

## Trump spurns Climate Accord



By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

"We're getting out!" President Trump declared before the press and a knot of governmental officials who had gathered in the White House Rose Garden on June 1. "In order to fulfill my solemn duty to protect America and its citizens, the United States will withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord."

Trump characterized the Accord as being "less about the climate and more about other countries' gaining a financial advantage over the United States."

He continued his xenophobic message: "The rest of the world applauded when we signed the Paris agreement—they went wild; they were so happy—for the simple reason that it put our country, the United States of America, which we all love, at a very, very big economic disadvantage."

Trump singled out in particular the "Green Climate Fund," which he said has been siphoning billions of dollars out of the U.S. economy, "a massive re-distrib-

ution of United States wealth to other countries." The fund was intended to help underdeveloped nations move to renewable energy and mitigate the effects of climate change. So far, the fund has raised a total of around \$10 billion from wealthier capitalist countries, including \$3 billion from the U.S. (about one-hundredth of one percent of the U.S. budget).

According to the precepts of the Paris Accord, it will take more than three years for the U.S. to formally withdraw from it. But Trump indicated in his speech that he believes his announcement can help dampen any legal challenge to the measures that his administration has already put into place that weaken environmental safeguards in order to ramp up oil, coal, and other extractive industries.

And what about the climate? That burning issue was scarcely apparent in Trump's June 1 speech. Although his address was long, rambling, and repetitive, Trump never found a single moment to utter

(Photo) May 24 protest in Brussels against visit of Trump to NATO summit. See more on page 3.

the words "climate change."

Frequently in the past, Trump charged that reports of climate change were nothing but a hoax. But now he was silent on the question except to cite statistics about the inability of the Paris Climate Accord to make much of a dent in world temperatures. (Although it is true that the goals set by the Climate Accord are inadequate to stave off an environmental catastrophe, the data that Trump selected for his speech distorted and exaggerated what scientists actually predict.)

Despite the untruths and bombast, Trump's remarks received whoops and prolonged applause from his supporters in the Rose Garden. The atmosphere of the afternoon event was celebratory, as

(continued on page 9)



# Stand with Greek soldiers against hazing

By MITCH USMC 05-09

*The author is a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps in Iraq and a Socialist Action member.*

Can hazing build strong bonds in military, school, or athletic associations? No, the opposite is true. Hazing is about breaking down an individual to conform. Its about fear and obedience. It creates a culture of solidarity based on common abuse.

For many, the end results of hazing have led to serious mental health issues, addiction, and even suicide. Hazing is an especially problematic issue in the U.S. military. High-ranking American officials will say that institutional hazing has long been eradicated from the military. Yet report after report shows this is far from true.

Many members of the U.S. armed services report being hazed at some point in their training process, and those that speak out in opposition are vilified. They are accused of not being able to perform in the high intensity training that the military service requires. The blame is always shifted to the victim. The top officials will often imply that if the soldier had just tried harder they never would have found themselves being hazed.

Recently at the U.S. Marine Corps' recruit training depot on Parris island, a young Muslim military recruit was hazed prior to jumping off a third story building—tragically ending his life. This exposed a culture of hazing at the training depot, where 20 Marines were then served with legal consequences.



The spokespeople for the military said that these 20 Marines were “bad apples” and insisted that a culture of hazing does not exist in the military.

However, it won't be long before another story of unabashed hazing reaches the public eye. There is a systemic reason for hazing in the military, and people stuck in this system fear reprisal and social isolation.

The young man mentioned above who jumped to his death, sought out mental health counseling as a result of his hazing. He eventually recanted his story for fear of retaliation. He was only treated for a day and released back to the same unit that was hazing him. This only can come about through a culture that values silence and submission over hearing the truth.

I'm writing in solidarity with Greek soldiers who are standing up and organizing against abuses in the military. Nikos Argiriou was charged for releasing a letter condemning hazing that occurred during his time in boot camp

in the Greek army. Nikos unjustly received a suspended two-year sentence. A guilty verdict was largely deemed to be a foregone conclusion because military service is compulsory for every male citizen in Greece. His activities as an active duty soldier in the Conscript Solidarity Committee were considered an affront to this institution.

Nikos was charged with defamation after giving a first hand account of his hazing and trying to fit it into a bigger picture of high suicide rates and drug addiction among members of the Greek military.

The military as it stands under capitalism is used to maintain the power of the ruling class. It is not for the liberation or benefit of working people anywhere. Yet working people are recruited or conscripted into armies across the globe. There is no room for honesty, solidarity, or democracy in the capitalist military. The structure is top down and it will vilify anyone who speaks out in opposition to haz-

ing, against military policy, and other abuses. Many who serve can expect lasting trauma from their experiences.

Yet there are those who resist. Nikos and his co-thinkers stand in a proud tradition that includes soldiers who opposed the war in Vietnam. Nikos will not be another example in a storied history of militaries handing out stiff penalties for those that do not conform to the role of silent sufferer. He tried to bring to light an unacceptable culture in the Greek military.

Soldiers are workers and deserve to be treated with respect and dignity, and like any other worker they should have the right to organize against abuses from their bosses.

Initially, this message was sent in April in solidarity with Nikos and calling for his acquittal, the cancellation of his sentence, and removal of all charges against him. Since April Nikos stood trial and had the charges against him reduced to less serious charges and then cancelled due to a recent law that dismisses minor charges before 2016.

Comrades in Greece said that building a solidarity movement was very important. They received more than 110 declarations of support by unions and many international statements as well.

As a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, I stand with Nikos Argiriou and the Greek Conscript Solidarity committee as I stand with soldiers in the U.S. to end a culture of abuse and to restore their democratic rights and their rights to not be used as a tool of destruction for the capitalist class. An injury to one is an injury to all! ■

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Socialist Action is a national organization of activists committed to the emancipation of workers and the oppressed. We strive to revitalize the antiwar, environmental, labor, anti-racist, feminist, student, and other social movements with a mass-action perspective. Recognizing the divisions that exist on the left and within the workers' movement, we seek to form united front type organizations around specific issues where various groups have agreement. In this way we seek to maximize our impact and demonstrate the power and effectiveness of mass action.

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# Haiti erupts in strikes and protests

By MARTY GOODMAN

Beginning on May 19, thousands of textile sweatshop workers in Haiti walked off the job or laid down inside their textile assembly plants to protest their starvation wages. The workers are demanding a raise from \$4.67 per day to \$12.47 per day, a raise not tied to increased production quotas for workers. Many bosses do not pay the minimum wage.

Workers are also demanding meal, transportation, and housing subsidies, which consume much of the worker's miserable income.

The recent wave of protest subsided by May 29, with marches estimated at up to 18,000, but the struggle is far from over.

Militants say the workers' upsurge has been partly spontaneous and partly organized by PLASIT-BO, a coalition of the independent textile unions throughout Haiti that are affiliated with Batay Ouvriye, including SOTA-BO in Port Au Prince; SOKOWA in Ouanaminthe; and SO-AGH in Caracol. Some 40 union organizers have been fired in the course of the upsurge.

Georges Sassine, president of the Association of Industries of Haiti (ADIH), despite the daily firing of union organizers, called strikers "out-laws." The ADIH was forced to suspend business on May 19, 20, and 22.

Workers struck in the Haitian capital of Port au Prince, including at the big SONAPI industrial park. Thousands of workers marched into the capital on May 19 from Carrefour, a town a few miles away. Textile workers also walked off the job in the northern towns of Ouanaminthe and Caracol.

There are about 40,000 workers in textile assembly plants, run by international apparel companies and their outsourced partners in Haiti. Many plants in Ouanaminthe are owned by Dominican capitalists, whose anti-Haitian racism is notorious.

