wall Street, it is named for the wall that used to be there, which was built by slave labor. On Wall Street between Water and Pearl, about 160



In compliance with the Fugitive Slave Act, in June 1854 Anthony Burns was ordered to be returned to slavery in Virginia. 50,000 protesters lined the streets of Boston as soldiers took him to the waterfront. In the window and on top of nearby buildings, people shouted "Kidnappers!"

feet from the NYSE, a sign marks the site where, from 1711 to 1762, the precursor of the city council operated New York's official slave market.

As Wells demonstrates in his book *The Kidnapping Club*, the capitalist class in New York City, and the North generally, was deeply involved in the business of slavery. New York gained a reputation as the most pro-Southern city in the North, even taking steps to secede from the Union at the outset of the Civil War. Investors, bankers, insurance and shipping companies, customs officials, lawyers and politicians all had a vested interest in plantation slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, including after it was illegalized in 1808. Underlying the rise and expansion of New York City as a major metropolitan center, as Wells emphasizes, were the profits made from slave labor.

The Kidnapping Club also shows the role of New York's then-nascent police force, its courts, jails and Democratic Party-run political machine in blatantly serving the intertwined interests of Southern slave masters and Wall Street financiers. Upholding their property interests and power, the police continuously trampled the basic rights of the city's black population. Though Wells is not a Marxist, his book vividly illustrates Friedrich Engels' definition of the state – highlighted in V.I. Lenin's *State and Revolution* (1917) – as "special bodies of armed men" enforcing the rule of the owning class against the oppressed.

"The Kidnapping Club" is what New York City's foremost abolitionist, the black activist and editor David Ruggles (1810-

1849), called the cabal of Wall Street businessmen, cops, judges and slavecatchers that he tirelessly exposed in public meetings and the abolitionist press, including his journal *The Mirror of Liberty*. Born free in Connecticut, Ruggles moved to the city in 1828, a year after slavery officially ended in New York State. After working for a time as a sailor, he opened a grocery store and subsequently an "anti-slavery bookstore." Ruggles became the prime mover behind the foundation of the New York Committee of Vigilance, an interracial organization dedicated to defending the rights of all black people – from the free black population to runaway slaves and those who were clandestinely kept in servitude in defiance of state laws.

Today, as we fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants, and for mass mobilizations by the multiracial working class to drive modern-day bounty hunters out of our cities, we have much to learn from David Ruggles' story, which is the keynote of this book.

A City Built on Slavery

From its beginnings, going back to when it was called New Amsterdam under the Dutch, New York was reliant on enslaved labor. African slaves cleared the forests and swamplands, worked the farms and were the core of the city's construction labor force. During the 18th century the size of the New York's slave population was only surpassed by that of New Orleans and Charleston, the South Carolina port

continued on page 22

Learning from Our History

Revolutionary Marxists and the Fight for Women's Liberation

The following is based on a presentation by Carmen at the CUNY Internationalist Clubs' International Women's Day 2025 forum, held on March 25 at Hunter College.

We are holding this forum amidst a sweeping assault on basic democratic rights. This is occurring across the board, from the rights of immigrants to the right of women to get an abortion, from transgender health services to scientists' research, the right of teachers to teach and students to learn the actual history of this country. The right of free speech, which was won through major struggles, is being rabidly repressed, as part of the genocidal war on Gaza. This U.S./Israel war would not be possible without the bipartisan ruling-class funding and arming of the genocide.

The assault on our rights is not new under Trump. Under the Democrats and the Republicans, the capitalist class that rules this society has been eroding democratic rights for decades, from building up the deportation machinery to the powers of the "imperial presidency" and intelligence agencies to racist police violence to the endless series of U.S. imperialist wars. *Roe v. Wade*, which was a concession from the ruling class after the big social and political upheavals of the 1960s, was chipped away at persistently for many years before it was finally overturned in June 2022. The reactionary crusade against abortion, which is a fundamental democratic right, and against the rights of transgender people – not only to healthcare but to their legal existence as human beings – has been brewing for quite a while.

This is often referred to as part of the "culture wars," but these clashes are not fundamentally about disputes in the realm of ideas. It's about regimenting society to crush dissent and to shore up the nuclear family, the cell unit of capitalist society and the nucleus of women's oppression. The at-

tack on basic rights is also meant to stoke racism and bigotry and to drive fear into the hearts of the most vulnerable layer of the working class, undocumented immigrants, without whose labor this country would not function. And it's about making us all fall in line behind the U.S. imperialists' war drive and machinations to keep their grip on the world as U.S. hegemony starts to crack.

All these things are connected, as part of the decay of the capitalist system. Society's productive forces have grown ever more international, they depend on the social labor of huge numbers of people, and all of us depend on that to survive. But they are still bound by private ownership by the capitalist rulers, driven only by the ruthless pursuit of profit. Increasingly, capitalist society has been shedding the veneer of liberal democracy and showing what it really is: a dictatorship of capital. It's a profoundly unequal society where black people are murdered by the police on a daily basis; where many women in the U.S. must travel hundreds of miles to get to the nearest abortion clinic; where tens of thousands sleep in the streets and the cost of living continues to soar while the value of wages has been stagnant for decades. All while we inch closer and closer to a third world war aimed centrally at China.¹

This is the big picture: you can't effectively fight black oppression, or the oppression of women, trans and gay people, immigrants, or any other group, without fighting *all* forms of oppression. And to actually do away with all forms of oppression requires a struggle against capitalism, the system that nurtures these oppressions, that constantly reproduces them, and that *depends* on them to function.

We're here today to talk about women's oppression and the revolutionary so-

¹ See "Only Socialist Revolution Can Defeat U.S. Imperialism's Drive to WWII," *Revolution* No. 20, September 2023.

cialist – that is, communist – program to do away with it forever. We're here to talk about women's liberation. Women's oppression is bound up in the very roots of class society, older even than capitalism, which later gave rise to racial oppression and other forms of oppression that have life-or-death consequences for millions today. Because of this very fundamental quality of women's oppression, the task of women's liberation is a central part of our program as revolutionary Marxists, who see working-class revolution as key to fundamentally changing society.

Where Women's Oppression Comes From

The first thing we must understand is that women's oppression is a key part of how the society we live in functions, and that its origins are material and historical. These are interwoven with the emergence of class-divided civilization, when society developed to such a point that different classes emerged with mutually opposed interests. (For most of human history people could not produce enough to create a stable surplus that a ruling class could live off of.) Property being passed down through the father's line became central to one kind of class society after another and meant enforced monogamy for women.²

Society has changed a lot since the birth of civilization, but in modern-day capitalism we very much still live with women's oppression. Women workers face "double oppression," as workers and as women. Around the world, hundreds of millions of women toil in near-slavery conditions of exploitation, while here in the supposed pinnacle of civilization, black, Latina and immigrant women workers are triply oppressed. And even before the overturn of the constitutional right to abortion, the reality has been that only rich women have unfettered access to abortion.

Women's oppression is central to "social reproduction," in other words the everyday recreation of the world we live in, along with all its unequal and oppressive dynamics. Under capitalism the *nuclear family*, the central institution of women's oppression, must be preserved, keeping women chained to the home, to domestic tasks and child-rearing. Working-class women come

² See the Internationalist pamphlet *Marxism and Women's Liberation* (2017) and Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884).

INTERNATIONALIST CLUB

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY FORUM

When: Tuesday, March 25 at 2:30 p.m.
Where: Hunter College - Thomas Hunter 314

You can't have capitalism without women's oppression. The struggle against women's oppression is central to the liberation of all oppressed people and for the creation of a new kind of society. Why hold an International Women's Day event now? Women, in particular immigrant women workers, have played a key role in historic workers' struggles. This history is important for our present-day struggles. Today, as capitalist society gets more unfree and more oppressive by the day, we say: **Women's liberation through socialist revolution!**

Come to the Internationalist Club forum to discuss:

- The role of immigrant women workers in historic class struggles
- The current onslaught against immigrants, women, trans people, and the rights of us all
- The fight for women's liberation through socialist revolution

Labor donated For more information email comintinternationalists@gmail.com



Sharecropper - Elizabeth Catlett, 1952

Flier for this year's forum celebrating International Women's Day, held by the Internationalist Club at Hunter College of the City University of New York. For many years the Club has held such forums on a wide range of issues related to the revolutionary Marxist program for women's liberation through socialist revolution.

home from work to perform these tasks, rearing the next generation of the working class. Bourgeois women hire nannies, often immigrant women with families of their own, to raise their bourgeois children.

Marxists call for the socialization of household functions – laundry, cooking, caring for children, etc. – to free women from their domestic prison, and to allow them to flower as full members of society. We also call for free abortion on demand, no questions asked.³ The stultifying restriction of women to the domestic sphere, discrimination and bigotry against gay and trans people, the crime of forcing a woman to carry to term a baby she does not want – all serve to tighten the grip of the institution of the family.

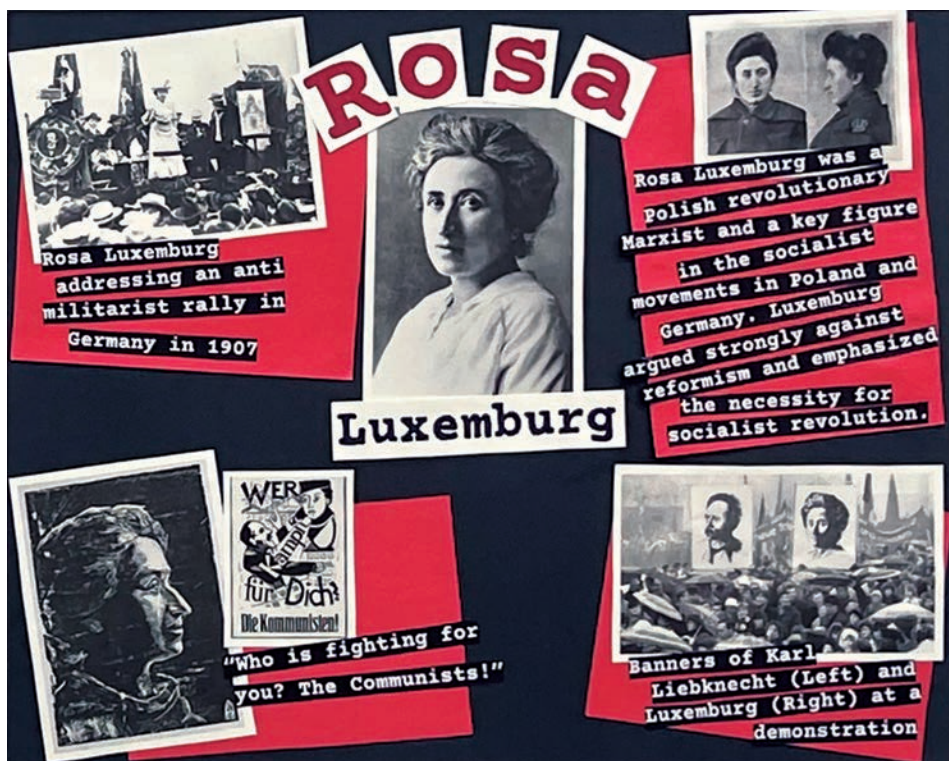
For the family's functions to be superseded by collective institutions emancipating women from household servitude – this requires a society based not on profit but on fulfilling human needs. This is only possible under a workers government, after a socialist revolution has smashed the old capitalist state and constructed a workers state to lay the foundation for socialism: a classless, stateless society based on abundance and radically lowering the time that needs to be devoted to labor. This is the basis for our slogan, "**Women's liberation through socialist revolution.**" Women's oppression, like black oppression, is bound up in the very roots of this deeply racist, sexist society. To end oppression, we not only fight all its manifestations in the here and now, but uproot it by doing away with its material basis.

Marjorie Stamberg: From Feminism to Revolutionary Marxism

As revolutionary Marxists, we stress that political clarity is essential. As the great Polish communist Rosa Luxemburg put it, our program does not come from "indiscriminate odds and ends just because they sound-

continued on page 19

³ See "Free Abortion on Demand: How Revolutionaries Fight for It" and related articles in *Revolution* No. 19, September 2022.



One of the posters made by Club members to decorate the room for this year's revolutionary International Women's Day event at Hunter College.

Elizabeth Catlett, From D.C. to Mexico City Exile

The Inspiring Odyssey of a Black Radical Artist

By Vinh and Ray

Early this year, activists from the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth (RIY) and the Internationalist Clubs at the City University of New York visited the Brooklyn Museum to view the exhibition “Elizabeth Catlett: A Black Revolutionary Artist and All That It Implies.” The topics addressed in the art of Elizabeth Catlett (1915-2012) are of great interest to us as young revolutionaries. But despite this, and despite her importance in the history of art and leftist politics, the truth is that until recently most of us had never heard of her.

That changed in summer 2024 when RIY and Internationalist Club members made a museum trip – accurately described as “exhilarating” in the last issue of *Revolution* – to the “Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism” exhibit at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. In an article about this (with great graphics!) and a short accompanying piece on Elizabeth Catlett, comrades expressed their excitement at seeing one of her paintings there and hearing about her for the first time.¹ She seemed like a precursor of things we’re fighting for, like black liberation, women’s emancipation, international solidarity and the ability of rebellious artists and activists like her to express themselves freely in the face of repression and bigotry. We wanted to learn more about her.

So it was with considerable anticipation that we went to see the special, extensive exhibition of Elizabeth Catlett’s work at the Brooklyn Museum, which featured over 200 of her sculptures, engravings, etchings and paintings. It was a great experience. Yes, the exhibit curators downplayed the “red” (communist) background and context of much of her story, but this was not a surprise, having seen how most of the bold redness of Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglas and other Harlem Renaissance greats

¹ “Black and Red Keys to Harlem Renaissance Story” and “Elizabeth Catlett (1915-2012),” *Revolution* No. 21, September 2024.



Untitled (Harriet Tubman), 1953, by Elizabeth Catlett, Taller de Gráfica Popular.

had been bleached out of last year’s exhibit at the Met. The great thing about the Catlett exhibition was seeing so much of her inspiring and beautiful work, in so many different media and styles, all in one place.

Why It Spoke to Us

A huge fist in gorgeously grained deep-brown wood greeted us in one of the museum’s main halls, not far from another large wooden sculpture of a young black woman raising her fist high – both made by Elizabeth Catlett in Mexico City, in 1968. That was a year of radical upheavals in one country after another, from the Vietnamese National Liberation Front’s Tet Offensive against U.S. imperialism to France going to the brink of workers revolution to huge stu-

dent antiwar protests from Tokyo to Berkeley and NYC. We learned that Catlett’s work was a point of connection between black freedom struggles in the U.S. and the 1968 mass student strike at UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, where she taught sculpture and actively supported the student movement (which her sons were also part of). As our Mexican comrades of the Grupo Internacionalista, and thousands of others, chant at Mexico City marches to this day, “¡Dos de octubre no se olvida!” (October 2nd will never be forgotten). On that day in 1968 the Mexican Army bloodily repressed the students’ mass protest movement, murdering hundreds on the eve of the 1968 Summer Olympics held in the Mexican capital. It was on the medal stand at those Olympics that black U.S. athletes John Carlos and Tommie Smith famously raised the clenched-fist salute, which originated in workers struggles, was widely popularized by the Communist movement during the Depression and in the 1960s was widely adopted as a symbol of black militancy in the struggle against racist oppression.

Not far from the huge fist sculpture at the Brooklyn Museum exhibit were several dramatic lithographs and linocuts (prints made from a block of linoleum) that Catlett made in Mexico in 1969-72, focusing on repression and resistance in the United States. Among these were a particularly striking one on police terror and “ghetto riots” in cities across the U.S., titled *Watts/Detroit/Washington/Harlem/Newark*, and *Torture of Mothers*, in which the head of a black woman holds the image of a murdered black boy. Looking at these images today, we cannot help connecting them to the fact that despite even the massive protests of 2020, racist police terror continues unabated in capitalist America.

While Catlett’s own politics were largely shaped by the Communist Party milieu that developed in the 1930s and ’40s,

works included in the exhibit show her vivid sympathy for Malcolm X, the Black Panthers and others who were key to the New Left radicalism of the ’60s. Portrayed as well in her exhibited works were major figures in black history going back to the poet Phyllis Wheatley (1753-84), among them Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Paul Robeson and many others. One of our favorites was the anonymous union organizer shown in the linocut *My Role Has Been Important in the Struggle to Organize the Unorganized* from Catlett’s 1946-47 series *The Negro Woman* (later titled *The Black Woman*).²

A large statue in polychromed cedar, from 1971, shows a black woman with her wrists manacled behind her back. Titled *Political Prisoner*, it evokes Angela Davis, while a brightly colored 1972 print titled *Angela Libre* celebrated Davis being freed from jail early that year. It turns out that Elizabeth Catlett was prominent in Mexico’s “Free Angela” committee and vocally connected her imprisonment in the U.S. to that of hundreds of survivors of the October 1968 massacre in Mexico. The more deeply we got into the museum exhibit, the more we understood some things. For example, how Catlett incorporated motifs and techniques ranging from African sculpture to pre-Columbian terra cotta coils to the mural paintings of José Clemente Orozco; and how she sought to connect the history and struggles of exploited and oppressed people in the U.S. with those in Mexico. Some of the artwork also addressed solidarity with the Cuban Revolution and the fight against U.S. imperialism in Central America. Despite the U.S. and Mexican governments’ attempts to silence her, the courageous artist/activist never backed down.

² This is reproduced in the short article on Catlett in *Revolution* No. 21.



Sharecropper, 1946.



During visit to the exhibit “Elizabeth Catlett: A Black Revolutionary Artist and All That It Implies” at the Brooklyn Museum. In background: the artist in her studio.



There Are Bars Between Me and the Rest of the Land, 1946, from the series *The Negro Woman* (later renamed *The Black Woman*).

An Artist's Education in Jim Crow America

How was it that Elizabeth Catlett, whose roots were in the U.S. South, became a long-standing figure in Mexico's vibrant and politicized artistic political life? She was born in Washington, D.C. in 1915, where Jim Crow reigned – and where today in 2025, black Washingtonians face a racist occupation by the National Guard. Her odyssey personifies aspects of the “transnational” left (a term particularly used with reference to leftist artists and activists who moved between the U.S. and Mexico)³ that are little known today. Born in Freedmen's Hospital to two D.C. public school teachers, she went to a high school named after influential black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. Seeking to pursue her interest in art, in 1932 she applied to the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University), but it denied her entry. Why? Because Catlett, the granddaughter of slaves, was black.