Working-class anger was brought to a boiling point by a new 13% government tax on all workers, supposedly to pay for basic social services—services not received by the masses and often simply pocketed by corrupt officials. The new tax on workers was on top of a hike in gasoline taxes, imposed by the current U.S./World Bank puppet, Haitian President Jovenel Moise. The gas tax increase was a deal between the government and corrupt unions.

The gas tax ripple effect, besides its immediate impact on small taxi and passenger vehicles called tap-taps, will be on all workers and Haiti's vast unemployed, which stands at 40.6% (2010 estimate), 50% for women. Many jobs are informal, only marginally better than unemployment. Added to that is a punishing inflation rate of 12.4% (2016 est.) on consumer prices. About 54% live in poverty. Roughly 2.5 million Haitians, out of a population of 11 million, live in extreme poverty (below \$1.25 per day), mostly in rural areas.

In response to protests, the Haitian police fired gas, shot rubber bullets, and sprayed protesters with water containing a rash-inducing chemical. Of the rubber bullet victims, at least one woman was severely injured, knocked down when struck in the head.

Cops blocked the doors at one factory to not let workers join the protests. At the Sewing International factory, many workers stopped work to join the demonstration, but were locked inside by management. Eventually, they were able to join the march.

The Haitian cops are backed by a U.S./UN occupation force called MINUSTAH, which has not interfered directly in the recent protests—so far. The imperialist occupation began under Bill Clinton in 1994, with the support of "socialist" Congressman Bernie Sanders, and was renewed under George W. Bush in 2004. It is there to implement the austerity policies of the U.S.-dominated World Bank and crush possible revolution.

U.S. imperialism has been central to the present crisis. Memos obtained by Wikileaks revealed that the U.S. State Department during the years 2003 to 2010 worked with Fruit of the Loom, Hanes, and Levi's to block an increase in the minimum wage in the hemisphere's poorest nation. Hillary Clinton, as Secretary of State, pressured the Haitian government to block raising the minimum wage from \$1.75 a day to \$5 a day, a demand of mass mobilizations. The bosses wanted \$3 a day and got it, thanks to Hillary Clinton.

Article 137 of the Haitian Labor Code, passed under the Baby Doc Duvalier dictatorship, calls for an adjustment to the minimum salary every time the cost of living index registers an increase of more than 10%,



often much higher. No Haitian government, be it a dictatorship or the elected capitalist government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, has implemented the Labor Code.

## Termination of the TPS?

On May 22, some 58,000 Haitians who fled to the U.S. after the 2010 earthquake, received a six-month extension of Temporary Protected Status (TPS), granted for natural disasters or war. The Trump administration had threatened cancellation of TPS for Haitians. The reversal came after Haitian advocates organized protests and received favorable newspaper editorials and statements from politicians.

Recently leaked Department of Homeland Security (DHS) e-mails reveal racist efforts to demonize Haitians as criminals and welfare cheats to justify termination of TPS. The extension granted by the DHS falls short of the usual 18-month extension. DHS Secretary John F. Kelly's announcement stressed that this is likely the last extension and that TPS holders should "attain travel documents" for a return to Haiti. Haitian TPS will be reviewed again in January 2018. The announcement said conditions in Haiti had greatly improved—a boldfaced lie!

The DHS' assertions were challenged by the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH). The 2010 earthquake killed as many as 200,000 people and destroyed much of its infrastructure. A post-earthquake cholera epidemic killed over 9500 Haitians and sickened over 800,000 people after the UN's Nepalese contingent contemptuously dumped human wastes into a river used by Haitians for drinking and bathing.

The UN stonewalled blame for the epidemic until August 2016, despite scientific studies proving UN culpability (see SA Sept. 2016). Moreover, last October, the most powerful hurricane in 52 years, hurricane Matthew, wiped out crops, and livestock, and was the cause of a food and potable water shortage in Haiti's southwest.

The DHS statement also stated: "96% of people displaced by the earthquake and living in internally displaced person camps have left those camps ... 98% of these camps have closed."

Lie! Many were reclassified as "permanent housing," because residents added to their makeshift shanties. In addition, many were driven away by landlords. Nevertheless, an estimated 50,000 still live in unsanitary, unsafe tent cities—seven years after the earthquake!

## Expulsions by Dominican Republic

Meanwhile, the racist Dominican government has continued its practice of expelling migrant Haitian workers and Dominicans of Haitian origin. Many have fled the Dominican Republic out of fear of expulsion or racist attacks. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), an organization linked to the UN since 2016, about 111,400 people, or 92,000 households, have crossed the Haitian-Dominican border since July 2015.

Georges Marc Desmangles of the Zile Foundation, a binational organization working on the Haitian-Dominican relationship, states that returnee Haitian migrants who remained for many months to cross the Haitian border from Anse to Pitres, "were accused of bringing the cholera epidemic."

## Trump not welcomed in Belgium

BRUSSELS—About 12,000 took part in the May 24 demonstration against Trump and the NATO summit. More than 70 organizations protested war and imperialist adventures, climate change, women's oppression and homophobia, the degradation of social and democratic rights, and demanded an open asylum policy. The link was also made with the Belgian government's policies.

Turkish and Kurdish activists also protested the dictatorial policies of Erdogan, who participated in the NATO summit. Unfortunately, with only a few exceptions, the unions were hardly present. — THOMAS WEYTS

"Migrants from the bateys (plantation work camps) have been severely affected. Thus, they are afraid of being caught up and repatriated under inhuman conditions at any time. It is the same for workers in construction and hotels."

Dominican cops will seize your identity papers and then tear them apart before your eyes, said Isidro Bellique Delmas, a member of the Reconoci.do movement, an independent national civic network composed mainly of Dominicans of Haitian origin who promote human rights. Delmas, 28, was able to find his documents of identity only after at least eight years of struggle.

Some 1000 Dominican troops will join 1500 soldiers regularly stationed along the border, it was announced May 3. Border "security" was enhanced by U.S. advisors. Dominican spokespersons have cited U.S. deportations as an example to follow.

In 2013, the Dominican government targeted Dominicans of Haitian descent with a racist court decision, known as "La Sentencia 168/13," an immigration ruling that stripped citizenship rights from more than 200,000 individuals whose families had migrated to the DR since 1929. So far, the government has deported tens of thousands to Haiti, even though many are not Haitian citizens. Many have never even been to Haiti or speak Haitian "Kreyol." More than 100,000 have crossed into Haiti as the result of the threat of deportation and/or mob violence.

Human Rights Watch called upon Dominican authorities "to halt expulsions of denationalized Dominicans, to promptly restore their citizenship, and to respect their right to a nationality." Amnesty International also called for an end to deportations.

For decades, Haitians were brought to the DR by corrupt politicians on both sides of the Haiti/DR border to work in sugar cane fields under conditions called "modern day slavery." Today, Dominican-Haitians also work in the service sectors, where they face discrimination. The Dominican government, a staunch anti-communist U.S. ally, has historically promoted "anti-Haitianism." Everything Haitian—whether skin color, culture, or religion—is degraded.

U.S. policy is to blame for the misery of the Haitian masses. Their conditions cry out for international solidarity. ■





Mark Ugolini / Socialist Action

# Fight for 15 confronts McDonald's stockholders

By ANN MONTAGUE

This is the fifth year that Fight For 15 made the trek to Chicago and then to suburban Oak Brook, Ill., where the annual McDonald's shareholders meeting was taking place.

The first day, May 22, started with showcasing the leading role of women of color. A panel of activists expressed their message expanding on a quote from poet activist Audre Lorde, who spent her life addressing racism, sexism, and homophobia: "We cannot build a single issue movement, because we do not live single issue lives."