This experience of racist discrimination was part of what led her into a life of political activism. Accepted into Howard, one of the foremost “HBCUs” (historically black colleges and universities), she studied under faculty members who had been part of the Harlem Renaissance and were teaching art history as well as painting and printmaking. During this period she started researching African art, found out about Mexican artists' connections with the Harlem Renaissance, and grew increasingly interested in Mexican muralism and printmaking.

It was also at Howard that a fellow student introduced her to socialist ideas. In December 1934, she joined other Howard students in a protest against lynching in which demonstrators wore nooses around their necks. Over subsequent years she became close to a broad range of the era's most famous African American artists, writers and activists who were aligned with the Communist Party (CP), among them singer and actor Paul Robeson, muralist Jacob Lawrence and writer Lorraine Hansberry. In Depression-era U.S. society, Communists had taken the lead in key struggles against racist repression such as the case of the nine “Scottsboro Boys” targeted by lynch-law “justice” in Alabama. In important ways (despite the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet workers state under Stalin), this reflected

³ See Rebecca M. Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles in Mexico* (2008), which includes several sections on Catlett.

the ongoing impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917.⁴

In 1936 Catlett moved to Durham, North Carolina, where she taught art at a high school, supervised art programs at several elementary schools and participated in protests demanding higher pay for teachers. After two years in Durham, she pursued graduate studies in art at the University of Iowa, where she studied with the “regionalist” artist Grant Wood, best known for his 1930 painting

American Gothic. Wood, who encouraged his students to make art about “something you know the most about,” became a mentor to Catlett. Graduating in June 1940, Catlett became the first person in the U.S. to get a Master of Fine Arts degree. Over the next two years, she briefly chaired the art department at Dillard University in New Orleans – where even taking black students to a Picasso exhibit (at a museum in a segregated city park) meant “breaking the color bar” – and lived briefly in Chicago. There, she connected with artists and writers who were part of the “Black Chicago Renaissance,” including Gwendolyn Brooks, Frank Neil and CP member Charles White, whom she married in December 1941.

The following year, Catlett and White moved to Harlem and then Greenwich Village. In New York, they rubbed shoulders with everyone from Langston Hughes and Duke Ellington to Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois, and, in Catlett's case, studied sculpture with Russian-born artist Ossip Zadkine, who was particularly influenced by African art. Over the next years Catlett's connections in the CP milieu deepened, as she worked at Camp Wo-Chi-Ca (the Workers Children's Camp), taught ceramics at the party's Jefferson School and became staff artist for the publication of the CP-led National Negro Congress. Most importantly, she began working at the George Washington Carver School on 125th Street in Harlem.⁵

Established in 1943 under the leadership of poet and graphic artist Gwendolyn Bennett, the Carver School was an adult education center that taught a broad range of subjects including writing, art, black history, U.S. history, labor studies and “practical economics.” At the school, many of whose students were black women, Catlett did publicity and fundraising work and taught courses on sculpture, pottery, block printing and dressmaking. She later described the student body as consisting largely of “lower working-class people” including maids, garment trades workers, elevator operators and others. Decades later, Catlett recalled the Carver School being targeted by “a big red-baiting article” in the *New York Herald Tribune* branding the

⁴ See James P. Cannon, “The Russian Revolution and the American Negro Movement” (1959), published as a pamphlet by the Internationalist Group.

⁵ Rashieda Witter, “Chronology,” in Dalila Scruggs (editor), *Elizabeth Catlett: A Black Revolutionary Artist and All That It Implies* (2025).

Carver School as “a Red Front school.”⁶ In 1947, as the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) revved up its anticommunist hearings, Democratic president Harry Truman issued an executive order directing the Department of Justice to assemble a list of “subversive” organizations. The Carver School was included on the list and soon shut down.

In Mexican Exile, An Artistic/Political Convergence

Elizabeth Catlett's experiences with the working-class students at the Carver School had a major, long-lasting effect on her work. One of the ways this was reflected at the Brooklyn Museum exhibit was in its display of 16 linocuts from her *The Black Woman* series from 1946-47. These powerful images focus not only on Harriet Tubman and other historical figures who led black people to emancipation, but also on the arduous labor of women workers “In the Fields,” “In Other Folks' Homes” and elsewhere, together with scenes of repression and segregation. This links up with many of the works Catlett would soon be creating in Mexico, including some like *Campesinos Mexicanos* (1947), in which tools, the design of farm laborers' straw hats and other motifs draw parallels to sharecroppers' toil in the U.S. South.

In these and other works at the exhibition, the history of slavery and the seizure of indigenous land looms as the background to ruthless exploitation in the present day, bringing to mind the famous passage on “primitive [i.e., original] accumulation” in Karl Marx's *Capital*:

“The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins, signalized the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production.”

Catlett frequently highlighted this shared scar of primitive accumulation and the following history of subjugation and exploitation under capitalism experienced by both black American and Mexican workers. Similar themes were explored by another “transnational” artist closely connected to the CP, Hungarian-born Hugo Gellert, who in 1934 published a great series of prints called *Karl Marx's “Capital” in Lithographs*.

With the Cold War increasingly strangling artistic, intellectual and political life in the U.S., with African Americans like Robeson, Du Bois and innumerable others among those smeared and targeted, many sought relief from U.S. racism and rightist reaction by moving abroad. Quite a few major cultural figures, such as James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Chester Himes and Bud Powell, moved to Paris. During the

⁶ Patricia Hills, interview with Elizabeth Catlett, 3 June 1995, Boston University (OpenBu). The *Herald Tribune* article in question seems to be “Communists and the Negro Problem,” 23 December 1943, which quotes NAACP president Walter White attacking the school; further coverage followed in the *New York Times* and other papers.

same period, many black and white activists, artists, writers and film makers from the U.S. Communist milieu moved to Mexico. After receiving a foundation grant to study in Mexico, Elizabeth Catlett moved there in mid-1946. Over time, she came to refer to African Americans and the people of Mexico as her “two peoples,” highlighting shared legacies and connections and seeking to draw them closer together.

Catlett reached an artistic/political confluence or convergence when she became connected with the artists of the Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP – People's Graphic Arts Workshop), a group of radical print makers, many of whom were Communists. (Among its members was Francisco Mora, whom Catlett married in 1947 after divorcing Charles White.) As Catlett herself put it, “We were concerned not only with problems in Mexico; the problems of whatever oppressed people, colonial or semicolonial, were of concern to us.”⁷ The TGP specialized in inexpensive or free linocut prints focused on labor and peasant (*campesino*) struggles, Mexican revolutionary history, solidarity with anti-imperialist movements, particularly in Latin America. Many of these prints still have a powerful attraction today, while others, especially on “antiwar” themes, seem tame, reflecting the fact that Mexican CP followed the Soviet bureaucracy's quixotic quest for “peaceful coexistence” with U.S. imperialism.

Unfortunately, U.S. imperialism's Cold War offensive, which by the 1950s was bringing death and destruction to workers and peasants from Korea to Iran, southern Africa to Central America, hit Mexico as well. Anti-communist U.S. “labor leaders” worked with the CIA and the Mexican government to purge leftist unionists in Mexico. Surveillance of Catlett and other

⁷ Melanie Anne Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico* (2005).



Linocut *Central America Says No!* (1986), denouncing murderous repression unleashed by U.S. imperialism against revolutionary upheavals that broke out in the region in the late 1970s and 1980s.



“I Have Given the World My Songs,” 1947, from the series *The Negro Woman*.

expatriate U.S. leftists by the FBI intensified, likely spurred in part by the TGP’s 1953-54 print series *Against Discrimination in the U.S.*, which included portraits of Robeson, Du Bois, Douglass, anti-lynching and black self-defense advocate Ida B. Wells, pioneering black trade unionist Isaac Myers (titled *Unity of All Workers*) and others. Catlett’s husband contributed a portrait titled *Mississippi Ballot*, of former slave Blanche Bruce, who during Radical Reconstruction became a U.S. senator.

Unbowed and Unsilenced

In 1958, the Mexican government viciously targeted dissident teachers and militant railroad workers, sending CP-aligned union leaders to prison on charges of “social dissolution.” (Still imprisoned a decade later, the fight for their freedom was one of the touchstones of the 1968 Mexican student movement.) At the same time, the Mexican authorities, with encouragement from the U.S. embassy, rounded up a number of leftists who had moved to Mexico from the United States, together with refugees from the Franco dictatorship in Spain, the Batista dictatorship in Cuba, the military junta installed in Guatemala by the U.S.-organized 1954 coup there, and others. Elizabeth Catlett was violently seized at her home and thrown in jail, later stating that she was freed only through the personal intervention of Mexico’s Secretary of Education, who was an admirer and collector of her artwork.

Seeking to avoid further threats of deportation, Catlett decided to apply for citizenship in Mexico, which granted it to her in 1962. With the United States under John F. Kennedy seeking to root out “communist subversion” throughout the Americas in the wake of the Cuban Revolution, the United States government labeled Catlett an “undesirable alien” and she was banned from returning to the U.S. Yet amidst the growth of black freedom movements in the 1960s and early ’70s, her work was increasingly known and popular among African American activists and art aficionados. Repeatedly invited to conferences as well as exhibitions of her work, she was repeatedly denied a visa.

In 1969, scheduled to give the keynote address to a major conference on black art at Illinois’ Northwestern University, she had to give the speech by phone from Mexico because the U.S. embassy would not allow her in. It was only in 1971, a

decade after her last trip to the U.S., that she finally got a visa to travel there, to attend the opening of her solo exhibition *Elizabeth Catlett: Prints and Sculpture* at the Studio Museum in Harlem. Yet it was not until 2002 that the U.S. reinstated her citizenship. In 2010, at the age of 94, she presented her sculpture of singer Mahalia Jackson in New Orleans. Two years later, in April 2012, Elizabeth Catlett died at her studio/home in Cuernavaca.⁸

To get a sense of what she must have been like as a person, here is how, in the speech she gave by phone from Mexico in 1969, she addressed the issue of why the U.S. government had denied her a visa to visit the country of her birth:

“Unfortunately for me, I was refused on the grounds that, as a foreigner, there was a possibility that I would interfere in social or political problems, and thus I constituted a threat to the well-being of the United States. To the degree and in the proportion that the United States constitutes a threat to black people, to that degree and more, do I hope to have earned that honor. For I have been, and am currently, and always hope to be a Black Revolutionary Artist and all that it implies!”

So we found a kindred spirit in our visit to the Brooklyn Museum exhibition, at a time when all our hard-won rights are under attack. For her inspiring art and her defiant courage in the face of racist reaction, we embrace the memory of Elizabeth Catlett. ■

⁸ Witter, “Chronology.”

Women’s...

continued from page 16

ed desirable.”⁴ Instead, it comes from a long political tradition that is rooted in struggles of the working class and oppressed, and in the application of the lessons born from those struggles. The Internationalist Club holds an International Women’s Day event every year to discuss with young people interested in changing society about the history of this socialist holiday, the struggles of women workers and the rich political traditions that were shaped through these fights, which inform what we do today.

In that vein, I want to talk about an important revolutionary fighter who died recently, our comrade Marjorie Stamberg. Her life and what she fought for help us concretize some of the points we’re talking about today. Marjorie became politicized as a college student and participated in the first “teach-in” against the Vietnam War, in 1964. She moved to Washington, D.C. to be a full-time activist with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Com-

⁴ This is a quotation from a 1911 work by Rosa Luxemburg that provided a searing critique of the fraud of “disarmament” under capitalism, printed as “The Road to Peace” in *Young Spartacus*, May 1982, and available on Marxists Internet Archive in a somewhat different translation under the title “Peace Utopias.” A good introduction to “Red Rosa” is “Poland’s Marxist Tradition: Hail Rosa Luxemburg!” (April 1982), one of the articles and talks by Marjorie published in *Marxism & Education* No. 7, September 2025, together with “Marjorie Stamberg (1944-2024), Revolutionary Trotskyist, Marxist Educator, A Leader of Struggles for All the Oppressed.”

mittee, the radical wing of the civil rights movement, and Students for a Democratic Society, the principal organization of what was called the New Left. Marjorie took a revolutionary position for the victory of the Vietnamese Communist forces against U.S. imperialism. She became a writer for the *Washington Free Press*, the earliest of many “underground newspapers” that emerged during that time. After moving to New York to write for another radical paper, Marjorie became a pioneer of the radical women’s movement, which revolted against the male chauvinism that was widespread in the New Left. In the late ’60s, she was an early member of Red-stockings, a major group in the movement we now know as “second-wave feminism.”

We often say “*La lucha educa*” – struggle educates – a slogan from militant teachers’ struggles in Puerto Rico. A powerful example is Marjorie’s account of how she was won to the Marxist program for women’s liberation. It is a very concrete example of the difference between the fight for women’s liberation, which is a major part of revolutionary Marxism, and feminism, a bourgeois ideology that actually stands in the way of effective struggle for women’s liberation.

In the late 1970s, while working as an operator for AT&T, which at the time was known as Ma Bell or “the phone company” (it was a monopoly), Marjorie was part of a radical women’s organization called Oakland Women’s Liberation (O.W.L.). She had helped found a feminist journal called *Tooth and Nail*, which became the voice of this group. Operators, workers who manually connected phone calls at the time, were almost exclusively women and were presented as the gentle, caring feminine voice between the customer and the company.

These women worked in awful conditions, under constant surveillance by the company, which was a notoriously repressive employer. They were required to sit on tall stools at a specific distance from the switchboard, could not smoke, chew gum or even (in many cases) cross their legs. They could be accused of neglecting their jobs for supposedly “looking around too much,” which in practice meant looking away from the switchboard at all. To us today it sounds a lot like Amazon’s monitoring of warehouse workers’ so-called “time off task.” The pay was terrible and the bureaucratic leadership of the union they were part of, the Communication Workers of America (CWA), often ignored their demands.

Marjorie went to work at the phone company, as did some other members of O.W.L., to organize among working-class women. As operators they were part of the CWA and they also started a group called the Operators Defense Committee to fight for the rights of women phone operators. In O.W.L., as Marjorie described it in a talk she gave in 2015, “we were unionists, we were radicals, we were feminists and revolutionaries, and we saw no contradiction.”⁵ They did not involve men in their political work and rarely if ever had men at their meetings. Marjorie and others worked in a big phone building in downtown Oakland, where many of their coworkers were in or around the Black Panther Party. Oakland is where the Panthers got started.

At AT&T there was also the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), which represented workers in skilled jobs re-

quiring a lot of training, who were all men at the time. The IBEW went on strike in 1971. Marjorie and her comrades in O.W.L. watched as women workers they had recruited to their operators’ group with the politics and rhetoric of feminism *scabbed on the IBEW strike*. In other words, they crossed the picket line of the striking workers, undermining the power of the strike and breaking the fundamental principle of working-class solidarity.

This was horrifying to watch, especially as Marjorie and others heard these women echo feminist arguments they had used to win them over. Operators crossing the picket line justified this with things like “We’re the most oppressed, we earn much less money, so we don’t have to honor their strike,” or “That union never fought for women, so we don’t have to support their strike.” Marjorie, in a state of shock, immediately helped publish a leaflet calling for operator solidarity with the IBEW strike. She participated on the picket lines and along with her comrades demanded that nobody cross the picket line. But in this experience came a major moment of reckoning, and of realization. As she put it, “in order to hold the class line, we were forced to break with many of the feminist constructs we had previously held and come to grips with the contradictions we didn’t see before.”

Another group at the phone company was the Militant Action Caucus, which was politically aligned with a group called the Spartacist League (SL), which for three decades represented the revolutionary Marxist politics of Trotskyism. (Leon Trotsky, co-leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution along with V.I. Lenin, defended the Bolshevik program against the conservative bureaucracy headed by Joseph Stalin that usurped political power in 1923-24.) Members of that group invited O.W.L. to carry out political discussion with them, beginning a year-long period of study during which Marjorie was won to the program of Trotskyism. She remained committed to this revolutionary political tradition – one from which our club draws its lineage – and fought for its program until the end of her life. After moving to New York, Marjorie became the first woman switchman in the city. She also joined the staff and later the editorial board of the SL’s newspaper *Workers Vanguard*. The eventual degeneration of the SL led to her and other comrades being expelled in 1996, after which they founded the Internationalist Group.

“For a Socialist Fight to Save New York”

In 1978, Marjorie ran for New York state assembly as the SL’s candidate during the throes of the New York fiscal crisis, when landlords were having their buildings burned in the Bronx to collect insurance money. This is also the period during which tuition was imposed at the City University of New York (CUNY) for the first time, an assault on the city’s working-class and immigrant population masses who sent, and send, their children to CUNY. “For a Socialist Fight to Save New York” was the slogan of Marjorie’s campaign, which was a far cry from the reformist electoralism of “Democratic (Party) socialists” then and now. For example, one of the campaign platform’s central points was “Break with the Democrats – For a workers party to fight for a workers government!” And it called to *expropriate* the banks, real-estate and other capitalist enterprises – including such hated companies as Ma Bell and Con Ed.



Posters at literature table at March 2025 International Women's Day forum, showing aspects of the life and work of our comrade Marjorie Stenberg (1944-2024). Marjorie was a founding member, and a key leader, of the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International.

In 1985, in the middle of Ronald Reagan's new anti-Soviet Cold War, Marjorie ran again as the Spartacist candidate, this time for mayor of New York against the racist Democrat Ed Koch. Her campaign slogan was "From Soweto to Harlem: Smash Racist Terror." Soweto is the black township near Johannesburg, South Africa, where a huge revolt against apartheid occurred. There is a long list of other inspiring struggles that our comrade Marjorie was part of and helped lead. Among them, the organization of mass labor/black mobilizations to stop Ku Klux Klan provocations in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere; the fight against capitalist reunification of Germany and for a "red Germany of workers councils in a socialist Europe" in 1989-90; organizing solidarity with militant Mexican teachers strikes and the defense of indigenous education in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, and many others.

In the late '90s she started a second career as a teacher in the NYC school system, where she became a union delegate and leader of Class Struggle Education Workers, battling tooth and nail against the capitalist government's racist and anti-working-class assault on public education, teachers' and students' rights. Her work exemplified the meaning of class-struggle opposition to the union bureaucracy that chains the unions to the Democratic Party.