On May 23, around 2500 activists took to the streets of Chicago to protest McDonald's low wages and sexual harassment of workers. They seemed undaunted by the pouring rain. Using the slogan "McDonald's is the Trump of Corporations: Sexual Harassment, Wage

Theft, Poverty Wages, Tax Evasion" brought out allies of fast-food workers. There were workers from many fast-food restaurants, as well as from Amazon's warehouses, home health-care workers, and workers from other corporations.

Terrance Wise, a McDonald's worker from Kansas City, blamed McDonald's for perpetuating "intergenerational poverty." He recalled that his mother worked at fast-food restaurants for 30 years: "Watching her get up faithfully every morning at 5 a.m., working hard for years and years, and yet we continued to live in poverty in my childhood. We would come home some days and the lights were off, an eviction notice on the door.

"Now I see the repeat of it with me and my three little girls and fiancée. We are working hard every day, I am working for a profitable company, and I am still not able to provide for my family."

Marches across the nation supported the workers marching in Chicago. Tina Sandoval, a McDonald's worker in Richmond, Calif., told the crowd, "As the biggest fast food company, McDonald's sets the bar for jobs and pay across the economy."

The marchers connected their struggle with McDonald's to the struggle for clean air and water. McDonald's is the largest global buyer of beef, pork, tomatoes, and lettuce. They are responsible for farmworkers' exposure to toxic chemicals and the environmental impacts of mass agriculture.

On the following day, May 24, about 300 activists—including many who had taken overnight buses—brought their protest to Oak Brook, Ill., where McDonald's annual shareholders meeting was being held. Many were workers who wanted to support the fast-food workers' struggle for \$15 and a union. The protest included Madie Cummings, 40, who got on a bus in Cleveland. She is a kindergarten teacher who supports the workers and believes they will win. She said she didn't sleep because "everyone was talking and very motivated." It also included a 75-year-old member of the United Auto Workers local from Kansas City. "We fought for that stuff," he said.

Ashley Bruce, a McDonald's worker from Chicago, said, "No matter who is in office we are still going to fight for what belongs to us. We deserve \$15 an hour and union rights."

Her observation was quite timely. On the same day that the workers' movement for \$15 gathered across the country to support its five-year fight for a living wage and union rights, Democratic Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi made a politician's promise that the next Congress, in its first 100 hours, would pass a \$15 minimum wage—a measure that would not take effect until 2024(!).

This is a typical Democratic Party ploy. Historically, any time the Democrats see a social movement they do not control, they find a way to undermine it and to divert it from the streets and into the Democratic Party swamp. Of course, the small print in this case is "if the Democrats regain control of the House in 2018."

Anyone who has been paying attention the last five years should be startled to see that the name of the bill that Pelosi is proposing is called the Raise the Wage Act. This the same name of the tactic the Democrats have been using in state after state to undermine the movements for \$15 and a union. By ignoring the workers' movement and working with businesses in a number of states, they passed small raises that were way below a living wage.

Workers like Ashley Bruce should keep their eye on the prize: Keep striking and marching and broadening their movement. Expose the Democrats' ploy to undermine them, and keep fighting, "no matter who is in office." ■

By BILL ONASCH

**Off the Job Training**—Of the 700,000 members of the Communications Workers of America, 150,000 work for AT&T—making them second only to UPS as the biggest unionized private sector employer in the U.S. But since deregulation "broke up" the virtual telephone monopoly of Ma Bell in the 1980s, a single national contract has been replaced with dozens of agreements. Many of these are small newly unionized units in the wireless part of the industry that is rapidly supplanting landlines.

While the company peacefully settled some of the agreements in traditional union strongholds, they decided to challenge the CWA in newer units that had never participated in a strike.

On May 19, CWA used the strike authorization voted by the membership to call out more than 40,000 ATT Mobility workers for a three-day, long-weekend walkout that was also joined in some areas by thousands of landline workers and 2000 employees of Direct TV, a satellite network recently acquired by AT&T.

The strike served two objectives. It was intended as a warning to the company of what to expect if they continue to stonewall in negotiations. Last year CWA effectively shut down Verizon, a spin-off from the former Bell system in the Northeast, and a leader in wireless business.

But it was also a test of the commitment and organizational ability of thousands of new members who had never before walked a picket line. While not everything went off like clockwork, these workers passed the stress test, and areas of concern were identified so that they could be

## Labor Briefing

Chris Garlock / Union City



reinforced. An open-ended strike threat, like last year's shutdown at Verizon, remains credible.

At our deadline, the company appeared to be willing to resume meaningful negotiations. We'll likely will know more next month.

**Prevailing Double-Dealing**—On May 22, more than 100 mostly Latino *unorganized* workers walked off their jobs at the construction site of a new high-

end Omni Hotel in Louisville. They claimed the subcontractor who had hired them was cheating them on wages—a charge hotly denied by the boss, whose defense was that he was paying them the rate offered when they were hired.

While the boss was technically correct on that score, workers had discovered that union members doing similar work were paid \$40 an hour while they were receiving only about \$20. They contacted an attorney, who explained that since about half of the \$289 million cost of the hotel was being picked up by local and state subsidies, it qualified as a "prevailing wage" project. That means union scale has to be paid even if workers don't belong to a union.

But the subcontractor argued he was paying a union scale—also technically correct while actually deceitful. For some years, in most areas, the Carpenters union has negotiated two-tier deals that pay substantially less for residential work than commercial or government jobs. With no previous challenge, the boss had advertised for help at the residential rate on this nine-figure project.

The Latino workers now depend on a just ruling from the NLRB or the courts—hardly a sure thing. After their strike, the

Carpenters union finally showed up a day late and \$20 short to pass out union authorization cards—which were signed by nearly all.

**Closing ObamaPost Era** — While unions are understandably concerned about the Trump administration's likely attacks on public as well as private-sector workers, few talk about Obama's ruthless gutting of the U.S. Postal Service. Postal workers cannot legally strike. Obama used compulsory arbitration and executive orders to eliminate and downgrade tens of thousands of USPS jobs. Now, the Letter Carriers are finally getting a chance to vote on a negotiated contract.

It's described in broad strokes by Mark Gruenberg, writing for the semi-official Press Associates Union News Service: "The 213,000 members of the National Association of Letter Carriers will vote this summer on a new 40-month contract with the U.S. Postal Service, featuring two raises and a pay upgrade for each carrier and for city carrier assistants, a narrower pay gap between CCAs and career carriers, and more opportunities for CCAs to become career carriers."

"On May 12, the union's executive board unanimously recommended members approve the pact, NALC President Fredric Rolando said. If they do so, NALC will avoid binding interest arbitration. Several postal unions were forced to use that in recent contracts. The recommended NALC pact is retroactive to May 21, 2016, and runs through Sept. 21, 2019."

**Extra-Curricular Activities**—Samantha Winslow began a *Labor Notes* article about teacher involvement in May Day

(continued on page 5)



# No sanctuary for immigrants in Chicago & LA

By MARK UGOLINI

Democratic Party Mayors Eric Garcetti and Rahm Emanuel proudly declare that they run “Sanctuary Cities.” They claim that Los Angeles and Chicago offer “sanctuary” for immigrants; that local police will neither ask about immigration status, nor will they detain immigrants for ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement).

These reassurances are phony, designed to create a sense of security in the largest immigrant communities in the country, and generate votes for Democrats in coming elections.

Local police in both cities continue to play critical roles in the U.S. deportation machine, an integral cog in a massive prison-industrial complex. While many immigrants are deported, large numbers end up in detention centers and U.S. prisons. Police agencies partner with ICE in both cities in the ever-expanding “war on crime” that has resulted in mass incarceration of Black and Latino working-class youth as well as deportations.