Liberation Can't Come Through "Sectoralism"

One of the major lessons Marjorie emphasized, and which I think her revolutionary political journey shows, is that the program of revolutionary Marxism is counterposed to "sectoralism." This is the ideology, which the New Left pushed heavily, that each sector of the oppressed would and should pursue its own struggle with a "multi-vanguardist" perspective, instead of the fight to win over the multiracial working class to using its huge potential power in the fight for liberation of women, black people and all doubly or specially oppressed groups.⁶

To give a couple of examples, we fight for labor to defend the abortion clinics, for workers action against racist police terror and for the working class to bring its power to bear in the struggle against depor-

tations – as those of you know who have been involved together with Internationalist activists in the Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants. As Lenin emphasized, a revolutionary Marxist party must be "the tribune of the people," the champion of all the oppressed. Only by destroying capitalism and establishing workers rule can we dismantle the material basis of the different forms of social oppression, which are constantly reproduced by the workings of the system of capitalist exploitation.

But you can't get there by reinforcing the divide-and-conquer divisions this system makes between sectors of the workers and oppressed, or dividing up who is allowed to fight for whom. In her life and work, Marjorie was by no means exclusively concerned with women's oppression; she saw this as inseparable from fighting the oppression of black people, which in this country founded on slavery has always been key to virtually every political and social question. As a Marxist educator, she was very effective at explaining the tradition of Marxism, which teaches that liberation for *all* the oppressed is the task of the whole working class and that this requires revolutionary leadership.

Marjorie, who died in May 2024 after a three-year struggle with cancer, fought until the end of her life for the freedom of all the oppressed through socialist revolution. Her death was a massive loss to our organization, and to the movement she dedicated her life to. But together with the Internationalist Group and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth, we in the CUNY Internationalist Clubs carry on her memory and the Marxist program she fought for.

In closing, there are a few points that I hope people leave with. First, the question of women's liberation is a class question. Marjorie's story of coming to terms with what the politics of feminism lead to in practice – when, at Ma Bell, she saw how consistent feminism led to strikebreaking – is an example of why revolutionary Marxism and feminism are counterposed. While feminists draw a line between men and women in society, we Marxists draw a class line, between the working class and the bourgeoisie. And that understanding is crucial for *winning* the fight against the oppression of women and all forms of oppression. This is crucial today, when the rights of ev-

ery sector of the oppressed, which were won through struggle, are under attack and being stripped away one after another.

We must grasp the big picture: the current onslaught from the Trump administration didn't come out of nowhere – it is an expression of the social and political decay of the capitalist system and U.S. imperialism's desire to maintain its dominance worldwide. In so many different ways, as we have shown in our press, the Democrats paved the way for Trump. We cannot forget, for example, that Democratic icon Jimmy Carter, together with then-Senator Joe Biden, were instrumental in pushing the infamous racist Hyde Amendment barring federal funding for abortions, hitting poor working-class, black and Latina women the hardest.⁷

Today we keep seeing how support to the Democrats chains the power of the workers and oppressed to this system. This means that to fight the current escalating assault on the rights of us all, to unchain that power it is essential to **break with the Democrats**. Our insistence on this struggle for the political independence of the working class is one of the basic things that make the Internationalists different from other groups that may label themselves socialist or Marxist but whose actual politics are based on class collaboration, not class struggle.

Instead of looking to the parties of the racist ruling class, we need to look to the class power of the working class. We need to fight for a revolutionary workers party, to defend the rights of all the oppressed and fight for their liberation through socialist revolution. As Lenin emphasized in his speeches on women's emancipation, for example on International Women's Day after the victory of the October Revolution in 1917, women's fate is tied to the triumph of socialism. The situation of women is at the heart of any society's character – her liberation can only come with the full liberation of humanity in a society freed of exploitation and oppression. ■

⁷ See "Free Abortion on Demand: How Revolutionaries Fight for It."

Witch Hunt...

continued from page 8

nationwide. Meanwhile the presidents of Rutgers and Northwestern universities, and the chancellor of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), were hauled before the Committee in May 2024.

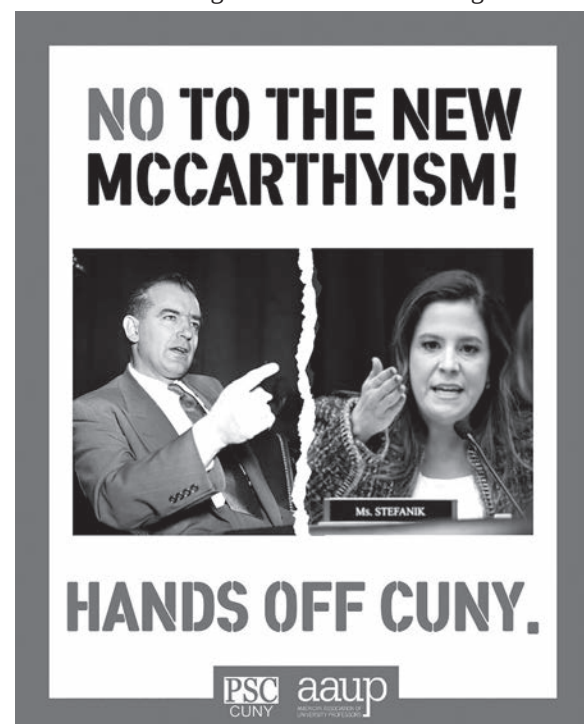
The hearings began with Ivy League and other elite colleges, long central to preparing the next generation of the ruling class to rule. These institutions' role in promoting the power of U.S. capitalism is also reflected in the fact that nearly 30% of Ivy League attendees are international students. The Trump-loyal witch-hunters targeted elite universities first because of their outsized importance in setting the tone of culture and norms both in higher education and in U.S. politics. This is a central reason for the Trump administration's obsession with purging liberals from the academy – and why back in November 2021, JD Vance gave a keynote address to the National Conservatism Conference titled "The Universities Are the Enemy."

Vance, now Trump's VP, got his law degree from Yale (the alma mater of innumerable Republican figures), while Elise Stefanik, Steve Bannon, Christopher Rufo, Ted Cruz and a host of others went to Harvard. But shaping a "new" elite is a central objective for the Trumpists and their strategists such as Russell Vought, the Office of Management and Budget director who plays a major role in the administration. Backed by a sector of top U.S. capitalists – Peter Thiel, Vance's sinister far-right backer, is among the most prominent – they see liberalism as an impediment to untrammelled profiteering and ruthlessly restoring the dominance of the American "homeland."

While their initial focus on witch-hunting the Ivies was in sync with this outlook, moving "beyond the Ivy League" was the next step, and this was the title of the sixth of the inquisitorial higher-ed hearings. Held on 7 May 2025, it brought in the heads of DePaul and California Polytechnic universities as well as Haverford College, a shift to scrutinizing administrators' repressive efforts at public higher ed institutions and smaller liberal arts colleges. This was followed by the July 15 hearing, which included Georgetown and UC Berkeley (a prestigious school with a high-profile activist history) while featuring the public grilling of the chancellor of the largest urban public university system in the country: the City University of New York, which is attended by close to 240,000 students.

The interrogation of CUNY's Chancellor Matos alongside the heads of other colleges was meant to intimidate basically everyone in public higher education. Moreover, the Trump administration has pulled about \$25 million in federal grant money from CUNY (according to estimates by the University Faculty Senate), and this will cause real damage. However, CUNY and many public colleges are much less dependent on federal money than the leading private schools. (Columbia received almost \$900 million in federal research funding in 2024, nearly 20% of its total budget.) The fact that CUNY is, overall, less susceptible to financial blackmail by the federal government means that its faculty and staff are potentially in a stronger position to resist the attacks on basic rights.

The City University's student body comes mainly from New York's multiracial, multinational and largely immigrant working class. The racist ruling class has



CUNY faculty/staff union PSC and American Association of University Professors poster shows 1950s witch-hunter Joe McCarthy and today's "ultra-MAGA" inquisitor Elise Stefanik.

Who's Witch-Hunting CUNY?

In its crusade of slander, censorship and intimidation aimed at rooting out pro-Palestinian protest on college campuses across the U.S., the House Education Committee has summoned university tops from around the country, smeared student and faculty activists with the false accusation of antisemitism and denounced administrators for supposedly skimping on repression. This inquisitorial body includes some of the most right-wing elements in Congress. Chairing it is **Tim Walburg**, a Michigan Republican and evangelical pastor, who last year said Gaza should be dealt with “like Nagasaki and Hiroshima.”

Similar remarks were made on Fox News by committee member **Randy Fine** of Florida, who stated: “We nuked the Japanese twice in order to get unconditional surrender. That needs to be the same here” in the war on Gaza. On his X account Fine has posted that “Gaza must be destroyed,” has used the hashtags “#BombsAway” and “#StarveAway,” and mocked a photo of a dead Palestinian child, responding “Thanks for the pic!” Fine, who openly stokes Islamophobia, has called for the deportation of Somali American congresswoman Ilhan Omar.

North Carolina Rep. **Virginia Foxx**, who was chair of the committee when its interrogation of the Harvard and Penn presidents led to their resignation, is the far-right anti-abortion author of *God Is in the House: Congressional Testimonies of Faith* (2016). A promotor of “Christian academies,” the name preferred by the whites-only private schools set up in the South after the Supreme Court outlawed segregation in public schools, Foxx is a hardline “Christian Zionist” supporter of Israel who believes that “the Jews are God’s chosen people.” In the milieu of the religious right, this proclamation is often linked to openly antisemitic themes.

Self-described “ultra-MAGA” New York Rep. **Elise Stefanik**’s knack for

demagoguery in the committee’s televised proceedings has gotten her a great deal of publicity; her name became almost synonymous with the proceedings. Though she postures as a defender of Jews, Stefanik is notorious for echoing the “great replacement theory” in her campaign ads (“The Invention of Elise Stefanik,” *New York Times*, 31 December 2022). This is the antisemitic, anti-immigrant conspiracy theory spouted, among others, by the white supremacists who chanted “Jews will not replace us” in Charlottesville in 2017.

Fellow committee member and “America First” demagogue **Mark Harris**, of North Carolina, is an evangelical pastor who called Islam “dangerous” and the work of Satan. A booster of his state’s infamous anti-trans “bathroom bill,” he also made headlines by preaching that women “must understand” their domestic “core calling,” that “only one title is given to a woman in all of scripture ... the title given to a woman is ‘helper’” and therefore one must ask if women having their own career is “a healthy pursuit for society? Is that the healthiest pursuit for our homes? ... Is that the healthiest pursuit for the sexes in our generation?”

The quotations from House Committee on Education and the Workforce members could go on for pages, but we will end with Rep. **Mary Miller** of Illinois, who, at a June 2022 campaign rally with Donald Trump, described the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* as a “historic victory for white life.”¹ In January 2021, Miller notoriously proclaimed that “Hitler was right on one thing – whoever has the youth has the future,” in her speech to a rally held outside the U.S. Capitol by Moms for America, a hard-right “conservative education advocacy” group. ■

¹ On the racist roots of the anti-abortion crusade, see “Free Abortion on Demand: How Revolutionaries Fight for It,” and related articles in *Revolution* No. 19, September 2022.

long left CUNY chronically underfunded, while its students struggle to make ends meet and are all too familiar with police repression and other daily realities of capitalism in NYC. But the demographics of CUNY can help unlock a lot of social power: that’s the potential when the daily life of a quarter million students is so closely connected to the city’s working class and oppressed communities. For this potential to be realized requires a class-struggle program and leadership, which is what we’re fighting to build, at CUNY and beyond.

CUNY Chancellor Vows “Zero Tolerance”

In his July 15 testimony to the Congressional star chamber, Chancellor Matos Rodríguez was eager to “highlight” (his word) how, “with the help of the New York City Police Department,” the CUNY administration “ended” the Gaza solidarity encampment at City College in April 2024. “We have zero tolerance for encampments at CUNY right now,” he said, “have doubled down” on enforcing “time, place and manner” restrictions on campus protest. “We’ve also hired more than 150 full-time security employees and contracted with an additional 250 security

personnel.” And “our approach has shown results,” he boasted. “This past spring, we applied our zero tolerance policy and worked with CUNY Public Safety to prevent an encampment” – in other words, he’s helping make our rights increasingly *unsafe* from censorship and repression.

One committee member after another mouthed the talking points provided by their staffers, stumbling over terms and titles in their zeal for naming names, demanding arrest and firing numbers and that the chancellor list disciplinary measures and denounce specific faculty members’ views. Not even pretending to defend CUNY against the McCarthyite inquisition, he dutifully responded, “we have terminated individuals in the faculty and staff”; “there were four” faculty fired (at Brooklyn College); he will investigate and “take action” against more at CUNY schools if needed. What about students, Walberg wanted to know: how many were thrown out so far this year? “Seven,” Matos Rodríguez replied, with a meekness that outdid his counterparts from UC Berkeley and Georgetown, who now and again pushed back. But his efforts to ingratiate himself with the inquisitors got him no sympathy; they just demanded more.

Union-Busters on the Prowl

Much of the House Committee’s ire was directed at education workers unions at CUNY and the University of California: the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) and United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 4811 respectively. That they have defended academic freedom and free speech rights, and protested repression against student demonstrators, was portrayed as an intolerable outrage by representatives from states with anti-union “right-to-work” laws in particular.

In his opening remarks, committee chair Walberg set the tone with the openly anti-labor lie that “unions across the country” supposedly “encourage anti-Semitic activism.” How? “Through protests, demands and workshops,” he said – the repressive intent of this smear could not be more clear. Members of the committee have long been active on the anti-union front, and last year its former chair, Rep. Virginia Foxx of North Carolina, launched a “probe” of 12 unions for supposed fraud and other offenses. This year not long before the July 15 hearings, committee members Walberg and Allen launched an initiative for “strengthening” one of the key anti-labor laws passed during the Cold War period: the Landrum-Griffin Act.

So it was no surprise that the targeting of universities with a high-profile union presence would whet the appetite of zealous union-bashers on the committee. The website of Rep. Bob Oander of Missouri, for example, describes him as a “strong supporter” of charter schools and “school choice” (translation: he wants education to be privatized). At the July 15 hearing he launched a diatribe against UAW Local 4811, which represents graduate student workers across the University of California system. In Spring 2024, the union went on strike to protest the brutal repression of the encampment at UCLA.⁴ The UC Board of Regents took the union to court, resulting in a temporary restraining order that led to the end of the strike; the case against the union remains in litigation. Lyons leapt at the chance to denounce the union at the July 15 hearing and provocatively “asked” whether “the UAW contributes to antisemitism.”

The PSC also came under fire from the congressional witch-hunters. PSC activists have been among the targets of vicious doxxing campaigns for defending Palestinian rights, and over the past period the union has helped reverse the cancellation of a pro-Palestinian film at Hunter College, protested the police repression of the City College encampment and organized protests for the rehiring of the “Fired Four” adjunct faculty members at Brooklyn College. (See articles in this and previous issues of *Revolution*.) Here too, anti-labor rightists on the House committee went out of the way to bait,

⁴ See “Flash Point UCLA: Student Workers Strike Against Repression of Pro-Palestinian Protesters,” *Revolution* No. 21, September 2024.

smear and encourage attacks on the union during the hearing. Rep. Foxx, for example, tried to get the CUNY chancellor to “admit” that the PSC has an “antisemitism problem” and asked if he supports “forcing” Jewish faculty to be represented by it.

In a statement on the July 15 hearing, PSC president James Davis wrote that Congressional committee members “got their facts wrong today in their attempt to smear CUNY and our union as antisemitic,” adding:

“CUNY administrators have investigated faculty for the terms in which they discuss the war in Gaza in their classes, limited the time, place, and manner for exercising the right to free expression on campus, invited police violence against non-violent student protestors, and even fired faculty in apparent retribution for their political activism. It is still not enough to satisfy the new McCarthyites.”

Since *Revolution*’s first issue back in September 2003, we have documented the CUNY administration’s and Board of Trustees’ nefarious services to the ruling class, from doing away with open admissions and ramping up tuition to actively collaborating in militarization, witch-hunting, repression and attacks on academic freedom and free speech rights. Joining the chorus of slander and incitement against CUNY students, faculty and staff for protesting the Gaza genocide; unleashing NYPD violence against them at City College last year and Brooklyn College this spring; then promising “zero tolerance” to a panel of rabid rightist witch-hunters – these are just the latest reasons why the CUNY administration and Board of Trustees need to be *abolished*. In their place, the university should be governed by those who study and work here, through elected councils of students, faculty and staff.

This basic democratic demand is part of the overall Marxist program to take education at all levels out of the hands of the capitalist class, its appointees and forces of repression. To open the way for free, high-quality education for all – freed from the mounting repression, bigotry and backwardness bred by capitalism in decay – we need a socialist revolution. ■

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COLORED PEOPLE

OF BOSTON, ONE & ALL,

You are hereby respectfully CAUTIONED and advised, to avoid conversing with the Watchmen and Police Officers of Boston,

For since the recent ORDER OF THE MAYOR & ALDERMEN, they are empowered to act as

KIDNAPPERS

AND Slave Catchers,

And they have already been actually employed in KIDNAPPING, CATCHING, AND KEEPING SLAVES. Therefore, if you value your LIBERTY, and the Welfare of the Fugitives among you, Shun them in every possible manner, as so many HOUNDS on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.

Keep a Sharp Look Out for KIDNAPPERS, and have TOP EYE open.

APRIL 24, 1851.

Notice posted in Boston in 1851 by local abolitionist Theodore Parker.

Slave Catchers...

continued from page 15

that was a major center for commerce, including the transatlantic slave trade.

New York was one of British North America's largest slaving ports (i.e., port cities where enslaved people were bought, sold and unloaded from or loaded onto ships). A slave rebellion burned down large parts of the city in 1712, as did a second one in 1741, which reportedly involved black slaves uniting with poor whites and "free people of color" to challenge colonial authorities. During the colonial period, nearby Brooklyn (a separate city before becoming part of NYC at the end of the 19th century) was overrun with slaveholding farms and plantations that cultivated crops needed to feed the island of Manhattan.

Only after the American Revolution did the tide begin to turn against slavery in the North. Unlike the South, which was a "slave society" – in other words, one based centrally on the institution of slavery – the North was what historians of slavery call a "society with slaves" (one in which enslaved labor was one component of the economic system). In 1799 and 1817, New York stated passed laws that gradually phased out slavery, finally terminating the institution in 1827. Among those legally freed that year was future abolitionist Sojourner Truth, who had been enslaved in Hudson Valley for the first 29 years of her life. But while slavery became illegal in New York more than three decades before the Civil War, racism was rampant.

In the 1830s and '40s, New York's black population – which reached a peak of 16,300 in 1840 – found itself besieged in a city that, like the U.S. as a whole, was increasingly polarized over the issue of slavery. In 1821, New York State eliminated all property qualifications for white men to vote, but established a \$250 property requirement for black men, effectively denying them voting rights. Harassment was a daily occurrence. Segregation was company policy in public trans-

port and customary in restaurants and other public establishments. In the 1840s, a wave of impoverished Irish immigrants arrived and encountered virulent nativist discrimination (portrayed in Martin Scorsese's 2002 film *Gangs of New York*). Employers pitted Irish laborers against blacks, stoking racist resentment to foment working-class division.

As cotton became the United States' largest export, New York's prosperity grew even more dependent on the labor of enslaved black people on Southern plantations. In the years leading up to the Civil War, roughly 40% of U.S. cotton revenue was gleaned by New York City's financiers, insurance and shipping companies.² So frequently did slaveholders come to New York

on business that a "traveler's exemption" was created, lasting until 1841, that allowed non-residents to bring their slaves into the state for a period of nine months, making it possible to crisscross state lines to reset the time limit. Moreover, despite the fact that the transatlantic slave trade had been illegalized, it was an open secret that over the following decades New York was a hub in the trade's illicit continuation in "undercover" form, linking the city's merchants and shipyards to Brazil, Cuba and the West African coast.

The profits that New York rulers obtained from slavery went a long way. After a fire destroyed much of the city's financial district in 1835, this wealth allowed the city to replace the ravaged wooden structures that remained with more durable granite buildings; fueled uptown development, leading to expansion of the city limits; and paid for the construction of the Croton aqueduct, ensuring the city a stable supply of clean water. In 1800, New York was a small port city of about 80,000 inhabitants. By 1860, its infrastructure had been transformed and its population surpassed 800,000. Key to this transformation, as Wells demonstrates, were the profits that New York capitalists made from Southern slavery.

Slave Catching in Gotham

New York's characteristic hustle and bustle, and the sense of anonymity that grew alongside the city's population, gave runaway slaves a chance to start life anew as free people. But the same labyrinth of city streets and alleyways also hid the dens of slave catchers. Bounty hunters, lawyers and informants in the employ of Southern slaveowners prowled the North looking to cash in on the kidnapping of black people. By the 1830s, reports of missing black children had become a regular occurrence in New York, but police refused to investigate. A letter from the Anti-Slavery Society pleading to the mayor and aldermen was simply returned without a response.

² "The Hidden Links between Slavery and Wall Street," BBC, 29 August 2019.

At any time, black residents of New York could be accused of being fugitive slaves from the South and kidnapped. Southern planters and their agents could strike terror with the sanction of law, while New York's rulers worked diligently to comply with the demands of their Southern business partners. The original Fugitive Slave Clause, which was part of Article IV of the U.S. Constitution that went into effect in 1788, mandated that enslaved people who escaped to free states could not be granted freedom and "shall be delivered up" upon claim by their owners. In 1793 this was supplemented by the first Fugitive Slave Act, stating that slaveowners and their agents had the legal right to hunt for escaped slaves inside the borders of free states. (As discussed below, a second, even more draconian Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850.)³

Working alongside the slave hunters for hire were New York police, who also got bounties (which they relied on in part to cover legal fees from lawsuits brought by people they had brutalized). In 1832, after Virginia's governor asked New York governor William Marcy to take action on behalf of an owner of runaway slaves, Marcy gave police a blank warrant to arrest anyone suspected of being a fugitive. Over the following two decades, this particular warrant – which saw so much wear and tear that it had to be copied and re-signed – was brandished by NYC cops Tobias Boudinot and Daniel Nash, who became widely known for their slave catching activities.

But Boudinot and Nash were far from the only ones. In one notorious case in 1834, a Richmond slaveowner and a New York sheriff marched into the African Free School on Duane Street in Manhattan, where they seized a seven-year-old black child named Henry Scott. Henry was dragged before Richard Riker, who served as a judge presiding over the city's primary criminal court. (He was from the wealthy family that owned Rikers Island and eventually sold it to the city to turn into a jail.) Riker who ordered the terrified and sobbing child to jail while his captor travelled back to Richmond to obtain proof of ownership.

Though Henry managed to obtain his freedom with the help of community support,

³ For some crucial context, see "Slavery and the Constitution: Origins of U.S. Capitalist 'Democracy,'" *Revolution* No. 17, August 2020.

many others passed from Riker's kangaroo court into Southern bondage. Nash, Boudinot and other cops and slave catchers would haul captives before Riker's bench at all hours, reliably obtaining a favorable verdict. Riker would later tell a Southern business agent: "Tell your Southern citizens that we Northern Judges damn the Abolitionists – we are sworn to abide by the Constitution."

David Ruggles and the Vigilance Committee

As the dominance of "King Cotton" grew in the 1830s and '40s (by 1840 cotton's share of U.S. exports reached over 50%), the Manhattan elite's growing wealth became even more dependent on the business of slavery. After all, as Wells notes, cotton was "a crop financed by Wall Street banks and exported to New England and British textile mills via New York brokers, businesses, and financiers." And so the influence of Southern slaveholders over NYC's politics, policing and judicial system grew even greater. African Americans living in New York found that at any moment, they could be stripped of their rights and spirited into Southern bondage.

Against this, the courageous work of abolitionist David Ruggles persistently exposed the actions of the slave catching and abduction network that he called "the Kidnapping Club." Together with running New York's first black bookstore, where he disseminated abolitionist literature, Ruggles was a sales agent and contributor to prominent anti-slavery newspapers, including *The Liberator*, founded in 1831 by William Lloyd Garrison.⁴ Ruggles' polemics (writings against opposing standpoints) included fierce opposition to those who backed schemes for "colonization" of black people with the argument that they could never attain equality in the United States and therefore should migrate to Africa or the Caribbean. Denouncing this, he argued that the U.S. was the home of African Americans and they should organize to claim their birthright to equality.

For his fearless defiance of the Kidnapping Club, exposing the machinations of City Recorder Riker, police officers

⁴ Becoming widely known in the 1830s, Garrison would go on to burn a copy of the Constitution on July 4, 1854, calling it "a covenant with death, an agreement with Hell." (See "Slavery and the Constitution.")



Detail from cover of *Harper's Weekly*, 14 January 1882, engraving by Thomas Nast.



Notices like this one (undated) were frequently posted to warn fugitive slaves and those seeking to aid them, when slave catchers had been sighted.

Boudinot, Nash and many others, Ruggles was frequently the target of retaliation. In the summer of 1834, anti-abolitionist riots rocked New York; Ruggles' bookstore was burned down and ransacked. He was also the victim of violent attacks by racists objecting to him riding on stagecoaches and train cars. Still, Ruggles continued to push forward the struggle for equality.

Rather than yield to intimidation, Ruggles sought to widen the scope of abolitionist activism in the city. In November 1835, Ruggles established the Committee of Vigilance, which worked to alert the city's black residents of the presence of slave catchers, to shelter runaways, as well as organizing and funding legal defense efforts. The committee established links with similar groups that were forming in Philadelphia, Boston and other cities, and mobilized its members to City Hall, Riker's courtroom and the city's fearsome Bridewell prison in defense of those arrested on charges of being a fugitive. In the course of the ten years following its foundation, according to the committee's published reports, it saved approximately 1,800 people from the clutches of the Kidnapping Club.

Together with the fight against slave catchers, Ruggles and the Vigilance Committee kept watch for illegal slave trading taking place at the city's docks. In December 1836, Ruggles got a tip that a known Portuguese slave ship, the *Brillante*, had docked in Lower Manhattan. Heading to the docks, he talked with a white sailor who confirmed that the ship carried human cargo and was in the port for repairs. Ruggles repeatedly tried to get the New York District Attorney to take action, but got the run-around, followed by a shouted order to get "out of my office!" The case was only taken up after Ruggles got news of it published in two daily papers.

The ship's captain and the five African men found aboard the *Brillante* were then arrested. The U.S. District Court concluded that the five Africans aboard the ship were crew members and released the ship's captain. Ruggles discovered that the five "crewmen" were being held in a debtors' prison in City Hall Park at the behest of the ship's captain until he was ready to depart. Ruggles visited a series of city officials, as well as the prison, trying to secure their release. Each time, he hit a wall – and within a few days the enslaved Africans were returned to the *Brillante*.

Retaliation came soon, when the slave-catching cop Daniel Nash, accompanied by a member of the *Brillante*'s crew and other men, appeared on Ruggles' door-

step in the middle of the night with a warrant from the chief of police. Ruggles managed to escape but was later arrested and charged with resisting arrest, but eventually released. The notoriously racist *Morning Courier* (30 December 1836) lauded Ruggles' arrest, denouncing his role in the *Brillante* case as "one of hundreds of impudent and

insolent attempts on the part of the blacks to violate the laws and interfere with the authority of the magistrates."⁵

But Ruggles remained undeterred. He continued to track and intervene in cases involving the kidnapping of black people, sometimes traveling across state lines to find leads and advocate on behalf of the victims. He also continued to uncover illegal slaveholding in the New York area; he described Brooklyn in particular as "the Savannah of New York," referring to the Georgia city known for its major role in the slave trade.⁶ For this, as Ruggles wrote in the *Mirror of Liberty* (January 1839), he was denounced as "a nuisance and a vagabond" by the editor of the *New York Gazette*, one of Wall Street's many journalistic mouthpieces.

Ruggles faced arrest yet again in the fall of 1838 for aiding in the attempted escape of Thomas Hughes, a young enslaved man whose owner brought him from New Orleans to New York. In a blatant frame-up, police and the Wall Street press tried to pin responsibility on Ruggles for Hughes taking some of the enslaver's money before fleeing. Abolitionist activists exposed the corruption behind the police investigation and legal proceedings, and Ruggles, after paying a hefty bail, was allowed to go free. As for Thomas Hughes, New York's capitalist "justice" system declared him "guilty" and sentenced him to two years in Sing Sing prison.

The Split Over Self-Defense

As the abolitionist movement grew in the 1830s, so did differences of outlook and strategy within the movement. Its best-known leader at the time, William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879), was viewed as an intransigent radical because he called for "no compromise with slavery" and demanded its immediate abolition. At the same time, Garrison and his followers were doctrinaire pacifists, putting forward a strategy of "moral suasion" aimed at persuading the slaveowners to give up the sin of slavery.

⁵ An in-depth account in the online history journal *Commonplace* (December 2024) gives further details, which differ in some ways from Wells' account. The *Brillante* case came three years before the rebellion of 53 African men held captive aboard the Spanish slaving ship *La Amistad*, which drifted to the coast of Long Island in 1839, leading to a famous legal battle the U.S. courts, events portrayed in the 1997 Steven Spielberg film *Amistad*.

⁶ Savannah, Georgia was later the site of what is believed to be the largest single sale of human beings in U.S. history, known as the "Weeping Time," when in March 1859 approximately 436 enslaved people were auctioned off at a race-track to pay off the gambling debts of a local plantation owner.

While Garrison's *Liberator* was one of the papers David Ruggles wrote for and distributed, he began to argue for a more militant orientation in the struggle for black freedom. In July 1836, a free black man named George Jones was arrested on Broadway, two blocks from Wall Street, on a charge of battery that served as a pretext for his kidnapping by slave catchers who falsely stated that he was a runaway slave. Reporting on a meeting in Jones' defense, Ruggles wrote:

"We are all liable; your wives and children are at the mercy of merciless kidnappers. We have no protection in law, because the legislators withhold justice. We must no longer depend on the interposition of Manumission or Anti-Slavery Societies, in the hope of peaceable and just protection; where such outrages are committed, peace and justice cannot dwell... no man is safe; we must look to our own safety and protection from kidnappers; remembering that 'self-defence is the first law of nature'."

— "Kidnapping in the City of New York," *The Liberator*, 6 August 1836

The differences came to a head during the 1837 defense campaign of William Dixon, a black laborer arrested by Boudinot and Nash and brought to court, presided over once again by Richard Riker. Abolitionist activists and members of the black community in what is now the Lower East Side found a series of witnesses who contradicted the claims against Dixon, and the case was moved to trial. The Vigilance Committee organized people to observe the trial, helped raise funds for the defense and mobilized hundreds to protest for Dixon's freedom. Police clashed with demonstrators; some individual activists also attempted to rescue Dixon from his captors.

Samuel Cornish, a Presbyterian minister who edited a newspaper called *The Colored American*, had been a collaborator of Ruggles on the New York Committee of Vigilance. Both had opposed "colonization" as a defeatist accommodation to racism. Cornish had even abandoned his editorial post at *Freedom's Journal*, a paper he had co-founded, over disagreements on this topic. But as slave catching deepened the polarization of New York City and U.S. society at large, the strategic rifts within the abolitionist movement deepened.

As a man of wealth and respectability, Cornish abhorred the protests outside the courthouses and jails and was ill at ease with the militant crowds of working-class black people confronting kidnappers. Denouncing

"the ignorant part of our colored citizens," he expressed particular disapproval with the presence of black women at these actions who, he wrote, "so degraded themselves ... we beg their husbands to keep them at home for the time to come, and to find some better occupation for them" (*Journal of Commerce*, 19 April 1937).

The author of the *Kidnapping Club* states that "class tensions" within the black community were a big factor underlying the political divisions, as affluent African American leaders often opposed militant protest and organized self-defense. But he misses a key moment of continuity in the struggle. Ruggles' disagreements with Cornish on self-defense and mass protest came to the fore just as Ruggles was providing shelter for a fugitive slave from Maryland then called Frederick Bailey – who would soon change his name to Frederick Douglass.

Upon arriving in New York, it was at Ruggles' home at 36 Lispenard Street that Douglass found refuge. (Today, a plaque designates the building as a station on the Underground Railroad.) There he would reunite with the fellow abolitionist Anna Murray and marry her. That Ruggles was a mentor to Douglass and not just a lesser-known predecessor of comparable moral courage goes without mention in *The Kidnapping Club*. It is likely unintentional that Wells' book leaves out an important aspect of Ruggles' legacy in nationwide politics, as the United States hurtled toward civil war over the question of slavery. As Douglass himself recounted:

"I was relieved ... by the humane hand of Mr. David Ruggles, whose vigilance, kindness, and perseverance, I shall never forget. I am glad of an opportunity to express, as far as words can, the love and gratitude I bear him.... Though watched and hemmed in on almost every side, he seemed to be more than a match for his enemies."

— *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845)

"The Police of New-York on a Slave Hunt"

Opposition to the bounty hunters grew stronger in the 1840s, with increasing numbers of Northerners reacting against the brutal realities of slave catching and the corrupt influence of the Southern slavocracy over Democratic-run politics in New York and other cities. The flagrant arrogance of what came to be called the "Slave Power" (slave-owners' political and economic clout in U.S. society) aroused growing indignation.



A BOLD STROKE FOR FREEDOM.

Engraving by C.H. Reed, from *The Underground Rail Road* by William Still (1872).

Yet chattel slavery, so lucrative for so many sectors of the capitalist elite, continued to expand with the annexation of Texas (which had seceded from Mexico in response to that country's abolition of slavery) and the predatory 1846-48 war through which the U.S. acquired over half of Mexico's territory.

In New York, 1846 was the year the city was rocked by the case of George Kirk, who had escaped slavery on a Georgia cotton plantation by stowing aboard a ship bound for New York. Discovered by the crew, he was held under lock and key, but when the ship tied up at Manhattan's wharves, black stevedores (longshoremen) heard Kirk yelling for help. With protesters gathering around the ship, this time it was the captain who was taken to court – where he stated that he intended to return Kirk to slavery. With a large number of black and white slavery opponents in the courtroom, a sympathetic judge ruled in Kirk's favor and declared him a free man.

But New York's Mayor Andrew Mickle, a loyal Tammany Hall Democrat who, in Wells' words was "pressed by Wall Street interests" to intervene in the case, declared there would be a second trial. When another favorable ruling followed, Kirk's supporters, knowing that city rulers would continue to hound him, rushed him to the Anti-Slavery Society's office. "The Police of New-York on a Slave Hunt," headlined the *New-York Tribune* (30 October 1846); "the whole police force of the city turned slave-catcher" after Mayor Mickle signed a warrant for Kirk's arrest and sent **900** cops to find him. With massive protests growing, Kirk's supporters attempted to whisk him away in a crate, but he was ultimately apprehended by the police, who took him to the hideous "Tombs" jail on Centre Street.⁷ However, the judge set Kirk free again and he soon moved to Boston, where he lived as a free man.

By this time, however, David Ruggles had left New York. The strain of relentless work – together with injuries inflicted on him over the course of his anti-slavery struggle – wore down his health, costing him his eyesight and leading him to move to Massachusetts in 1842. He died there in 1849, at only 39 years of age, and his story was little known for more than a century. We owe a debt of gratitude to the author of *The Kidnapping Club* for changing that.

Wall Street Hails Fugitive Slave Act – Civil War Approaches

Little more than a decade separated Ruggles' death from the onset of the Civil War. As had occurred with each prior expansion westwards, the conquest of vast territories from Mexico threw the balance of power in U.S. society into crisis. The composition of the Senate in particular depended on which areas would become slave states and which new states would be based on non-slave labor. The result was yet another of the periodic "compromises" between North and South, the 1850 Compromise.

A key aspect of this was the establishment of an even more draconian Fugitive Slave Act. Its measures included mandating that all escaped slaves be returned to their owners; that citizens of free states collaborate in this directly; that those aiding or harboring fugitives slaves be subject to imprisonment and a steep fine; and that the federal

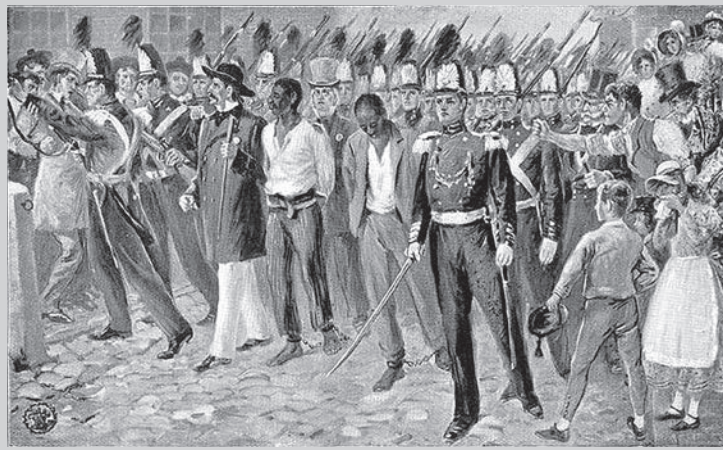
⁷ The Tombs, in downtown Manhattan a five-minute walk away from today's immigration courthouses, continued operating until 2020, when it was demolished to make way for a huge new jail complex.