Of course, Chicago and Los Angeles are hardly unique among U.S. cities. Throughout the country, fingerprints for people who are booked by police departments—even for minor infractions—are routinely shared with federal law-enforcement authorities, including ICE.

In April, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced continuation of Bill Clinton’s famous “war on drugs,” a program that has increased the U.S. prison population from 500,000 in 1980 to over 2.2 million in 2015. Implemented by law-enforcement in all major U.S. cities, it targets Black and Latino youth, strapping them with lengthy prison sentences of 10 or 20 years, and sometimes life without parole for first-time drug offenses.

Recent immigration raids in LA and Chicago show that there is no “sanctuary” from the long reach of the U.S. “justice” system and its highly militarized policing apparatus. Almost 200 people were arrested by ICE in cooperation with the LAPD in Southern California as part of a five-day dragnet ending May 24. The vast majority of immigrants detained were from Mexico, but others came from 10 other countries.

Since Trump took office, the Los Angeles enforcers made nearly 2300 arrests, roughly the same number as last year during the same time frame, but 20 % less than 2015, when Obama’s deportations were in full swing.

There was no “sanctuary” from these raids, which targeted immigrants with “previous records,” all victims of the U.S. court system, especially the working poor. They show up in a growing police database with “offenses” and “violations” of all types, including drug trafficking, and failure to provide “proper” immigration documents. Local police systematically turn over arrest records and fingerprints to ICE. Anyone with any kind of police record is a target for ICE and the local cops.

The LAPD partnered with ICE in joint “task forces” that are supposed to target gangs and other’s labeled as “criminals.” Many times the raids become little more than an excuse for mass arrests; and those caught in the dragnet are prime candidates for deportation—“criminal record” or not.

“By taking these individuals off the streets and removing them from the country, we’re making our communities safer for everyone,” said the local ICE officer. Safer? Really? The five-day roundup in Los Angeles spread terror. Police and ICE teamed up to harass the community 24/7, with raids to homes, workplaces, churches, and other places the community gathers.

How about on Chicago’s Northwest side? In late March, when 53-year-old Felix Torres, a permanent resident, was confronted by ICE agents at 6:20 a.m. at his front door, he was shot for no reason and later hospitalized in serious condition. Of course, the enforcer that shot Torres said he had a gun, but multiple family members verified that was a lie. He didn’t even own one!

The agents then forced their way into his house and threatened family members at gunpoint, including his one-year-old granddaughter. The family was terrorized, unable to explain their situation before they were forcefully ejected from their home. Finally, ICE and local authorities admitted that they were at the wrong house and the Torres family was not guilty of any immigration violations.

Acting as defenders of the immigrant community against Trump, Chicago’s city government promotes itself as a “sanctuary city.” “You’re going to be safe



here,” says Mayor Rahm Emanuel. “You are going to be secure here. You’re going to be supported here.”

What callous hypocrisy! As a Congressman, Emanuel supported the Sensenbrenner bill, which proposed making “unauthorized presence” in the U.S. a felony, and threatened to punish churches and other charities that offer assistance to immigrants. As White House Chief of Staff, Emanuel helped craft Obama’s immigration policy, which ended up deporting nearly 4 million people. He also advised Obama against any significant attempt to legalize undocumented workers.

In Chicago, Emanuel oversees the closure of inner city schools, a decline in public services that immigrants and other workers rely on, and a massive shift of wealth from poor and working-class neighborhoods to wealthy ones.

Chicago’s immigrant communities have been on edge for months, fearful of what’s coming next, aware of recent raids at O’Hare airport and elsewhere. Rumors run rampant of suspected raids at various neighborhood events and “EI” transit stops.

Minority communities have years of experience with Chicago cops, and a long memory. There is no lack of familiarity with the terror that police unleash on a regular basis. Recorded is a long, ugly history of police violence, including utilization of department facilities to torture prisoners. Also common are cop killings, like the cold-blooded murder of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald in 2015. Videos recorded 16 shots from the revolver of Officer Jason Van Dyke, pumped into McDonald’s body for no reason. Van Dyke still walks the streets of Chicago a free man.

Raids like these take place amid a surge in such crackdowns since President Donald Trump took office. He vows to deport as many as three million so-called “undesirable” immigrants. This might not be a big change from the Obama presidency, which deported close to 400,000 immigrants each year while apprehending an equal number of people crossing the border with Mexico, for a total exceeding five million.

Deportations in these numbers are not possible without a close working relationship between ICE and the local cops. Even when local police are not directly involved, they certainly don’t place any obstacles in the way of federal officers looking to harass immigrants and the working poor.

Sanctuary cities can only offer a small degree of protection to paperless immigrants. They certainly can’t prevent ICE agents from hunting down workers at businesses, or forcing their way into people’s homes. For these, all cops need is a warrant, which immigration judges issue liberally as needed.

While U.S. capitalists have some interest in minimizing the flow of immigrants into this country and expelling others, they have more interest in terrorizing the immigrant population that remains here to maximize their profits.

The bosses hope that a fearful and desperate community of the working poor will submit to the lowest wages, longest hours, and the most horrendous work-

ing conditions. This serves to drive down the wages and working conditions of all other workers, funneling super profits into the coffers of the super-rich.

For U.S. rulers this has the added benefit of dividing the working class against itself. They have an interest in getting U.S.-born workers to blame immigrants for their problems—rather than the bosses themselves, who are the true source of the problem.

The capitalist Republican and Democratic parties promote the interests of Wall Street and the banks. The Republicans say they will deport immigrants and therefore protect native-born U.S. workers; the Democrats create the illusion of “sanctuary” for immigrant workers. Both parties lie, and pit workers against each other in the process.

The only winning strategy is one that unites all working people in solidarity and common struggle, unleashing a powerful movement in the streets and in the political arena as well. ■

## Labor Briefing

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strikes and demonstrations:

“Teachers and their unions turned out for May Day this year in St. Paul, Minneapolis, Oakland, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Chicago, and Seattle. They held teach-ins at schools and pickets outside, and joined citywide demonstrations in solidarity with immigrant communities.

“Philadelphia teachers wanted to show solidarity with the day’s themes—but also make a statement to the city about their own contract struggle. They’ve gone four years without a contract and five years without a raise. They’ve suffered school closings, freezes on steps and lanes in the pay scale, layoffs of school nurses and counselors, and the privatization of substitute teachers. The state-appointed school board even tried to cancel their contract, though it was rebuffed by the courts.

“So, to create pressure on the district, a group of teachers organized their own protest. ‘We are finally taking some action, after five years of not doing much,’ said Tom Quinn, a teacher at the city’s largest high school, where more than half of teachers took a ‘personal day’ on May Day.” ■

If you have a story suitable for this column please contact [billonasch@kclabor.org](mailto:billonasch@kclabor.org)



# Women & gender politics in the Russian Revolution



By CHRISTINE MARIE and ANN MONTAGUE

This is a particularly important moment to be considering the meaning of the Russian Revolution for women, LGBTQI activists, and gender politics. We have seen the protests against the Misogynist in Chief by more than 3 million U.S. women being channeled into clubs to rebuild the Democratic Party in the 2018 elections.

Women eager to fight show up at many follow-up events, only to hear vapid lectures about how to run for office or how to network. In the meantime, Nancy Pelosi and Bernie Sanders lecture the fighters for a \$15 minimum wage, telling them last month that even after the Democrats regain control, they must not expect a \$15 minimum wage for at least another seven years.

At the same time, state legislatures dream up ever more creative ways to tighten restrictions on birth control, dismantle education for children, roll back wages and benefits, and cut health care. Rape culture continues, and lesbian bashing is again in the news.

The global crisis of capitalism is throwing up rightist parties and regimes with the most reactionary gender politics at the center of their political pro-

grams. It is clear as day that this system is incapable of providing women's full liberation or a real end to gender discrimination.

But a look at the experience of the Russian Revolution should help us think of an alternative way forward. It reminds us that there once was a state officially committed to women's liberation. Their program was based on the idea that a socialist society could release women from the control of institutions like the Orthodox Church and the patriarchal family. They not only created conditions of full economic independence for women but provided alternative means of supplying food preparation, laundry, child care, and education.

In the effort to create these material conditions, they were working towards the goal of the withering away of the restrictive family—with the striving for romantic love and sexual expression freed from the repression and authoritarianism that came with the development of the compulsory family as an economic and social unit under capitalism.

In the end, the pressures of imperialist intervention and civil war and then of counter-revolution under the bureaucracy led by Joseph Stalin reversed and then buried their dreams. But they still left us with

the most extraordinary record of a decade when working women deliberately set off on a new road with the support of a revolutionary state.

That decade was a time when hundreds of thousands of women workers, teenagers and mothers, from cities and nearly feudal rural villages gathered in conferences and meetings to debate the way forward and participate in some of the most audacious mass social experiments yet seen. Whatever the limitations of a century ago, they demonstrated that when the profit motive is suppressed and material conditions changed, extremely rapid changes can occur in social organization, attitudes, and goals.

As soon as the revolution occurred, the Tsarist criminal code was thrown out the door. While lesbians were never specifically mentioned in the code, gay men were criminalized through the anti-sodomy laws. When the anti-sodomy laws were repealed, Russia was only the second country to do so—the other being France, which at the time also was in the aftermath of *its* great revolution.

One of the first actions of the Russian Revolution was a new Family Code; the first version came out in 1918. In response to the lived experience of women over time, the code was revised and became more and more radical.

The first issue to be dealt with was an attempt to free women and children from the archaic morals and repressive family structure launched by Russian Orthodox marriage. The revolution also sought to end the misery of divorce. So, marriage and divorce became voluntary civil arrangements, marked legally only by registration. There is even a record of a same-sex marriage court case that ruled in favor of the couple. We do not know how common this was, but it shows just how dramatic was the change in thinking.

The Bolsheviks began their work in a situation in which the compulsory family structure had been weakened by the same kind of pressures women experience today when they are responsible for both waged work and domestic work. They recognized the vise in which women were squeezed, and implemented measure after measure to remedy the situation. For example, they ended the concept of the family wage and replaced it with equal wages for women.

This meant women could escape abusers without economic fear. They eliminated the shame and economic deprivation of illegitimacy, decriminalized sex work, and provided child-care centers for working mothers, communal dining for workers and children, and communal laundries. By 1920 free abortion was more or less available in hospitals.

These measures were in reality always partial, and the facilities were not always of the highest quality or enough to meet the demand. But think what they meant for those who experienced the sudden and amazing shift in their social organization and being involved in the continuing debate!

All of these legal changes resulted in an immediate upset to the sexual order. But sometimes, changes in behavior were far in advance of the economic advances that made women more secure. Under the circumstances of the war-torn economy, all women did not have genuine economic independence, and men abused the system, so the Family Code was altered again and again to provide more alimony to "divorced" women. There was little hesitation about taking remedial actions until the economy, wrecked by intervention and war, could be repaired.

These changes did not only impact urban women.

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# John Coltrane *Lite*

Lee Friedlander

By **MARTY GOODMAN**

*“Chasing Trane,” a documentary film by John Scheinfeld.*

“Trane is now a scope of feeling. A more fixed traveler, whose wildest onslaughts are gorgeous artifacts not even deaf people should miss.”

— **Amiri Baraka, poet, jazz critic, and activist**

In July 1967, I heard on a late night jazz radio show in Miami that visionary jazz saxophonist John Coltrane had died at the age of 40 of liver cancer. Doom and gloom was the mood, although the host tried his best to assure us that jazz would live on—somehow. Now, 50 years later, a new Coltrane biopic film, “Chasing Trane,” is out. Written and directed by documentarian John Scheinfeld, it is the first film made in cooperation with the Coltrane family.

“Chasing Trane,” is jazz retrofitted for the mainstream—that is, mostly white, middle-class jazz fans. But it is an inadequate and misleading introduction for jazz beginners. It is anti-jazz avant-garde work that simultaneously lionizes an avant-garde icon. There isn’t one complete performance in the entire film, so people cannot judge Coltrane’s adventurous music for themselves.

A “Coltrane lite” film was apparently what director Scheinfeld hoped for. Mission accomplished.

Coltrane was a jazz revolutionary, the avant-garde’s leading persona in an era of civil rights and emerging Black nationalism.

To its credit, “Chasing Trane” tells the story of the musician’s early life in Jim Crow North Carolina. As a boy, John was immersed in Black church music; two grandfathers were preachers. As African American Professor Cornell West explained in the film, “Black music was a Black response to being terrorized and traumatized ... that’s Black music, a response to a catastrophe.”

Coltrane was never overtly political, although he did attend a Malcolm X speech on the recommendation of his first wife Naima, a Muslim. But Coltrane was deeply affected by the Black struggle, Dr. King, and, as the film highlights, the 1963 racist bombing of a Black church in Birmingham, Ala., that killed four African American girls. Coltrane dedicated his mournful piece, “Alabama” to the victims, it is said, set to the cadence of an MLK speech.

In those times, Coltrane and the overwhelmingly African American jazz avant-garde were challenging conventional Western music’s structure, melody, and harmony. In particular, the avant-garde became famous for discordant, unconventional honks and angry screams. The music was sometimes overtly political, sometimes spiritual, often a mixture of both or simply neither. What was always clear was that society must change!

The mostly white jazz old-guard pushed back. In 1962, prominent jazz critic Leonard Feather, writing in *Downbeat*, the leading jazz magazine, called the avant-garde “anti-jazz,” a shot aimed mostly at Coltrane. Even jazz musicians got up and walked out on Coltrane, as did European audiences hearing the work of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernist classical composers.

## Coltrane’s evolution

After the passing of several family members, John took up music. After high school, he joined his family in Philadelphia, where he enlisted in the Navy in 1945 and joined a Navy jazz band. By ‘45 he had caught live jazz god Charlie “Bird” Parker, the center of the bebop revolution. Parker, and his gifted sidemen, trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie and pianist Bud Powell, played a new, fast-paced jazz tempo that was distinctly urban and reflective of postwar Black life.

Said Coltrane, “the first time I heard Bird play, it hit me right between the eyes.” John was screaming.

After playing with lesser bands as a would-be Charlie Parker, Coltrane got to play occasionally with his idol Parker in the late ‘40s. From 1949-51, Coltrane began traveling with Dizzy Gillespie and then in 1955, with trumpet superstar Miles Davis.

During the 1950s, Coltrane struggled with heroin addiction, as did many jazz musicians. Drugs were glorified by Charlie Parker as a door to creativity. By 1951 Coltrane was booted out of Dizzy Gillespie’s band, and also from Miles Davis’ classic quartet in 1957 (Miles had his own bouts with heroin), and from the band of pioneer bop composer/pianist Thelonious Monk.

Charlie Parker’s drug ravaged body succumbed in 1955, but Coltrane cold turkeyed on his own. Coltrane was back with Miles in 1958 in time for the all-time



**John Coltrane was a jazz revolutionary, the avant-garde’s leading persona in an era of civil rights and emerging Black nationalism.**

(Above) Coltrane records “Giant Steps,” 1959.

classic Miles album, “Kind of Blue” (1959).