When the White House Sent Marines to Seize Fugitive Slaves

Though New York's Wall Street rulers hoped the infamous Compromise of 1850 would silence opponents of slavery, the most recent in the long series of bargains between the North and the slaveholding South proved to be explosive. The new Fugitive Slave Act that was a pillar of the compromise enraged abolitionists, as well as many Northerners who had sought until then to evade conflict over slavery. The act's stipulation that slave catchers could force anyone and everyone

to join the hunt for fugitives goaded the anti-slavery movement, and large numbers of people who had not taken action until then, towards a more militant stand. U.S. society was shaken by several high-profile clashes that erupted in Northern cities when people seeking to rescue fugitive slaves faced off against bounty hunters, who were backed up by the police and, in some cases, by federal troops.

The watershed moment came in 1851 when a group of fugitive slaves and free black people in Christiana, Pennsylvania successfully resisted a raid led by a federal marshal working together with a slaveowner who sought their capture by force of arms. In response to the death of the slaveowner, President Millard Fillmore called out the Marines to carry out a manhunt, which led to the indictment of 38 black men and three whites on charges of "treason" ("for resistance in the execution of the Fugitive Slave Law of



"The Runaway Slaves, Anthony Burns and Thomas Sims, Returned to Slavery – Their March Through the Streets of Boston," from *The Story of My Life* by Mary A. Livermore (1898).

September 1850," in the words of a widely circulated contemporary report on the trial). Meanwhile, the runaways escaped northward and found refuge in Rochester, New York, in the home of Frederick Douglass, who helped them reach Canada. Public outrage against the slave catchers led Douglass to proclaim that the Christiana Resistance had "inflicted fatal wounds on the fugitive slave bill."

In May 1854, a mass upheaval broke out in Boston in response to a slave catcher's kidnapping of Anthony Burns. Enslaved to a shopkeeper and sheriff in Alexandria, Virginia, Burns had learned to read and write, and found a way to escape by stowing away on a Massachusetts-bound ship. When Burns was seized (using the pretext of a false robbery charge) and scheduled for trial under the Fugitive Slave Act, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Theodore Parker and other militant abolitionists organized a mass meeting at Boston's Faneuil Hall to plan for Burns' rescue.

Some of the meeting's participants tried to storm the building where Burns was being

held, in order to free him. In response, President Franklin Pierce ordered a massive force of Marines, Army artillery units and state militiamen to take control of the city. (Pierce, a Democrat, had used his military career in the U.S. war on Mexico as a steppingstone to the White House.) As many as 2,000 armed men marched a shackled Burns through the city and to a waiting ship in Boston Harbor. A crowd of 50,000 gathered in protest, defying the bayonet lines and cannon placements.

Many Boston-area residents were radicalized by the case of Anthony Burns. Shortly after Burns' abduction Theodore Parker, Henry Bowditch and other abolitionists formed a secret society called the Anti-Man-Hunting League devoted to aiding freedom seekers and resisting the slave catchers by any means necessary. In 1855, a group of black Bostonians purchased Burns' freedom, and he subsequently attended Oberlin College. After Burns, no fugitive was ever taken back to slavery from Massachusetts.

In 1863, after Abraham Lincoln's government finally yielded to insistent demands to establish a regiment of African Americans in the war against the slavocracy, the Massachusetts 54th Infantry Regiment was enrolled (two of Frederick Douglass' sons were among its recruits). As portrayed in the 1989 film *Glory* starring Denzel Washington, it played a heroic role in the Civil War that smashed chattel slavery – what Marxists call the Second American Revolution. ■

government be responsible for enforcing the act. The *Wall Street Journal of Commerce* described the act's approval as "glorious news." Its editor wrote that no one would be happier to hear this news "than capitalists, whose means are always at a greater risk in troublesome times." Without the riches deriving from the slave-grown crop, he argued, the United States would fall apart; in the face of conflict, "cotton is the great counteracting element.... Blessed be cotton!" (21 December 1850).⁸

The first person to be targeted under the new law was New Yorker James Hamlet, a porter who was arrested at his workplace on Water Street in Lower Manhattan. In response to this outrage, Frederick Douglass wrote that "we are all at the mercy of a band of bloodhound commissioners" (*Frederick Douglass' Newspaper*, 3 October 1850). While dejection spread among the city's abolitionists, the *Journal of Commerce* (28 December 1850) rejoiced that anti-slavery activists "have probably learned rebellion is not so rife in this community as they were taught to believe."

⁸ Nearly a century and a half later, the *Journal of Commerce* was purchased by the publishers of *The Economist*. It continues to be a mouthpiece of finance capital to this day.

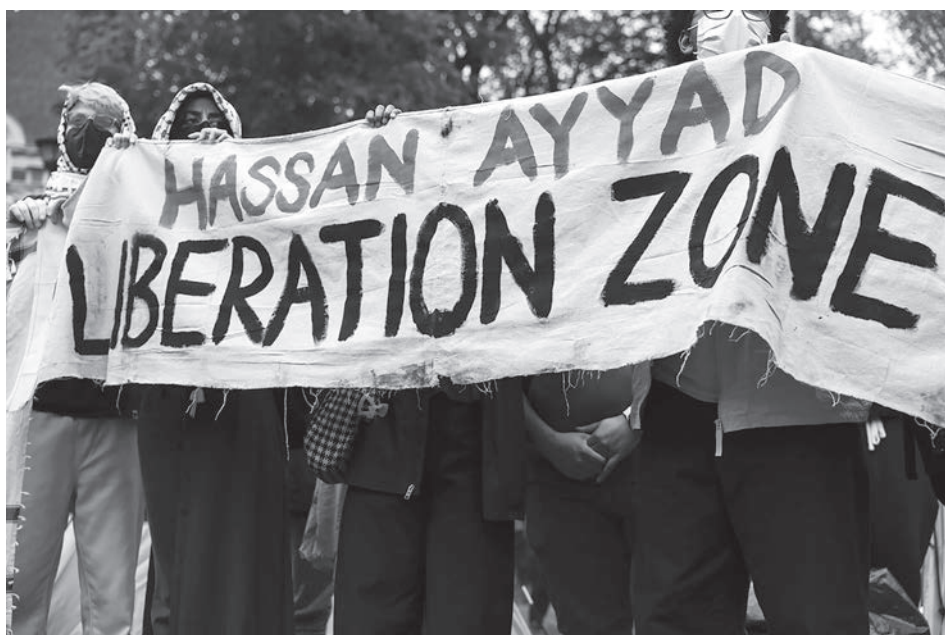
Despite Wall Street's hope that slavery's opponents in Northern cities would resign themselves to the slaveowners' power, militant resistance broke out in a series of places, including the mass upheaval of May 1854 in Boston. (See box.) In 1857, outrage intensified still further when the Supreme Court's *Dred Scott* stated that nobody of African descent was or could be a citizen of the United States and that Congress could not prohibit slavery in any federal territory. (Dred Scott had sued for his freedom after being taken from Missouri, a slave state, to a free territory.)

In April 1861, the "Confederacy" of secessionist Southern states launched what Karl Marx called the "slaveholders' rebellion" with the bombing of Fort Sumner in Charleston, South Carolina.⁹ Today, few people know that under the influence of the city's capitalist elite – the slaveholders' Wall Street partners – New York tried to secede from the Union in order to protect the commercial and banking profits fueled by slave-grown cotton. Speaking to the city's Common Council in January 1861 amidst the secession crisis, the city's Democratic mayor Fernando Wood ex-

⁹ See the Internationalist pamphlet *Marx on Slavery and the U.S. Civil War* (2009).

pressed "a common sympathy" with "our aggrieved brethren of the Slave States" and proposed that the city withdraw from the Union and declare itself a sovereign city-state. The council voted in favor, but the attack on Fort Sumner aroused the ire of the great majority of New York's working people, and the secessionist scheme of Wall Street's mayoral puppet fell through.

Where did the present-day political, social and economic set-up come from? How did a tiny capitalist elite driven by the relentless, remorseless pursuit of profit get a death-grip on New York City? What does this history mean with regard to the Democrats today, and why we fight for a revolutionary workers party against them and all capitalist politicians? The dramatic story told by *The Kidnapping Club* helps us get to the roots of some these issues. The courageous example of abolitionists like David Ruggles, who organized to stop the abduction of black people here in New York City, are an inspiration as we struggle today to defend the rights of immigrants – against latter-day slave catchers and the racist deportation machine built up by Donald Trump's Democratic predecessors and ruthlessly wielded by his administration today. ■



As the genocide in Gaza deepened, student protesters at BC sought to set up a solidarity camp named after a 14-year-old singer killed in an Israeli air strike a few days before.

Cop Riot...

continued from page 32

heels of the intensification of the genocide in Gaza, with the population on the brink of mass starvation. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu announces a “concluding” offensive while Trump talks of displacing all 2 million Palestinians living there, to turn Gaza into valuable beachfront property. Meanwhile, federal agents grab Columbia graduate Mahmoud Khalil at the door to his apartment building, and masked Department of Homeland Security thugs abduct Tuft student Rümeysa Öztürk.

The Democratic Party has been acting together with would-be strongman Trump to censor and assault dissent against the “Gaza Genocide Made in U.S.A.” (*The Internationalist* No. 73, July-August 2024). This includes New York’s Democratic governor Kathy Hochul ordering CUNY’s Hunter College to withdraw a hiring position for “Palestine studies” – a gross violation of academic freedom.

Brooklyn College is in the eye of the storm. It is located near the South Brooklyn hotbed of virulent Zionists, who this spring set upon demonstrators protesting Israel’s fascist security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. In October 2023, a pistol-packing Republican NYC councilwoman showed up at a BC Gaza solidarity protest, denouncing the demonstrators as “terrorists.” The college is also not far from the heavily Arab neighborhood of Bay Ridge. Meanwhile, the May 8 ambush of BC protesters set off an outpouring of angry condemnation from students and faculty at a May 12 CUNY Board of Trustees meeting. At the college itself, a number of faculty stood between the encampment and the campus cops on May 8, and the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), representing CUNY faculty and staff, has denounced the administration for this attack, demanding that charges against those arrested and detained be dropped.

The police riot at Brooklyn College was emblematic of the broad assault on universities and pro-Palestinian protests today. The events reflect the dire situation facing those who dare to resist the offensive to regiment U.S. society, starting by victimizing the most vulnerable sectors. This can only be fought by bringing out the only force capable of defeating this all-sided reaction: that of the organized working class. Students, faculty and all defenders of democratic rights should seek the active support of NYC labor to stop the witch-hunters and uniformed thugs at

Brooklyn College, throughout CUNY and elsewhere. **Drop all charges against the pro-Palestinian Brooklyn College protesters! For student-teacher-worker mobilization against police repression! Cops off campus, including campus cops!**

What Happened at BC

Around 1 p.m. on May 8, Mobina Hashmi, an assistant professor and co-chair of the BC chapter of the PSC, was at a “grade-in” organized by adjunct faculty members when participants decided to cut the event short and some went to support the student protesters across the quad. Hashmi said that once it became clear police were forming up outside campus, the group of faculty and staff “decided that what we could do was link arms, stand in front and let people know we did not think it was right for the NYPD to disperse peaceful protesters.” As police began massing at the gate, the about 20 faculty/staff members repeatedly chanted “Hands off our students.” When the cops entered in formation, as students were being dispersed the faculty accompanied them, trying “to ensure that we all had the space to do that as safely as possible.” The intentions of the police were the opposite.

By 5 p.m., CUNY “Public Safety”

helped clear the Bedford Street gate by pushing students to the ground, opening the way for NYPD’s notorious SRG to enter the campus. The entrance nearest to the protest on Campus Road was blocked off, so the only exit was where police were pouring through. “People didn’t want to go right in front of the cops who said they were going to arrest them. [The cops] all had riot gear, and were clearly there to fight,” said Oscar Docavo, a BC alum who came to the East Quad to support the encampment. Professor Hashmi said, “That was the scariest part because the path that we were supposed to take was lined with police officers.” According to an email sent to faculty by BC president Michelle J. Anderson, two students were arrested on campus.

The tactics utilized by the SRG were designed to stage a spectacle of wanton violence. Once the students were off campus, on the sidewalk, dispersing as the police had demanded, the police pounced on them. Cops pummeled students right outside the gates, while other officers pushed journalists away. “I saw police officers slamming people on the ground, grabbing people by the shirt, ripping them around,” Docavo said. Following the police assault, the library and multiple entrances to campus were cleared out and shut down by police. Professor Hashmi said it was reported that students and faculty who were off campus on a break in the middle of a class were not allowed to come back to collect their belongings.

The police occupation left the campus in shock. A letter by 19 BC student clubs condemned the police violence. On the day of the cop riot, the PSC fired off a statement to CUNY chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez and BC president Anderson which “condemns your use of NYPD Strategic Response Group (SRG) to intimidate and disperse a group of roughly 30 non-violent student protesters on the Brooklyn College campus today.” The BC Policing and Social Justice Project issued a statement (May 10) condemning the police violence and the CUNY and BC administration for bringing the NYPD on campus. On May 16, the PSC issued a further statement reiterating its condemnation of the administration and linking this to previous denunciations of state re-

pression such as its denunciation in 2013 of the police violence unleashed against students protesting CUNY’s appointment of former general David Petraeus to teach at the Macaulay Honors College.¹

The day after the police attack, the entire BC campus was shut down at 2 p.m., with no official explanation. Only people with a BC ID were allowed on campus. The Brooklyn College Student Union, a campus activist group, called an assembly on May 12 on the East Quad lawn to “stand in solidarity with student protesters,” notifying the administration via email. BC responded by emailing and messaging all student groups who had reposted the flier, saying the event was in violation of a recently created “Brooklyn College Events Protocol,” and demanded it take place at a different location. On the day of the assembly, when student organizers were accosted by campus cops on the quad as NYPD officers massed outside, they decided to call off the assembly.

CUNY “Rules” of Repression

During the afternoon of May 8, when the administration was trying to push protesters off campus, it distributed a pink sheet with the order, “Go to class or leave campus.” The college alleged that students had violated CUNY’s “Henderson rules,” without saying what rule the students supposedly violated. The Henderson rules prohibit “obstructing” campus activities, or “forcibly prevent[ing] others from exercise of their rights,” but at Brooklyn College on May 8, the student protesters did not obstruct any processes or facilities, while it was the administration that did the obstructing and violently prevented students from exercising their rights. Last spring semester, these rules were brandished against pro-Palestinian demonstrators at Hunter College. The Hunter Internationalist Club issued a letter demanding charges be dropped, noting “the administration is stretching and distorting even those rules.” We added:

“We must also all be aware that the very purpose of the Henderson rules – decreed by the Board of Trustees amidst the historic 1969 upsurge of CUNY student pro-

¹ See “Brutal NYPD Assault on Students Protesting Petraeus” and related articles in *Revolution* No. 10, October 2013.

McCarthyite Firings and Star-Chamber Inquisitions

In early June, Brooklyn College fired four adjunct faculty members (formally terminating one and “non-reappointing” the others) in what defenders of basic academic freedom rights accurately denounce as an echo of the “McCarthy trials of the 1950s.” As the president of the PSC-CUNY faculty/staff union noted in a letter to university chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez, “What the four instructors who lost their CUNY jobs at the same time have in common is their public protest against Israel and advocacy for Palestinian rights.”¹ CUNY Central has also reportedly had the Fired Four ousted from teaching positions at other CUNY campuses too. Their blatantly political firings – which their departments at

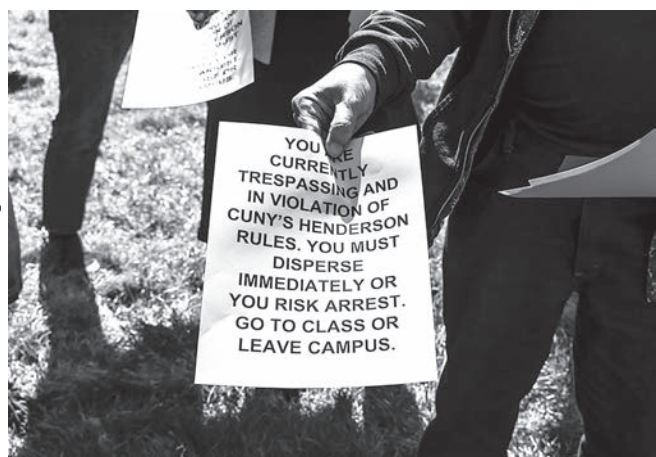
¹ The June 30 letter followed up on the June 26 “Resolution in Defense of Academic Freedom & Against Retaliatory Firing of CUNY Faculty” passed unanimously by the union’s Delegate Assembly.

Brooklyn College were not even consulted on – are part of the same campaign of McCarthyite repression that unleashed the brutal NYPD attack on May 8. All defenders of democratic rights must demand: **Reverse the firings now!**

This sinister and shameless purge was also part of the lead-up to a new witch-hunting Congressional inquisition along the lines of those that targeted Columbia and other elite universities last year. Using the same vile smear that brands defending the Palestinian people against Zionist genocide as “antisemitic,” they moved “Beyond the Ivy League,” as the House Committee on Education and Workforce proclaimed in the title of its May 7 hearing targeting DePaul, Haverford and California Polytechnic, then held a hearing on July 15 targeting CUNY, Georgetown and University of California, Berkeley. (See “The *Gleichschaltung* of American Universities” and “Congressional Witch Hunt Comes to CUNY” in this issue of *Revolution*.)

The CUNY administration did not wait until the July 9 Congressional star chamber to further ramp up repression. In mid-June Hadeeqa Malik, a leader of the City College (CCNY) chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine, was suspended from CCNY for a year, for allegedly violating CUNY’s anti-democratic Henderson Rules on campus protest, and forbidden to enroll in any other CUNY college. And now union activists at Brooklyn College report that five more faculty members and one staff member face “investigation” by the administration as the scope of the witch hunt continues to grow. These repressive measures too must be stopped and reversed, now!

Like the brutal May 8 NYPD/administration attack at Brooklyn College, the firings, inquisitions and investigations are a threat to the rights of just about everyone who works and studies at CUNY. **Students, faculty, staff unite – smash the McCarthyite witch hunt!**



The BC administration charged protesters with violating CUNY's Henderson Rules about "obstructing" campus activities, distributing fliers ordering: "Go to class or leave campus." But it was the administration that obstructed campus activities, violently preventing students from exercising their rights.

test against racism and the Vietnam War – has always been to provide pretexts for repression and undemocratic restrictions, strengthening the control of CUNY campuses by unelected and arbitrary authorities hand-picked by the capitalist elite.”