But with Miles, Coltrane was feeling a creative impasse. At the risk of oversimplification, Miles represented “cool jazz” to whites, a less threatening alternative to bop and the drug culture of Parker. Trane felt confined artistically and left Miles. In 1958, jazz critic Ira Gitler coined the term “sheets of sound” to describe the unique, evolving Coltrane style as he worked with Miles.

In the early 1960s, radical stylists appeared around Coltrane and within the broad avant-garde. The “radicals” (my favorites) included alto sax man Ornette Coleman—on a different path than Coltrane but an anti-establishment hero, particularly after his pivotal “Free Jazz” album (1960). Collaborators with Coltrane were the short-lived experimenter, saxophonist Eric Dolphy; the angry, political tenor sax man, Archie Shepp; the fearless Pharoah Sanders; bombshell innovator Albert Ayler; and pianist Cecil Taylor, whose volcanic style first took shape in the 1950s.

Several of these ground-breaking artists are still alive today—Sanders, Shepp, Coltrane bassist Reggie Workman, and Cecil Taylor. Archie Shepp’s classic first album “Four for Trane,” showed Coltrane standing next to him on the cover. Yet Shepp and the others do not speak a word in the film.

**“They went straight to Marsalis!”**

A few weeks after the film was released in April, I spoke with David Murray, thought to be the best of the 1970s post-Trane tenors, rooted in Coltrane and the avant-garde. Murray dedicated an album to Coltrane tunes.

Murray was playing at the world famous Village Vanguard with his provocatively named unit “Class Struggle.” I snatched an opportune moment as Murray

walked past, sax in hand: “David, quick question. Did they call you for the Coltrane movie?” He answered, “Nope, they went straight to [Wynton] Marsalis!” I shot back, “Why am I not surprised!”

To jazz radicals, trumpeter Marsalis is musical neo-conservatism incarnate, but he appears several times in the movie. Marsalis came into prominence during the Reagan era and is the longtime artistic director of *Jazz at Lincoln Center* in New York. Marsalis has been sharply criticized for his systematic exclusion of today’s talented free-jazz musicians. Marsalis has said, “post-1965 avant-garde playing is outside of jazz,” calling some avant-gardists “charlatans.” That apparently sits well with Lincoln Center’s wealthy funders and cultural Czars.

Also in the film was jazz fan and ex-president Bill Clinton, who represented what Coltrane despised—war, racism, corruption and lies. Clinton, an untalented saxophone player, contributed little other than star power. What is this guy doing here, I asked myself?

Somewhat more palatable was Cornell West, the African American writer and supporter of liberal democrats. But West got with the underlying motif, dissing the avant-garde. West portrayed Coltrane’s late works as indecipherable and ultimately dismissible. “I still don’t understand it,” said West. Okay, but what are you doing in this movie?

**Let the music speak for itself!**

For those new to Coltrane, his creative highs include: “Giant Steps” (1960), Coltrane playing his own compositions; “My Favorite Things” (1961), a cover of the sappy Broadway tune, radically transformed on soprano sax into a searching, almost Eastern sound; “A Love Supreme” (1964), a non-sectarian musical prayer for peace and tolerance that is Coltrane’s most revered album; the daring free-jazz “Ascension” (1965); and “Live at the Village Vanguard Again!” (1966), which includes a soul-stripping solo by Sanders.

In his book, “Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music” (1970), Frank Kofsky quotes Archie Shepp’s brief but apt description of the music capitalist, “You own the music and we make it.” Kofsky added, “Part of the ownership Shepp refers to includes ownership of the means of mental production,” that is, club owners, the record producers and, of course, jazz filmmakers.

The genius of Coltrane will outlive the cultural mediocrity of late capitalism. Coltrane lives! ■



# Mass mobilization can defeat the far right



By JOHN LESLIE

Since the presidential inauguration, far-right forces have been mobilizing under the slogan of free speech. Right-wing demonstrations began in February with a clash between rightists and anti-fascist activists who were intent on stopping a speech by *Breitbart News* editor Milo Yiannopoulos. This confrontation gave the so-called alt-right the opportunity to play the victim and advance their violent agenda under the guise of protecting the free expression of Trump supporters. These alt-right mobilizations have taken place in Berkeley, Seattle, Philadelphia, Boston, and Portland, Ore.

Last month in Portland, right-wing attacks escalated into murder after a fascist supporter, Jeremy Joseph Christian, 35, berated two women on the MAX train with a racist and Islamophobic tirade. Christian attacked fellow passengers with a knife when they attempted to stop the harassment. Two people, Rick Best, 53, and Taliesin Myrddin Namkai Meche, 23, were killed and another, Micah Fletcher, 21, was seriously wounded.

Christian has been identified as having attended a

rightist action in Portland on April 29, where he was “chanting “n\*\*\*er” and throwing fascist salutes, wearing an American Revolutionary War flag like a cape” (*Newsweek*, May 27, 2017). He has been charged with two counts of felony murder, attempted homicide, intimidation, and possession of a restricted weapon as a felon. At his arraignment, he shouted about exercising his “free speech” and referred to himself as a patriot.

Media and politicians have been reluctant to label the attack a terrorist attack or a hate crime. Instead, they assert that Christian is mentally ill or deranged. If the attacker had been a Muslim, the narrative would be much different! This violent attack has shocked millions and increased awareness of the violent intentions of the far right. More than 1000 attended a memorial vigil in Portland in the wake of the murders.

Reactionaries called for two more “free speech” mobilizations in Portland on June 4 and 10. The head of the Republican Party in Portland openly spoke about using far-right militia groups to “protect” the actions.

The June 4 “free speech” rally, called by the “Fraternal Order of Alt-Knights,” was met by much larger counter-

protests. After confrontations broke out, police stormed one group of counter-protesters, tearing down banners, and lobbing tear gas and at least two explosive devices at them. Fourteen people were arrested.

In the meantime, while wringing their hands over the supposed free speech of fascists, the right has targeted critics of the Trump administration. Recently, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, an author and member of the International Socialist Organization, has been forced to cancel speaking engagements after receiving vile racist hate mail and death threats against herself and her family, because of remarks critical of Trump made during the commencement ceremony at Hampshire College.

Taylor wrote about the role of the right-wing media in feeding these attacks: “Fox did not run this story because it was ‘news,’ but to incite and unleash the mob-like mentality of its fringe audience, anticipating that they would respond with a deluge of hate-filled emails—or worse. The threat of violence, whether it is implied or acted on, is intended to intimidate and to silence.”

The left movement and supporters of civil liberties should respond to the threats against Taylor with unconditional solidarity. Defense guards could be organized to make sure her right to speak is protected. One of the greatest principles of the socialist and labor movements is “an injury to one is an injury to all.”

Right now, the far right feels emboldened following Trump’s election and his anti-immigrant, sexist, and Islamophobic rhetoric. This “new” right is the same old racist right that has tried to repackage itself as something hipper and different from the Klan and Nazis.

Working-class whites are victims of the current social system, but without a strong workers’ movement and a workers’ party, some of them have been misled into scapegoating immigrants and people of color for their problems, substituting racism for class consciousness and solidarity. With determined leadership in the struggle, white workers can be won away from these reactionary ideas and convinced of the utter necessity of building a multi-racial fightback against the bosses and their government.

## Tactics in fighting fascism and the far right

The strategies and tactics we use can determine our long-run effectiveness in any struggle. How we advance slogans, or what organizing techniques we use can either undermine or strengthen our efforts.

We can’t rely on cops, courts, and capitalist politicians to protect us from right-wing provocateurs and goons. Cops often ally themselves directly with the fascists—this goes as far back as police collaboration with Mussolini’s black shirts.

The Democratic Party has shown itself to be incapable of building a real political opposition to the right wing. If anything, the Democrats helped prepare the ground for the ultra-right through their neoliberal policies. The Democrats will serve the interests of Wall Street before they serve the interests of working people.

The best road forward is to work to isolate the far right through mass counter-mobilizations built by broad united-front coalitions. Such actions have the potential of mobilizing the ranks of the working class and of involving the unions directly.

In the current discussion, however, mass actions have been deemed ineffective by some who favor direct physical confrontation with fascists and the ultra-right. Certainly, depending on the situation, self-defense groups could be called into being. These self-defense groups, if rooted in working-class mass organizations, can form the backbone of a fightback against the far right.

As a rule, however, to beat the ultra-right and the fascists we have to be able to mobilize a broad spectrum of workers and oppressed people. It would be a mistake to get too far ahead of them politically, or to try to lead them into poorly prepared physical confrontations, which could result in unnecessary injuries or arrests.

By the same token, in anti-fascist organizing, you don’t hand your enemy a weapon. The use of the slogan, “no free speech for fascists” gives the advantage to ultra-right forces. Understanding that most workers support the right to free speech, the rightists play the victim and stigmatize the left as being anti-democratic.

Malik Miah wrote in the *International Socialist Review* in August 1975: “The disagreement is over how to combat them [fascists] most effectively. Most effective is to confront

## Lessons from Germany



Today, the number of outright Nazis and fascists remains tiny. But the deeply deteriorated social conditions that could set a fascist movement into motion may well arise in the coming period.

The tactics of the fascists were described by Malik Miah, writing in the August 1975 *International Socialist Review* (“Free Speech and the Fight Against the Ultra-Right”): “Fascists try to turn the anger of all those threatened with ruin by the capitalist crisis against the oppressed racial minorities and organized labor. In this country, the approach of fascist organizations in the 1930s and 1940s was to claim to be the representatives of the ‘little man’ against both the big capitalists and the ‘communists,’ directing their fire especially at Blacks, Jews and ‘big labor.’ In his book ‘Fascism and Big Business,’ Daniel Guerin points out that ‘fascism’s game is to call itself anti-capitalist without seri-

(Above) Nazis urge boycott of Jewish-owned shop in 1933.

ously attacking capitalism.”

As a contribution to the discussion on how to fight fascism today, Wladek Flakin, writing in *Left Voice* (“The Origins of Antifa”), evaluated the experience of Germany in the 1930s: “A unified resistance among workers could have defeated the Nazis. We must not forget that in the 1933 elections, the SPD [Social Democratic Party] and KPD [Communist Party] together received more votes than Hitler.

“But coordinated anti-fascist action was absent. The SPD called the KPD ‘fascists painted red’ and ‘Kozis.’ The KPD called the SPD ‘social fascists. And both parties gave no quarter: linking up with fascists in order to fight other fascists was out of the question.

“So how did they think they could defend themselves from the Nazi

threat? The SPD assumed that the state, the Weimar constitution, and the police would protect them. The KPD, on the other hand, actively fought the gangs of the *Sturmabteilung* (the brownshirts, or SA)—under the impression that they alone, as a radical minority, could stand the Nazis down.

“Both parties were wrong. A real united front against fascism was needed. A united front would mean: ‘March separately, strike together!’ In other words, everyone can stick to and promote their own program, but when it comes to action, you work in concert.”

The sectarian refusal of the Socialists and Communists to build a united front paved the way for Hitler’s rise to power. Together, the Socialist and Communist workers could have crushed the Nazis. In a context where there was mass unemployment and high inflation, the masses needed decisive leadership, which the leaders of both parties failed to provide.

The social base of fascism is the petty bourgeoisie (“middle class”). In the struggle for power, fascism uses anti-capitalist slogans, but its paymasters are the ruling class. They use the petty bourgeoisie as what Trotsky called a “battering ram” against the working class.

Fascism in power in Germany spelled the demise of the unions and any other workers’ organizations independent of the state. The regime of fascism is, in the final analysis, the government of finance capital. Having masked their intent under anti-capitalist rhetoric, the Nazis quickly subordinated all of German society to the needs of the capitalist class. —J.L.

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a military band swung its way through “Summertime” and other jazz tunes. Many on Twitter later compared the scene to the moments after the collision with an iceberg when a band had played on as the Titanic sunk to its doom. Indeed, on the same day as Trump’s address, scientists announced that ocean warming is causing the Larson C ice sheet to break off from Antarctica and to form an iceberg the size of the state of Delaware.

But a good proportion of Trump’s allies felt they had reason to celebrate. It was a victory for the most reactionary wing of the Trump forces—from fascist advisor Steve Bannon to arch-conservative Vice President Mike Pence—as well as for a section of the capitalist class invested in coal mines and other extractive industries.

In the months leading up to the Rose Garden announcement, a number of coal executives and politicians from coal-producing areas of the country had strongly urged a pull-out from the climate pact. In a May 23 letter to Trump from Attorney General Patrick Morrisey of West Virginia and nine other state attorneys general, Morrisey wrote, “Withdrawing from the Paris agreement is an important and necessary step toward reversing the harmful energy policies and unlawful overreach of the Obama era.”

Now, after four months of hemming and hawing on the issue, their man in the White House had finally decided to fulfill a key promise of the populist America First platform that Trump had promoted during his presidential campaign. And as in his campaign rallies of last year, the president pitched his June 1 speech ostensibly toward a section of the working class, particularly in the decayed industrial areas of the “Rust Belt,” who have been hard hit by unemployment.

Of course, it was all a charade, a cover-up. Neither the coal barons nor Trump himself have any sympathy for the social problems of the working class—and much less for its unemployed members, who will be hard hit by the administration’s budget recommendations to cut nutritional, medical, and housing aid to the poor.

Many critics of Trump also played their role in the cover-up. Thus we heard protestations of Trump’s announcement from a segment of corporate industry, including major polluters like Exxon, which after decades of suppressing information about climate change and delaying action to stop it, now professes to favor a “clean” and “green” economy—based mainly on fracked gas, in which the company is a major investor.

Similarly, much of the U.S. capitalist press—generally tied to the Democratic Party—blasted Trump’s decision as being “shortsighted” in ignoring the dire effects of climate change while isolating the U.S. from sharing in the burgeoning market for renewable energy products. The *Washington Post* took the occasion, on June 4, to extend the criticisms to Trump’s America First policy as a whole, stating that it “substitutes selfishness for realism. It implies that nations can go it alone.”

In a similar manner, newspapers gleefully reported that the “realistic” pro-Wall Street grouping associated with Ivanka Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner, had counseled President Trump to maintain “a place at the table” in climate negotiations.

And even while Trump was still in the Rose Garden trying to explain his decision, former President Obama issued a warning that the U.S. would risk missing out on the economic benefits of adhering to the Accord. He said, “The nations that remain in the Paris Agreement will be the nations that reap the

## ... Trump spurns Climate Accord



benefits in jobs and industries created. I believe the United States of America should be at the front of the pack.”

It should be obvious, however, that Obama and the Democrats, who expanded fossil-fuel production in the United States to an unprecedented extreme, are hardly ones to lecture on the benefits of renewable energy.

Attorney and environmentalist Carol Dansereau, in a recent article in *CounterPunch*, points out: “Obama and his Party have not been climate heroes. They’ve been climate destroyers.”

“Throughout his two terms in office, Obama avidly served the fossil fuel industry. He opened up vast new offshore areas for drilling, even in the wake of the BP nightmare. He delivered giant leases to coal corporations. Obama’s fracking rules were designed to reduce pollution at fracking sites ‘without slowing natural gas production.’ And as fracking proliferated in the U.S., Secretary of State Hillary Clinton vigorously promoted it in other countries. Tens of thousands of miles of pipelines were constructed in the U.S. with Obama’s enthusiastic blessing...”