–*Revolution* No. 21, September 2024

The “unelected and arbitrary authorities” referred to are the CUNY administration and Board of Trustees (BoT), 15 of whose members are appointed by the governor and the mayor. (The other two are the heads of the University Faculty Senate and the University Student Senate.) At the May 12 hearing of the BoT held at LaGuardia Community College, a CUNY Internationalist Clubs contingent denounced the administration for setting up the cop riot at BC. Internationalist activists protested outside and attended the meeting holding signs reading “Cops Get Out of CUNY!” “[BC president] Anderson and Felo [Matos Rodríguez] Must Go,” “Enough Is Enough! Abolish the Admin and Board of Trustees” and “Police Repression Won’t Stop Us From Denouncing the Genocide in Gaza.”

A CUNY student, one of several who spoke in the hearing to denounce CUNY’s use of the police against the BC Gaza solidarity encampment, gave moving testimony that began contrasting the student’s experience of recovering from cancer with that of Mohammad Mater, a Palestinian university student and cancer patient who died due to a lack of medical care: “Even before October 7, radiotherapy in Gaza was non-existent due to an Israeli ban on equipment entering Palestine, and chemotherapy drugs were in short supply. Now the situation is far worse. Israeli bombardment has left no fully functioning hospitals in Gaza.”

Many PSC members spoke to denounce the police violence unleashed by the university administration. This, along with the PSC’s immediate condemnation on May 8 and PSC union members’ actions placing themselves between student protesters and the campus cops, underline the importance of students, faculty and staff working together. This was also seen in February when Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) and other agencies of the Department of Homeland Security sought to recruit students at CUNY’s John Jay College. Protests initiated by the Internationalist Clubs with strong participation from PSC members as well as supporters of the Labor Committee to Defend Immigrants led to the cancellation of the scheduled CBP recruitment event.² Against

² See “Student/Labor Protests Stop Immigration Cops’ Provocation at CUNY Campus,” in this issue of *Revolution*.

the onslaught of repression from the CUNY administration working hand-in-glove with the NYPD, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs call for **student/faculty/worker control of the university**.

For Student/Faculty/Worker Action Against the Repression

With the implementation of its “Events Protocol,” the Brooklyn College administration is establishing a system to crush dissent and stifle free speech, reflecting attempts to clamp down on basic rights at other CUNY campuses, part of the nationwide drive to repress protest against the Gaza genocide and ramped-up attacks on immigrants. At the BoT meeting students testified that administration officials at Lehman College threatened student protesters with disciplinary action for failing to provide a form two weeks in advance with a list of participants’ names. Faculty at Queens College reported multiple instances of harassment by campus cops after the QC administration issued a new “Interim Guidance Regarding Demonstrations.” (In February, union members held a protest against these new “time, place and manner” restrictions aimed at chilling free speech and protest.). *The next escalation or attack on the rights of us all at CUNY should be met with a CUNY-wide mobilization to defeat such censorship policies aimed at crushing protests across the board.*

The May 8 cop riot at Brooklyn College was not an isolated event. It is no accident

that this orgy of police violence took place on the eve of Mayor Eric Adams’ May 9 visit to the White House, where he thanked Donald Trump for dropping the multiple corruption charges against him in exchange for carrying out Trump’s agenda in NYC, particularly in regard to the ICE onslaught against immigrants. The images of police punching and slamming pro-Palestinian protesters to the pavement served as proof that Adams was keeping up his end of the bargain. Meanwhile, similar censorship and repression are being carried out by college administrations (in many cases aligned with the Democrats) under fire from the White House and Congress, as well as by Democrats in city halls and statehouses across the U.S. It is part of an overall drive toward an authoritarian “strong state” regime on the road to world war.

This all points to the urgent need to unchain the power of the working class, breaking from bourgeois politicians and forging a class-struggle leadership instead of the labor bureaucracy that chains workers and the oppressed to the Democratic and Republican parties of U.S. imperialism.

In these days of intense partisan feuding among the capitalist politicians, it is noteworthy that Democrats and Republicans join in smearing anti-Zionist protests as “antisemitic” (even as many Jewish students participate in them) and in violently repressing them. The assault on dissent in the universities comes as the Trump administration is resorting to police-state methods in its mass deportations operation, threatening millions of immigrants nationally. The Internationalist Club at Hunter College, which has been in the forefront of fighting McCarthyite censorship on campus, last year initiated the Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants which has attracted scores of students, joining with

workers citywide in the Labor Committee to Defend Immigrants, made up of members of a broad range of NYC-area unions. The PSC, meanwhile, has formed an active Immigrant Solidarity Working Group.

Following the successful protest that forced the cancellation of the border cops’ recruitment event at John Jay, the PSC launched a petition drive under the watchword, “No ICE/DHS at CUNY!” It demanded that the University administration:

- 1) **Refuse to capitulate to authoritarian demands that threaten academic freedom, free speech, faculty governance, free association, and our right to protest on campus; refuse to curtail CUNY’s commitment to racial, gender and other forms of diversity.**
- 2) **Provide emergency legal representation for any CUNY student or worker facing the threat of deportation or cancellation of visa.**
- 3) **Ensure that no CUNY college will allow ICE and Homeland Security to enter or recruit on CUNY campuses.**

On May 27, the union delivered the petition to the University administration that was signed by over 7,300 people at CUNY, including more than 3,000 faculty and staff and 3,900 students. Of those, approximately 3,000 signatures were gathered by students from the Internationalist Club and the Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants, who all-out in this effort, and also spoke at the PSC event presenting them.

To defeat the attacks on basic democratic rights by the capitalist government, parties and politicians, and the university administrations that do their bidding, student/faculty/staff action on the road to mobilizing the power of the organized workers movement will be key. **NYPD and all cops off campus! ICE out of CUNY! ICE out of New York! For workers action to stop the deportations! ■**

Thousands Sign Petition Demanding “No ICE/DHS at CUNY”

Photo at right: CUNY Internationalist Clubs and Hunter College Committee to Defend Immigrants (HCDI) activist at the May 27 presentation of petitions demanding “No ICE/DHS at CUNY,” launched by the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) and signed by thousands of faculty, students and staff at the City University of New York. (See the petition’s three demands in the accompanying article.)

In early 2025, the PSC, which represents 30,000 CUNY employees, officially established the union’s Immigrant Solidarity Working Group. The CUNY faculty/staff union (which has urged other NYC-area unions to establish their own working groups or committees to defend immigrant rights) produced the petition as part of its work of organizing at CUNY’s 26 colleges, where more than 240,000 students are enrolled. Of the over 7,300 signatures to the petition, approximately 3,000 were gathered by Internationalist and HCDI activists.

The CUNY administration has not fulfilled the petition’s demands. However, at the beginning of the Fall 2025 semester – clearly as a result of the union/student campaign – it an-



nounced the establishment of the CUNY Immigration Assistance Project. The project has pledged to provide free legal consultations for students and employees who have immigration court hearings, are detained, or face issues related to F-1 student visas or travel.

This fall, the PSC’s Immigrant Solidarity Working Group has further intensified its activities. This has included initiating a sizeable rally and march on September 25 demanding “ICE Out of New York”; sponsoring on-campus “Know Your Rights” trainings; and organizing union members to assist and seek to

accompany immigrants facing hearings in federal courts at NYC’s Foley Square, where ICE has illegally seized hundreds over the past months.

The CUNY union’s immigrant solidarity organizing efforts are an important step – but the struggle to bring out the enormous potential power of the New York labor movement must be deepened and expanded, linked to large-scale mobilization of CUNY students, and carried forward on the basis of a class-struggle program free from any and all illusions in capitalist politicians. ■

Student/Labor...

continued from page 3

a wide range of NYC-area unions aiming to bring out the power of labor in the struggle to stop the raids and deportations.

A workers' walk-out against an immigration raid would "electrify the workers movement from coast to coast," the LCDI speaker said. He contrasted this to the labor leadership's subordination to the Democratic Party, "which is either prostrate or actively collaborating with Trump," as NYC mayor Eric Adams is. "Students and workers unite!" chanted the crowd.

A UPS Teamster described immigrant defense efforts in his and other unions, explaining that "the power of the working class can stop everything in its tracks, which is why we started the Labor Committee to Defend Immigrants." The Committee is bringing together members of many unions including "six different Teamsters locals, the Transport Workers Union, and class-conscious teachers who've started committees in their public school." Healthcare workers are working to set up committees, "because they're not going to let [ICE] take their patients away."

A leader of the recent successful drive for unionization of workers at Brooklyn's Nitehawk cinema/restaurant said:

"We must organize our coworkers and fellow union members to join us in this fight! We must form committees to defend immigrants in our workplaces, in our schools, in our unions. The power of our labor, of the working class, will be the deciding factor in this struggle. We will not allow this disgusting racism to break our solidarity with our immigrant comrades. Their struggle is our struggle, their fight is our fight."

The student demonstrators (many of them recently out of high school themselves) listened intently as an NYC school teacher spoke about the formation of committees to defend immigrants in several of the city's K-12 schools, applauding loudly as she ended her remarks with the slogan "NYC Teachers Say: You Won't Take Our Kids Away!"³

That the demonstrations at John Jay led to cancellation of the sinister CBP recruitment event points to the potential for systematic and serious organizing on a class-struggle perspective. The protests built on the intensive organizing work at Hunter, City College and elsewhere by the CUNY Internationalist Clubs, which in November initiated the Hunter College Committee to Defend Immigrants. (See "Hunter Students Organize Against Anti-Immigrant Drive" on the *Revolutionaries in the Class Struggle* blog.) This harks back to the Committee to Defend Immigrants and Muslims formed in 2017 in response to the grotesque "Muslim ban" that Donald Trump decreed at the outset of his first presidential term.⁴

Today, with a second Trump administration vowing to unleash "the largest mass deportation operation" in U.S. history, it is important to remember that

the deportation machine he relies on was ramped up by Democratic "Deporter-in-Chief" Obama and his successors in the Biden/Harris administration. Trump's "border czar" Tom Homan, whose threats and venomous declarations seek to spread fear among millions of working people, was head of ICE's deportation branch under Obama, who in 2015 presented him with the U.S. government's highest civil service award.

With all our rights under attack, it's crucial that the working class break the chains binding it to the political representatives of capital. This is why we of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs work to win young people seeing the brutal reality of capitalism today to the only alternative: helping to build a revolutionary workers party that fights to put into practice a key slogan we led students in chanting during the recent CUNY protests: "¡Luchar, vencer, obreros al poder!" (Fight, win, workers to power). ■

Gleichschaltung...

continued from page 10

by Texas Democrat Martin Dies Jr., for decades thereafter held high-profile public hearings to smear suspected radicals and leftist political activists as "subversive" and "disloyal."

The precedent for anti-communist witch-hunting at the universities was set in 1940, when the New York State legislature moved on the eve of World War II to investigate leftist activities at City College and other NYC public colleges, and to purge students, faculty and staff over their political views. The Rapp-Coudert Committee subpoenaed and interrogated more than 500 people from Brooklyn College, City College of New York (CCNY), Hunter College, and Queens College. Around 50 teachers and staff members from City College were fired in what was "by far the largest purge of politically undesirable professors ever" in American history.⁵ Those who lost their jobs included CCNY's first black faculty member Max Yergan, Philip and Jack Foner, trade unionist Moe Foner, and English tutor Morris Schappes, who was sentenced to 14 months in state prison.⁶

After the war, in 1947, Democratic President Harry Truman established a loyalty program of oaths and screenings for federal employees. Across the country, states created their own witch-hunting committees modeled on Truman's program, and required public employees to swear their allegiance to the state and that they had no current nor prior affiliation to the Communist Party. By the early 1950s, 32 states required loyalty oaths from their teachers. New York would continue to see some of the largest purges in the country following the 1949 passage of the Feinberg Law barring suspected communist teachers from the classroom. Over 1,150 teachers were subject to questioning, and 378 lost their jobs.⁷

⁵ Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (1986) and "Witch-Hunters Target 'The Unpatriotic University'," *Revolution* No 3, November 2005.

⁶ See "Free Speech at CCNY, 1931-42" for an account of the fight over this attack on academic freedom, and "Free Speech at CCNY, 1931-1942," at the CUNY Digital History Archive.

⁷ Dennis Hevesi, "Irving Adler, Teacher Fired in Red Scare, Dies at 99," *New York Times*, 27 September 2012.

At the University of California in 1949, when its Board of Regents imposed its own anti-communist loyalty oath on faculty and staff, 157 employees refused to sign. The Board voted to dismiss them. All but 31 faculty members capitulated to the hysteria. The university had to settle with the fired teachers in 1951, but only because the state legislature had passed its own more harshly-worded loyalty oath, and faculty overwhelmingly toed the line. At the federal level, the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee questioned faculty at NYC colleges in 1953, resulting in the dismissal of several CCNY faculty members for invoking their Fifth Amendment right to refrain from responding. At the University of Michigan, some professors cited their First Amendment right of free speech or refused to answer at all, and were jailed for contempt of Congress.

As historian Ellen Schrecker explains in her classic work, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (1986), opposition to the witch-hunters from within the universities was weak. Overall, administrations dutifully cooperated with government inquisitors. The AAUP, although it formally opposed loyalty oaths and censorship and defended faculty members' right to invoke the Fifth Amendment, failed to censure any specific violations of free speech rights or academic freedom until 1956, when the tide had already begun to turn. Schrecker concludes:

"Professors and administrators ignored the stated ideals of their calling and overrode the civil liberties of their colleagues and employees in the service of such supposedly higher values as institutional loyalty and national security.... The academy did not fight McCarthyism. It contributed to it."

McCarthy fell out of favor and was censured by the Senate when he launched accusations against the military brass, boiling over in the heated (and televised) Army-McCarthy hearings of 1954. By the mid-1950s the fortunes of the red-baiters were beginning to change. The rigid Cold War McCarthyite control of social life in the U.S. was ultimately defeated by the rise of black struggle, first to integrate the schools after *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, notably in the 1956 battle over school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, and the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott that same year, followed by civil rights struggles all over the South. The ideological monolith of anti-communist cultural regimentation fractured.

A key moment was when students and labor joined forces against the witch-hunters. As we wrote in 2017, during Trump's first term, about rightist provocations on university campuses in California: "What's going on, not only in California but nationwide, is a push for a new McCarthyism on campus." Noting how Joe McCarthy's chief inquisitor, Roy Cohn, was Donald Trump's mentor, we wrote: "The threat of a new McCarthyism is real. The danger is that, as in the 1950s, the intended victims fail to mobilize and vigorously fight back." But, we added:

"What finally broke the grip of fear instilled by McCarthyism was a militant mobilization of students and workers against the House Un-American Activities Committee when it came to San Francisco in 1960. One of the main targets was the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), which defied the 1947 Taft-Hartley law banning Communists from union leadership positions. HUAC also subpoenaed teachers and a student. Instead of intimidation, the committee's hearing galvanized opposition. Professors and students from UC Berkeley and San Francisco State College joined with ILWU Local 10 members and effectively broke up the hearing."

—"Milo Yiannopoulos, 'Free Speech' and the Assault on Universities," *The Internationalist* No. 47, March-April 2017⁸

Gleichschaltung of Academia, Then and Now

During the World War II and Cold War witch-hunting in academia, the most avid inquisitors were waging their anti-communist crusade from Congress and state legislatures. Today, the assault on universities is coming straight from the Trump White House, with the full force of the federal government behind it. There is another important difference: the aim in the 1950s was to purge leftists from schools and colleges. Today, while leftists – and anyone that is pro-Palestinian, anti-Zionist or against genocide in Gaza – are in the crosshairs, there is a broader aim: to drive out liberals and remake higher education according to MAGA dictates. The Trump regime seeks to "replace the existing ruling class with another ruling class," as JD Vance put it in a July 2024 interview with *The Federalist*, by taking over and forcing the universities into line.

We have explained why it is not correct to classify Trump as a fascist,⁹ but the parallels to what is now being demanded of American higher education and what took place in German universities in the 1930s are such that the Berlin daily *Der Tagesspiegel* (15 April) headlined: "'Gleichschaltung' Feared: What the Trump Regime is Demanding of Harvard." Even before taking power, the Nazis used intimidation to force leftists out of academia. In 1930 after the University

⁸ See also "The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) Hearing and Riot of 1960," on Found SF, the San Francisco digital history archive, including video footage of the protests.

⁹ See "Is Donald Trump a Fascist?" and "Fascism, Bonapartism and Donald Trump," in *The Internationalist* No. 74 September-December 2024 and No. 75, January-May 2025.



Protest by International Longshore and Warehouse Union, students and supporters broke up 1960 HUAC witch-hunt hearings in San Francisco.

of Heidelberg hired Emil Gumbel, a Jewish mathematician and outspoken opponent of fascism, as an instructor, Nazi youth spear-headed a smear campaign against him, issued death threats, led physical attacks and organized mass provoc=ations and disruptions of his lectures. Ultimately, most of his colleagues capitulated and he was removed from his post in 1932.¹⁰

The Gumbel affair set the tone for what was soon to come. Hitler became chancellor (prime minister) in January 1933, and promptly passed an Enabling Act allowing him to rule by decree. The Nazis moved swiftly to remove Jews and leftists from public employment and require an oath of allegiance to the German state (and its *Führer*). The purge of higher education that began that spring culminated in the dismissal of 1,000 professors, or nearly one-fifth of university academic staff. The Nazi regime carried out a reorganization of the university, eliminating faculty governance bodies (as the Trump administration is now demanding)¹¹ and concentrating administrative authority in the office of the rector. The propagation of fascist propaganda was demanded, while today a Trump executive order mandates “patriotic education.”

Most administrators and professors complied willingly with these orders. Infamous among these opportunists was the philosopher Martin Heidegger, who became rector of the University of Freiburg just as the Nazis began to establish their control over the academy. Heidegger wasted no time in joining the Nazi Party. He dutifully carried out the reorganization of the university in accord with the dictatorial *Führerprinzip* (leader principle) and applied Nazi racial “cleansing” laws that targeted “Jewish or Marxist” or otherwise “non-Aryan” students. Today the targets are Palestinian or pro-Palestinian faculty and students. The eminent philosopher was one of the prominent signatories of the “Vow of Allegiance of the Professors of the German Universities and High Schools to Adolf Hitler.” In his inaugural address as rector, Heidegger proclaimed that “[t]he much-lauded ‘academic freedom’ will be expelled from the German university.”

So deep was Heidegger’s complicity in Nazi crimes that he was banned from teaching for several years after World War II. But his former lover and longtime friend, the German Jewish academic Hannah Arendt, became a court philosopher of the anti-Soviet Cold War. Her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), which made a false and cynical equivalence between the Soviet Union and arch-racist genocidal Nazism, was heavily promoted by the U.S. government via the notorious CIA conduit, the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Meanwhile, the doctrines of Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt are being taught in law schools in the United States as a foundation of the doctrine of “legal realism.”

¹⁰ A member of the Independent Socialist Party, Gumbel published a damning expose of the murders of revolutionaries Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg by right-wing *Freikorps* thugs at the behest of the Social Democratic government in 1919, as well as the wave of other extrajudicial killings by rightists in the ensuing years known as the Feme murders.

¹¹ See letter to Harvard (11 April) from U.S. Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services and General Services Administration.



For Labor Action to Defend Free Speech and Defeat the New McCarthyism

Today in *Trumpland USA* universities are under siege, as academic freedom and the rights to free speech and protest are menaced by the federal government as never before. The Trump administration is going after top private universities first of all because of their role in the intellectual formation of the ruling class, and is using financial blackmail to compel adherence. What’s called for is a struggle at universities throughout the country, in conjunction with labor and others threatened by the Trump attacks. As the administration criminalizes anti-Zionism, it is urgently necessary to join in common action with those fighting to defend Palestinians and to oppose the joint U.S./Israeli genocidal war on Gaza. Likewise, a successful struggle requires linking the struggle with the fight against mass deportations, against attacks on trans people and all those victimized in the repressive onslaught.

Today, many have hailed Harvard University as a counterpoint to the abject surrender of Columbia and as an example as they look to university administrations to stand up to Trump. As already noted, the administrators of this, one of the wealthiest universities in the world (endowment, \$53 billion), are hardly champions of academic freedom and free speech. Even more explicitly than other private universities, Harvard is literally a corporation, a business entity, not a “community of scholars.” And the masters of this corporation have repeatedly sought to bow down to Trump, including by forcing the resignation of Harvard’s previous president when she was pilloried by the witch-hunters in Washington. To look to this mainstay of American capitalism to lead the “resistance” to Trump is a lesson in futility and a recipe for defeat.

The same goes for university administrations in general, whether of private or public schools, small liberal arts colleges or large research universities. An open letter signed by over 600 college and university presidents and other “educational leaders” is circulating denouncing “the unprecedented government overreach and political interference now endangering American higher education.” But while espousing “the defining freedoms of American higher education,” it calls for “constructive engagement” with the Trump administration, which must be one of the all-time most illusory of pious hopes. This regime is not one to be “constructively engaged” – just ask the U.S.’ Ukrainian puppet president Zelensky. And while university execs have a certain vested interest in “academic freedom,” they surely aren’t



(Above) April 1933 Nazi decree ordering *Gleichschaltung* of German education. (Left) Philosopher Martin Heidegger carried out purge of leftists and Jews at Freiburg University.

going to defend pro-Palestinian protesters, students or faculty.

The origins of academic freedom go back to the *libertas scholastica* of the Middle Ages in Europe, when the few universities sought autonomy from papal or imperial control, as laid out in the 1158 charter of the University of Bologna (Italy). Later, during the Enlightenment, university autonomy served to protect the development of science and other disciplines linked to the rising bourgeoisie against the dead hand of the semi-feudal absolutist state. In the United States it is associated with the 1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure of the AAUP. But in this period of capitalism’s decline, as science itself is under fire, the Trump regime’s attacks on academic freedom are a facet of its broader assault on bourgeois democracy in the drive toward an authoritarian “strong state.”

The threat facing American universities today goes well beyond McCarthyism. It is a full-on drive to control higher education by a would-be Bonapartist government, such as Leon Trotsky analyzed in the 1930s, which seeks dictate to all of society. The Trump regime, using the “power of the purse,” arrogates to itself the power to determine what is taught (no courses on Palestinian or black history), who teaches it (no Marxist radicals), who are the students (no international students who support Palestinians), how the university is governed (all power to the admin, no diversity programs), who plays on varsity sports teams (no trans athletes) while replacing liberal faculty and students with right-thinking conservatives. Meanwhile, in K-12 schools their demand for “patriotic education” aims to indoctrinate students in “American values.”

Despite the pantomime of defiance by the Harvard administration – which is dependent on the courts, and ultimately the Trump enablers of the Supreme Court – the experience of the last three months underlines that, as during the witch hunts of the 1940s and ’50s, college officials will capitulate before the reactionary onslaught. This is no accident, for they administer academia as the agents of capital, both in private and public universities, not on behalf of an imagined campus “community.” The Internationalist Group along with the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth and the fraternally allied Class Struggle Education Workers call to **abolish college administrations** and boards of trustees or regents, and to institute democratic **student/faculty/worker control of the university** through elected assemblies.

The Trump administration’s campaign to intimidate one and all, ruling by decree and tightening the grip of the state over society, augurs worse to come. While

many who work and teach at universities are shocked and outraged by the blatant violation of democratic rights, the struggle cannot be waged in isolation within the ivory tower. Instead, it must reach far beyond the walls of the university and link up with the multiracial working class. This is especially so, as the attack on universities is accompanied by mass deportations of immigrants, mass firings of government workers, war on transgender people, an economic program that will impoverish all working people due to tariff-induced inflation, and continued support for, and even escalation of, the U.S./Israel genocidal war on Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

Ultimately, the offensive against the universities as the “enemy within” and the stripping away of the democratic façade of capitalist class rule are part of preparations for imperialist world war aiming at counterrevolution in the remaining, bureaucratically deformed, workers states, China first and foremost. To defeat this full-bore offensive, it’s necessary to bring out the power of the working class. The banner of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 for the May 2025 march in Oakland, California pointed the way, calling: “For Workers Action to Stop Mass Deportations and Mass Firings! No Military Cargo for Israel’s Genocidal War Against Palestinians! Defend the Rights of ALL of Us!”

At the City University of New York (CUNY), the faculty/staff union, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), has denounced attempts to censor Palestinian solidarity actions, formed an Immigrant Solidarity Working Group and circulated a petition demanding that the university:

- “1. Refuse to capitulate to authoritarian demands that threaten academic freedom, free speech, faculty governance, free association, and our right to protest on campus; refuse to curtail CUNY’s commitment to racial, gender and other forms of diversity.
- “2. Provide emergency legal representation for any CUNY student or worker facing the threat of deportation or cancellation of visa.
- “3. Ensure that no CUNY college will allow ICE and Homeland Security to enter or recruit on CUNY campuses.”

On May 27, the PSC delivered to the University administration this petition that was signed by over 7,300 people at CUNY, including 3,000 faculty and staff and 3,900 students. The CUNY Internationalist Clubs and Hunter Committee to Defend Immigrants played a major role in this effort. Now defenders of academic freedom, freedom of speech and immigrants’ rights face the arduous task of turning these demands into reality through resolute organizing. A successful fight here would have reverberations around the country.

Waging this struggle requires above all a political break with the Democratic Party, which armed the genocidal Zionist war machine, and on the home front set in motion the witch hunts, censorship and police repression on campuses – which the Republicans are now capitalizing on – while posing as “tougher than Trump” on the border. The Internationalist Group insists that, now more than ever, what’s needed is to forge a class-struggle workers party to lead all those exploited and oppressed by this rotting capitalist system in a fight for socialist revolution. How to accomplish this is the central issue of our time. ■

Mamdani...

continued from page 32

outpaced income growth, especially for lower-income households; nearly 8 in 10 Gen Z adults still live with their parents. Capitalism's spiraling decay has brought the genocide in Gaza, Trump's escalating onslaught on basic rights, the threat of a third world war – and all the ways the ruling class makes life unlivable for the working-class majority in NYC and around the country. To address this requires massive **class struggle** against the capitalist rulers and their profit system. But that is anathema to the party that is running Mamdani for mayor, the Democrats, who together with the Republicans have run this system for 170 years.

What then are the central planks that Mamdani is running on? A rent freeze here, a minimum wage hike there, five city-owned grocery stores, free buses...¹ OK (if it happens), but *none* of that touches the power of those who own and rule the city: Wall Street finance capital, the real-estate barons et al., or the police who enforce this social order.² For his campaign, in a basic sense, the point is to *not* challenge the core of capitalist power, much less fight to uproot it as genuine socialists aim to do. Revolutionary Marxists tell the truth: this requires a socialist revolution that replaces the rule of a tiny capitalist elite with a workers government here and internationally. In contrast, reform-

¹ "Rent freeze": Mamdani calls for a four-year freeze on the rents of apartments that are currently rent-stabilized. Grocery stores: In parts of Kansas and Wisconsin there are city-owned grocery stores; Mamdani calls for establishing five in New York City – one for each borough. (P.S.: NYC's Economic Development Corporation already operates six grocery stores.) Free buses: these exist system-wide in a bunch of U.S. cities, and for key routes in many more. (At present in NYC, 48% of bus riders don't pay the fare.) Like many previous candidates, Mamdani has also called for universal childcare.

² Mamdani's official platform affirms: "The police have a critical role to play," while calling to establish a "Department of Community Safety" (DCS). In an interview with the *New York Times* (24 September), he says the DCS would help "ensure that police are actually able to do their jobs," which sums up mainstream bourgeois claims that racist police violence is the product of overwork, lack of "resources," etc. – as opposed to the fact that repression *is* the job of the police. Born as a professional force from the slave patrols, their essential function is to protect the property and social order of the capitalist ruling class.

ists and Democratic Party "socialists" seek to prop up capitalist society and give its discredited political system a makeover. Like his predecessors and allies Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the political and social function of Zohran Mamdani's campaign is to corral youth and working people into the Democratic Party of U.S. imperialism.

When asked who his favorite New York mayors are, Mamdani cites milquetoast liberal Democrat Bill de Blasio (mayor 2014-21) as the best in his lifetime and Fiorello La Guardia (mayor 1934-45) as the all-time best. As mayor during the Great Depression, La Guardia faced the tough task of taming NYC's big, militant and largely leftist labor movement. With the aid of reformist labor leaders, and despite being a Republican, La Guardia played a big part in chaining workers to Franklin D. Roosevelt's Democratic machine. FDR's New Deal "coalition" between capital (and its state) and labor largely secured the political subjugation of the working class for generations. Today the Mamdani campaign, with its full-court press to energize liberals and recruit new young activists to the Democratic Party, is the latest effort to renew the mechanisms of that subjugation.

So the closer he gets to election day, the more Mamdani "has shifted more to the center" (AP, 20 September), walking back rhetorical stances that helped build his "left" reputation among youth – and ostentatiously courting the city's elite. In June, when asked his view on billionaires, he conceded that "I don't think there should be billionaires," since "what we need more of is equality." But then he got down to brass tasks: "I look forward to working with everyone, including billionaires, to make a city that is fair [sic] for all of them."

Intensifying the charm offensive, "Zohran Mamdani, a democratic socialist running for mayor, will meet with the who's who of the corporate world," reported the *Times* on July 15. These get-togethers with "leaders on Wall Street and across the business world" were organized with "the Partnership for New York City, a consortium of 350 members representing banks, law firms and corporations." At a rally the previous day, Mamdani proclaimed: "For our city to succeed, it will take all of us," including "those business leaders" – and he was "excited ... to work with them." Natural enough, since as we Trotskyists forthrightly point out, "democratic socialism" = class collaboration.³ Pledging to collaborate with the exploiting elite, as they fund and fuel the offensive against the city's working class, really does mean pledging to do the dirty work for capital.

Operation "Be My Democrat"

In early 2025, it was a tough challenge for the Democratic Party's foot soldiers to wind young NYC voters up again to vote Democrat.

³ See "'Democratic Socialism' in the Service of U.S. Imperialism" and other articles on the DSA's politics and history in the Internationalist pamphlet *DSA: Fronting for the Democrats* (2018).



Dems' refrain: "This time it's different." It's what Lucy tells Charlie Brown each time (and he keeps falling for) in "Peanuts" gag that goes back to early 1950s.

After Obama's mass deportations came the crimes and fiascos of Biden/Harris, the endless horror in Gaza that was armed and financed by Genocide Joe, and so much more. For growing numbers of them, moreover, the thrill was going or gone when it came to last-ditch Biden-boosters Bernie Sanders and AOC. In New York City, the number of registered Democrats had fallen by over a quarter million since November 2020.

Zohran Mamdani's campaign, equipped with a go-getter media team and a growing bevy of insider Democrat advisors, decided to address the challenge directly – in a video beseeching young potential voters to register Democrat before the cut-off date, which was a day before Valentine's Day. The result: a slick campaign video with a dash of Gen Z irony, giving viewers their own online meet-cute with Zohran, titled "Will You Be My Democrat?" The ad shows him carrying Valentine's balloons and chocolates on his way to a candle-lit dinner. With a romantic soundtrack in the background, he says, "I know you've been let down so many times. The whole working class has been let down. This time I want it to be *different*." With a nod to a few campaign planks, he sits down, smiles sweetly, then makes his pitch: "I know it's not yet Valentine's Day, but I can't wait any longer. Will you be my Democrat?" Then comes the concrete "ask" – register Democrat right away – followed by "Will you be my Democrat?" again. Except this time he literally *sings* the phrase.

In an article on the primary titled "How Zohran Mamdani Brought New Voters to the Polls," the *New York Times* (29 June) approvingly reported that "Mr. Mamdani ... drew tens of thousands of new [Democratic] voters to the polls," "providing a reason for the uninvolved to register," bringing in large numbers of "disaffected voters," youth who had not previously considered becoming Democrats, South Asian voters alienated by Biden, and many others. For their part, organizers for the NYC DSA boasted that the campaign's "special sauce" was the role of large numbers of DSA volunteers in enrolling Democratic voters for Mamdani. Despite all years of claims by "left" DSAers that sometime soon they were going to organize some kind of "break" from the Democrats, there they were licking envelopes and "knocking doors" yet again for the party of Hiroshima, the Vietnam War and the genocidal war on Gaza.

As for things being "different" this time, that's an old one. In the classic "Peanuts" cartoon, Lucy holds the football for Charlie Brown to kick. She smiles sweetly and vows that this time it will be different – then she pulls it away at the last second and yet again he falls with a resounding thump. "This Time It's Different" ought to be the theme song of every reformist and liberal seeking to rope workers and youth back in for the Dems. Take 1968: the Vietnam War deeply discredited Democratic president Lyndon Johnson and his VP and would-be

successor, Hubert Humphrey. But "peace" candidate Eugene McCarthy brought large numbers of young antiwar activists into his Democratic primary campaign. Rinse and repeat in '72 with George McGovern (Bill and Hillary Clinton worked on his presidential campaign), all the way down to Bernie Sanders.

So we've seen this film before – and we know how it ends. A small but fitting symbol of this endless cycle is how the Young Democratic Socialists of America at Hunter College recently repurposed their much-used cutout picture of Bernie Sanders in his grey mittens: sticking a photo of Zohran's face over Bernie's, they put the cardboard cutout back up for the latest electoral cycle. "Cute" mitten pix can't obscure the facts: Sanders' campaigns were the prelude to rounding up votes for war-mongering Wall Street nominees Clinton, then Biden – and the DSA's cardboard-cutout "leftism" fronts for the Democrats.

With regard to DSA member AOC, let's not forget that her "historic" victory in the 2018 Democratic primary and subsequent election to Congress were heralded as a "turning point," proof that the party could be remade from within. What followed? Having entered Congress as a supposed firebrand, on her first day in office AOC (having called to "abolish ICE") voted to maintain funding for the Department of Homeland Security and ICE during a government shutdown. She then voted for war budgets, voted to stop a \$500 million cut in funding to Israel's Iron Dome missile system, voted for tens of billions of dollars in military and "security" funding for the U.S./NATO war in Ukraine (which threatens to unleash World War III), etc.

"Ocasio-Cortez Became One of Joe Biden's Most Valuable Boosters" in 2024, as *Time* magazine headlined (16 February 2024). After she and Sanders were among the last hold-outs for "Genocide Joe" before he finally withdrew from the race, she soldiered on for self-proclaimed "Top Cop" Kamala Harris.⁴ Today we are living with the consequences of the reformist "left" joining the liberals, leaders of unions, social movements, etc. in endlessly saddling the working class, women, oppressed communities and youth with the Democratic Party.

Class, Power and Politics

Some readers will say: "OK we get it, so Mamdani's not the most revolutionary candidate to ever exist. Would it really be that bad to vote for him, especially with all the awful things the Trump administration

⁴ See "All-Purpose Bigot Trump or Genocide Joe's VP Harris? The Only Choice: Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!" *Revolution* No. 21, September 2024. Harris, in NYC recently on a book tour to promote her campaign memoir, said Mamdani had called to thank her for endorsing him and that she told him: "One of the reasons I am excited about your candidacy is you are bringing people in. That is so powerful!" (CNN.com, 24 September).

Revolution photo



Recycling the cardboard, à la Democratic (Party) "socialism": YDSA's cutout of Bernie Sanders and his mittens now has Zohran's face stuck on it.

is doing?” Marxists, however, see politics not as a sliding scale of badness but most fundamentally as a question of class and power. In the face of Trump’s onslaught, freeing the power of the multiracial working class from the grip of bourgeois politics is vital to the very survival of the workers movement and left today.

It’s high time to draw the lessons of this basic fact of U.S. politics (which you don’t have to be a Marxist to see): **the Democrats paved the way for Trump – twice!** The images from Gaza are a horrifying example. The Biden/Harris administration’s arming of the genocidal war against the Palestinian people led to ever more extensive parts of Gaza being turned into rubble, literally paving the way for Trump’s blood-chilling plan turn it into “the Riviera of the Middle East” through completely emptying Gaza of its Palestinian population.

Support for the Democrats has been marketed for generations as “practical” politics. Now we are told that the only “realistic” alternative to Trump is a party that exists to serve the interests, profits, state and geopolitical/military power of U.S. imperialism’s ruling elite. Meanwhile, despite the hopes and pleas of would-be advisors on the reformist left, the Democratic Party – described as “in crisis,” “inert,” “prostrate,” etc. since November 2024 – has been “incapable of mounting a real opposition to Donald Trump,” in the words of the DSA-aligned journal *Jacobin* (23 August).

In the face of the very real authoritarian threats and attacks from the White House (backed by a range of major players in the top ranks of the capitalist class), support for the Democratic Party – which was key in getting us into this situation – is the central obstacle to building an effective mass response in defense of basic rights. **You can’t fight Trump with the Democrats!** As our comrades of the Internationalist Group stated in their article on the primary in June:

“The historic curse on struggles by the working and oppressed people in the United States is that they have been hobbled and sold out by misleaders who chain them to the Democratic Party. The exploited vote for their exploiters. What is vitally necessary is to fight for the political independence of the working class from the capitalist class, the bourgeoisie, whose obscene wealth and opulent lifestyles derive from the profits they squeeze from the labor of millions. Class-conscious militants urgently need to break from Democrats, Republicans and all parties of capital to build a workers party to fight for a workers government.

“Such a party will be built not through reformist gimmickry but in the course of convulsive struggles of the multiracial working class – including the huge number of immigrant workers denied even the right to vote by this racist system. The issue is not having merely another ballot line for a slightly more left-wing party, but to forge a party based on the power and organizations of the working class in order to lead the oppressed in a *class* struggle against all the oppressors. This means forthrightly opposing attempts by Mamdani et al. to corral youth and workers back into the Democratic Party of U.S. imperialism.”

A key task today, the article emphasizes, “is to build committees to defend immigrants in schools and workplaces to



Left: Asked by “SubwayTakes” if he wants to “defund” the police, Mamdani reiterates, “I’m not defunding the police, I’m actually working with the police to create public safety” (Instagram, 22 June). Right: Racist NYPD “doing its job,” attacking Black Lives Matter protest in Brooklyn, May 2020.

be able to mount a labor-led, working-class mobilization against the escalating immigration raids and the mass deportations, mass layoffs and attacks on democratic rights that pose an impending catastrophe for the vast majority of the population of New York City, and for millions across the U.S. and beyond.”⁵

“Reaching Out to the Police”

This brings us back to the question of capitalist state and the police and other repressive forces that are central to it. This topic, always key to differences between reformism and revolutionary politics, becomes even more important in times of heightened danger to the workers and oppressed. Like now.

“Zohran Mamdani is reaching out to the police” was the headline of an in-depth piece in CNN.com (30 August) reporting on the DSA Democrat’s intensifying efforts to court the NYPD. We’re talking about the largest police force in the country, which Wall Street needs – to protect its power and profits in this union town, which runs on the labor of NYC’s huge, multiracial and historically militant working class. So Mamdani had some work to do to prove his bona fides to the city’s rulers. Back in 2020, Democrats seeking to woo youth outraged by the murder of George Floyd raised illusory calls to “defund the police,” and Mamdani joined in. But now, preparing to join the list of big-city Democratic mayors who are the bosses of the racist cops, he kept facing demands to disavow his old “defund” rhetoric. At a major debate before the primary in June, after reiterating that “I will not defund the police,” he declared: “I will work with the police because I believe the police have a critical role in creating public safety.”

Gross doesn’t begin to describe this, and of course that is the *opposite* of a socialist definition of the police, whose actual “critical role” in bourgeois society is to be **armed enforcers of capitalist rule**. That is why the question of the cops is so fundamental, both for those seeking to uproot capitalist oppression – and for those vetting the likely next mayor, to make sure he will obey the dictates of capital. NYC’s “business leaders” aren’t dummies. While unhappy with campaign planks for even a (piddling) 2% income tax on residents with an annual income over \$1 million, nor for a four-year rent freeze on rent-stabilized apartments, they know Mamdani is no socialist, no Marxist radical. In fact, his ostentatiously moderate program is not even a pale reflection of the (thoroughly capitalist) reforms of FDR’s New Deal. Some mega-rich moguls are funding scare ads about Mamdani’s campaign, but savvy representatives of Wall Street see that he’s ready, willing and able to play ball.

Mamdani, though, is taking no chances on this score and as election day draws near, he’s kept stacking up the “policy shifts” and sound bites. Bernie Sanders got a cameo role in this show, with a live-streamed “Bernie and Zohran conversation” titled “Mayor to Mayor” (6 Septem-



ber). Mamdani kicked it off by noting that Sanders’ electoral career began with his election as mayor of Burlington, Vermont in 1981, when Ronald Reagan had just been elected president. “And yet there you were as a democratic socialist deciding to run for mayor. What made you make that decision?”

Sanders responded that “basically, it was an attempt to involve people in the political process to revitalize American democracy.” After reminiscing about chats with regular folks on snow removal, an after-school program, etc., “Uncle Bernie” gave Zohran some tips on relating to blue-uniformed guardians of capitalist rule and their so-called union:⁶ “A week before the election, we talked to the Burlington Patrolmen’s Association. The police union. And we said, ‘Look, you guys are workers [sic], it’s a difficult job being a cop. How can the city play a better role?’ And we talked about it.”

“Socialist” senator Sanders’ homey encomium to the capitalist cops didn’t

⁶ On claims that cops are “workers,” and the nature of police “unions,” see “Why Cops and Their ‘Unions’ Have No Place in the Labor Movement,” internationalist.org, June 2020.

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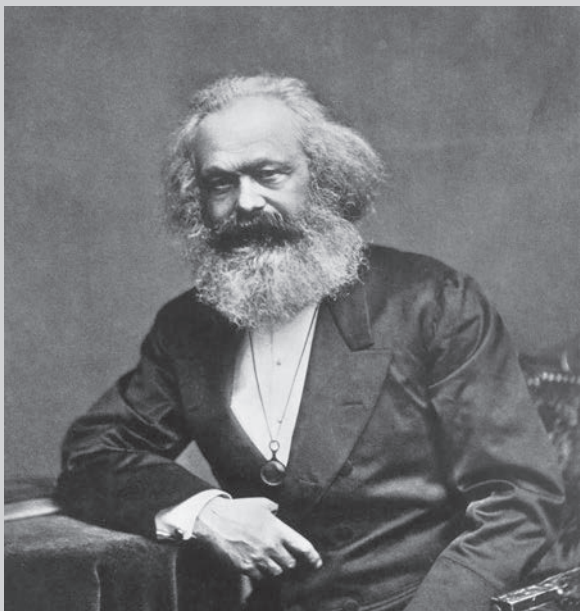
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“Our politics must be working-class politics. The workers’ party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party; it must be independent and have its goal and its own policy.”

– Karl Marx, “Apropos of Working-Class Political Action,” 21 September 1871

Going back to Marx, the struggle for political independence of the working class has been fundamental for genuine socialists (communists). Revolutionary Marxists stand *against* support for any candidate of bourgeois parties – we fight *for* building a revolutionary workers party on the program of international socialist revolution.

come out of the blue. A few days later, Mamdani made new headlines with his promise to apologize for having called the NYPD racist, homophobic and “a major threat to public safety” back in 2020. **Knowing that the NYPD is racist is like knowing that $2 + 2 = 4$.** But if you’re signing up for defending the interests of capital and its “law and order,” you can’t even acknowledge that basic fact.

Three days after Mamdani’s pledge, Governor Hochul published her op-ed endorsing him (*New York Times*, 14 September), which also noted that she has “urged [Mamdani] to ensure that there is strong leadership at the helm of the N.Y.P.D. – and he agreed.” It’s not yet known if that means he will retain the current police commissioner, billionaire heiress and mass-surveillance expert Jessica Tisch. However, “Mamdani has praised Tisch’s leadership of the NYPD,” noted the extensive report by CNN (30 August). The same article highlights that Tisch has made it a point “to rail against criminal justice reforms,” while “emphasiz[ing] technology-focused surveillance and traditional policing tactics,” and calling for “expanding policing teams focused on quality-of-life enforcement, a policing strategy focused on low-level offenses” such as panhandling and fare jumping.⁷ The incredible pervasiveness

⁷ The call to escalate “quality-of-life policing” recalls a previous police commissioner, Bill Bratton, who under Bill de Blasio (one of Mamdani’s two favorite mayors) carried this out under the label of “broken-windows policing.” Bratton had previously been commissioner during the mayoral administration of Rudy Giuliani, when he became notorious for increasing the use of “stop-and-frisk” arrests. Today, the implications of arrests for minor infractions are heightened by the fact that under New York State law turnstile-jumping is classed as “theft,” one of the grounds for mandatory detention of people “unlawfully present” in the U.S., under the draconian Laken Riley Law.

of the NYPD’s sinister “Domain Awareness System” (DAS) was recently analyzed in depth in the *Times* (“What You Need to Know About Police Surveillance,” 15 September). Tisch has been in charge of DAS since its inception in 2008.

What is the blue-uniformed force that will “do their job” of upholding capitalist “law and order” in NYC if mass protests break out against ICE raids, mass layoffs, Trump’s deployments of federal troops – or for that matter his brazenly anti-democratic threats to stop federal funds to the city if Mamdani wins the election? We all know the answer: the NYPD. This is the same repressive force that beats down students protesting the U.S./Israel genocide in Gaza, that operates the “technology-focused surveillance” helping pave the way for a police state, and whose record of racist brutality is infamous worldwide. To spread illusions in the cops – for example: claiming

they’re “workers,” calling for oppressed communities to “partner” with them, or denying that the NYPD is racist – is dangerous enough even in “normal” times and doubly so today.

We often make the point that Democrats are the bosses of the racist cops in innumerable cities across the U.S. Over the past months we’ve seen how this plays out as the Trump administration sent troops to Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. In June, it sent the National Guard to Los Angeles in response to protests against immigration raids. Over 1,000 people were arrested by the LAPD, with Democratic mayor Karen Bass unleashing mounted police, clouds of gas and hard munitions against protesters, to show that the local cops (and the state authorities under Democratic governor Gavin Newsom) had things “under control.”

In August, when Trump sent the Guard to Washington, D.C. and federalized the city’s police, Democratic mayor Muriel Bowser issued an executive order for cooperation with the feds. ICE then “sharply increased its arrests in the city,” to around 1,200 arrests from early August to mid-September (in comparison to about 85 arrests in Washington from January 20 to the end of July). How? By “working alongside the local police and other federal agencies to identify immigrants during stops for minor traffic violations,” turning D.C. into “a test case for Immigration and Customs Enforcement as it expands its efforts in major urban centers” (“How Washington Became a Testing Ground for ICE,” *New York Times*, 1 October). All this shows yet again that exposing illusions in the Democrats, and the police and courts they preach reliance on, is crucial to the struggle against Trump’s repressive onslaught.

Workers and Students: If the Feds Invade, Shut the City Down!

Now Trump has announced more troop deployments – to Memphis, Tennessee and Portland, Oregon – and threatened to send the National Guard, supposedly to “clean up crime,” into additional cities, including Baltimore, Chicago, Oakland – **and New York**. (Let’s not forget that last year Democratic governor Hochul, hyping “fear city” propaganda against NYC, promoted her “tough-on-crime” image by sending the National Guard to “patrol” the subways.) If the White House sends troops to go after NYC, **workers and students should shut the city down!** To be politically prepared for the coming struggles, labor unionists, student activists and immigrant-rights defenders need to free themselves from illusions in and political domination by the parties of Wall Street.

What is being said by the powers that be? Governor Hochul told Trump there is “no need” to send the National Guard to New York and then tried to outdo him on “homeland security,” saying his budget-cut offensive “defunds police” in NYC. “We got this,” said outgoing mayor Eric Adams, chiming in on the “no need” theme. For her part, NYC’s top cop “Jessica Tisch told the U.S. attorney general, Pam Bondi, that New York ... does not need the presence of the National Guard,” while also “tout[ing] the department’s use of drone technology” and “quality-of-life teams” (*New York Times*, 25 August).

And Zohran Mamdani? The *Times* (24 September) recently asked him, “If President Trump sends the National Guard to New York City, what are three specific steps you would take in response?” First, Mamdani said, is to hire 200 lawyers so that “NYC returns to its pre-pandemic staffing levels within the [city’s] Law Department.” Second, he went on, “is to echo ... my colleagues already in government that have made clear that this is not something that New York City needs. We recently heard Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch speak about the fact that we do not need the National Guard here.” And third: “to follow the example that we’ve seen elsewhere of the importance of partnership. In California, we saw the mayor of Los Angeles with the attorney general and the governor come together to respond to the deployment of the National Guard, filing a lawsuit...”

So in response to the threat of federal forces being sent to NYC to flagrantly trample the rights of all the city’s working people, the Democratic “socialist” candidate for mayor echoes and preaches confidence in capitalism’s law-and-order hierarchy, from the witch-hunting Democratic gov-

ernor to the NYPD with its billionaire top cop and architect of mass-surveillance repression. Telling the truth – that the bourgeois politicians and police “serve and protect” the racist capitalist system against the workers and oppressed – is a crucial part of helping build for the **mass mobilization of working-class power** in defense of the basic rights of us all. What Mamdani’s campaign says and does is naturally the opposite of that, since it seeks to keep workers chained to the Democrats. *Every* brand of reformist politics serves in fact to subordinate the exploited to the capitalist system and the capitalist state.

“**How did we get to the situation we’re in today?**” asked a speaker from Class Struggle Education Workers at a September 4 rally in defense of immigrant rights outside Hunter College. “It’s been a bipartisan road of repression, imperialism and war,” led by “both the Democratic and Republican heads of the beast called capitalism in this society. To put an end to that, we need a socialist revolution,” he stated. Workers’ labor makes New York run, he said, adding:

“We need to make it so the people who make society run are the people who run society. We’re are facing a situation where the power of labor *could* be part of making it so ICE has to get out of this city, but that power is kept in chains. Every generation, that chain keeps getting made and remade. When people get tired of the old version of that chain of the Democratic Party and other capitalist politicians, the chain is remade, and they want you to believe that by going for that new chain, things are going to be different. So the question is: are you going to help remake that chain or are you going to help break that chain?”

Join us in fighting to break the chain. ■

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Mamdani says: “Be My Democrat”

No Way – You Can’t Fight Trump With Democrats

For a Revolutionary Workers Party!

By Rosario and Ray

OCTOBER 1 – Zohran Mamdani’s campaign to be elected mayor of New York City on the Democratic Party ticket has saturated every corner of the city and grabbed headlines nationwide. The primary campaign by the Democratic Queens state assemblyman, an ever-cheerful 33-year-old of South Asian descent who is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), was once dismissed as marginal. But Mamdani’s primary campaign operation used on-the-ground canvassing, intensive voter registration and a pervasive, youth-oriented social media presence to score what was widely described as a “stunning upset” over former governor Andrew Cuomo.

Now Democratic Party candidate Mamdani is poised to be elected mayor of NYC. While we denounce racist scaremongering and bigoted threats aimed against him, revolutionary Marxists call for no vote to any candidate of any capitalist party, including Democrat Mamdani, Republican Curtis Sliwa or Cuomo, who

is running as an independent. Faced with decaying capitalism’s escalating dangers and attacks against workers, youth and all the oppressed, it is more urgent than ever to unchain the power of the working class, break the stranglehold of capitalist politics and build a revolutionary workers party.

In the wake of the June 24 primary, political truth-telling was in short supply. Sore loser Cuomo, dog-whistling for racist backlash, called Mamdani “dangerous,” while disgraced mayor Eric Adams claimed he’s “extremist.” *Nonsense*. On Instagram, the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America crowed “Socialism Wins.” *Nonsense*. A mainstream news service succinctly summed things up: “President Donald Trump calls him a ‘communist.’ His critics say he wants to defund the police. Zohran Mamdani insists he’s just a guy trying to make New York City more affordable” (AP 20 September). A *genuinely socialist* fight to bring out the power of the working class in defense of our rights is what New York desperately needs. The Mamdani campaign is nothing of the kind.

Supporting the Democrats means reinforcing the political obstacles that stand in the way of the fight urgently needed today.

“Affordably” Refurbishing Wall Street Rule

With every sector of the exploited and oppressed under siege by a head-on offensive of bigotry and anti-labor backlash, Mamdani’s campaign boasts of avoiding “hot-button” social issues – while going the extra mile to court the NYPD and “business community.” This recently earned him the endorsement of New York Governor Kathy Hochul, a “law-and-order” Democrat known for her zeal for McCarthyite witch-hunting and repression against pro-Palestinian students and faculty at the City University of New York. In her “Why I am Endorsing Zohran Mamdani” op-ed in the *New York Times* (14 September), she made a point of praising him as “a leader who is focused on making New York affordable.”

What does this mean concretely? Statistics from a slew of sources certainly show how unaffordable the city’s capitalist rulers have made it: one in four New Yorkers live in poverty; food prices have

continued on page 29



Screenshot from TikTok video

Mamdani’s “cute” Valentine’s Day video to woo you into the Democratic Party of U.S. imperialism. “One of the reasons I am excited about your candidacy is you are bringing people in,” Kamala Harris told him.

For Student-Teacher-Worker Mobilization Against Police Repression!

Vicious Cop Riot Against Pro-Palestinian Protesters at Brooklyn College

By the CUNY Internationalist Clubs

The following was first published as a leaflet in June 2025.

On May 8, a phalanx of several dozen New York City Police officers stormed onto the campus of Brooklyn College (BC), part of the City University of New York (CUNY), to violently repress and viciously beat demonstrators protesting the escalating genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. Around noon, some 30-50 student protesters gathered with tents on the lawn of the East Quad to proclaim it the Hassan Ayyad Liberation Zone, named after a 14-year-old Gazan singer killed in an airstrike just days before. The small protest continued for several hours with back and forth with BC authorities over the tents until the administration, determined to prevent a restart of last year’s Gaza solidarity encampments, ordered CUNY “Public Safety” officers to clear the campus and brought in the New York Police Department.



After forcing protesters off the Brooklyn College campus on May 8, NYPD Strategic Response Group cops attacked, viciously punching and slamming them to the ground.

This was a deliberately laid trap. The protesters had received reports of a big build-up of city police outside, with a whole street filled with NYPD vans. Already

when a university cop car tried to enter the sealed-off campus, protesters blocking the entrance were fiercely attacked by CUNY’s Orwellian-named S.A.F.E. (“Special As-

sistance For Events”) squad. And then, the minute the student protesters were pushed out the gate, the militarized NYPD Strategic Response Group (SRG) let loose. Multiple extensive videos show the SRG thugs, including “white shirts” (supervisors), repeatedly punching demonstrators, throwing them to the pavement, slamming them up against a fence, charging into the crowd to grab someone, then going back and punching some more victims. This display of wanton cop violence was greater even than against the 2020 protests over the racist police murder of George Floyd.

Altogether, at least 14 students were detained, dozens were pushed, punched and kicked and one was tazed at BC. Under New York City’s cop mayor Eric Adams, and in Donald Trump’s increasingly authoritarian regime, the police clearly figure they have “open season” on protesters. Adams, in fact, visited Trump in the White House the very next day. The lurid police repression at Brooklyn College on May 8 came on the

continued on page 25