“As a result of all this, vast quantities of greenhouse gases were pumped into the atmosphere under Obama’s Democratic administration, bringing us closer to environmental catastrophe.”

Other political leaders of the capitalist world, whose countries compete in trade and investments with the U.S., also expressed their displeasure with Trump’s pull-out. Of course, Trump made it easy for the European leaders to mock him, with his disingenuous protests that the United States—the wealthiest and most domineering country in the world—has been victimized by less powerful economic competitors. With little doubt, the major capitalist powers will try to take advantage of the fissure with the Trump administration over the climate issue in order to put forward their own economic interests more assertively.

If any of the pro-capitalist critics of Trump’s pull-out had really cared about the climate, they would have made sure that the Paris Accord had some teeth in it. They would have insisted on massive and concerted measures that allowed each country, rich and poor, to attain 100 percent renewable energy within little more than a decade. And steps to achieve a re-

duction of world temperatures would be mandatory, not voluntary.

The recommendations contained in the Paris Accord—while arguably better than nothing at all—will not stop the world from heading toward climate catastrophe. In fact, the treaty serves as a convenient cushion for world leaders and the capitalist economies that they serve. It is a means for them to pretend that business as usual, with non-binding promises and sluggish “market mechanisms,” can somehow avoid the worst effects of climate change—or at least push them off into the far future.

This attitude is rife in U.S. ruling circles and in the media. It is seen not only among Wall Street conservatives but even in the proposals of the most liberal section of the Democratic Party.

Thus, a supposedly “progressive” bill in the U.S. Senate sponsored by Bernie Sanders, Jeff Merkley, and Corey Booker would delay the attainment of 100 percent renewable energy to the year 2050—when it would be too late. Moreover, the proposed law specifies waiting four years until the minuscule first steps toward that goal would be mandated.

The liberal Senators’ “100 by ’50” Act would allocate merely \$150 billion per year, less than one percent of the GDP, as the maximum to be spent in attaining their goals—nowhere near enough for the monumental task that the country faces. It is unfortunate that leading environmental leaders, like Bill McKibben, have decided to stand behind this weak Senate bill.

To be sure, Trump’s withdrawal from the climate pact, and the other anti-environmental measures taken by his administration, are crippling blows. But what are the alternatives? The world cannot afford the consequences of the ineffectual nibbling at the problem of climate change by allegedly “concerned” political leaders.

The U.S. certainly *can* move toward the “front of the pack” (in Obama’s misplaced words). It needs to do so by launching a massive emergency project to put the country immediately on the road to achieving 100 percent renewable energy. The means are potentially at hand, but it will take utilizing the entire budget and resources now wasted on the military and on perks for billionaire investors. The project also will require a massive reorganization of production and of society itself. Legions of workers must be retrained and given employment and a clear voice in repairing the earth from the ravages of capitalism and in rebuilding society in a fully equitable, democratic, and sustainable manner.

Many in the environmental movement are coming to understand that the present world rulers, the corporate titans and their political representatives, who consistently put the striving for capitalist profits above human needs, are incapable of carrying out such essential measures.

The working-class worldwide, which suffers the worst effects of climate change, must look to taking the reins of power into its own hands, and to supplanting the capitalist system with a system that can fulfill the needs of human society. That system will be a socialist one. ■

## ... Far right

(continued from page 8)

the fascists’ ideas ideologically and their actions through counteractions. The “no platform” approach blunts our effectiveness. It means that the struggle against racism and fascism is turned “inside out.” Instead of coming across for what it really is—a struggle in defense of the democratic rights of the working class and oppressed minorities—the struggle is turned into a sterile dispute over the “rights” of the fascists. That is advanta-

geous to them, not to the antiracist movement.”

The task ahead is to mobilize the largest number of people against the agenda of the racist far right and the economic system that holds us down. All of our strategic and tactical choices should be made with this in mind. Our goal has to be to decisively shift the balance of class forces against these reactionaries.

Workers’ organizations and organizations of the oppressed are key to a mass action orientation. Left forces acting alone cannot defeat the right. The unions, with millions of members, have the social weight to drive these goons off the streets. ■



# Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

## We have 10 questions

By NDP SOCIALIST CAUCUS

In the Fall of 2016, left-wing activists in the labour-based New Democratic Party of Canada launched an independent campaign to draft Sid Ryan, past president of the Ontario Federation of Labour, to run for Leader of the federal NDP. On a website, the campaign team posted a 17-point socialist policy platform to serve as the basis for his candidacy, and to influence all registered candidates in the race for NDP Leader. Over 20,000 people visited the site to read the policies and to see videos featuring Sid speaking on political issues.

For personal reasons, Sid decided on April 26, 2017 not to run. We respect his decision.

Still, the need for socialist leadership and a new direction for the NDP is urgent. Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the new Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer, and most of all, the big business ruling class must be challenged from the left.

To advance that prospect the NDP Socialist Caucus decided to pose 10 Questions, to challenge the registered candidates to state clearly where they stand on those issues and the 17-point platform. Based on the responses we get, the Socialist Caucus will seriously consider whether to support one or none of the contenders. At the same time, the SC continues to protest the undemocratic entry fee and rules imposed by NDP officials that unduly restrict who can run.

The NDP Socialist Caucus, founded in 1998, is the organized left wing of North America's only mass, working-class political party. The SC has hundreds of members and supporters across the country who actively participate in the NDP at all levels. It persuaded the party to demand Canadian Forces out of Afghanistan in 2006. It played a pivotal role in launching the leadership review in 2016 that is forcing NDP federal Leader Tom Mulcair to step aside at the conclusion of the present leadership race in October 2017.

The SC got the party at its 2016 federal convention to launch a national discussion of the Leap Manifesto. In April of this year it successfully pushed the Ontario NDP, at its convention, to embrace public pharma care, dental

care, the re-nationalization of Hydro One, and free post-secondary education.

In a federal leadership race dominated, so far, by the politics of identity, a race in which the political differences between the candidates are often blurred, the SC endeavours to put the focus on policy and on issues that matter most to the working class—to marginalized, alienated and disenfranchised people. To that end, it calls on all the registered candidates for Leader to answer the 10 Questions, directly, clearly and without delay. **Here are the questions:**

1) The benefits of robotization and new technologies generally should be shared, not utilized to make the owners super-rich and to drive more workers into poverty. Do you commit that under your leadership the NDP will fight for a reduction in the workweek without a loss in pay or benefits?

2) About 235,000 Canadians become homeless every year, with 35,000 sleeping in shelters and on the streets on any given night; 1.7 million are unable to afford adequate, suitable shelter. Do you commit that under your leadership the NDP will demand the construction of half a million quality social housing units by means of a publicly-owned land assembly and housing construction enterprise?

3) For decades, NDP leaders have gone along with the New Cold War against Russia and China, and backed Western military intervention abroad, including the bombing of Libya. Do you commit that under your leadership the NDP will demand that Canada get out of NATO immediately?

4) Do you commit that under your leadership the NDP will actively support the worldwide campaign backed by unions and parliamentary bodies to effect Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against the Zionist apartheid state until its occupation of the West Bank ends?

5) Do you commit that under your leadership the NDP will demand a steeply progressive tax system, including the following measures:

a) Tax Capital Gains Income at the same rate as employment income, bringing in \$8 billion.

b) Increase the Corporate Tax rate from 15% to 21%,

bringing in \$9 billion.

c) Eliminate corporate stock options as a benefit, with a net savings of \$600 million.

d) Cut Justin Trudeau's "middle class tax cut" and enhance the Guaranteed Income Supplement and Child Benefits.

e) Increase income tax for earners with income over \$200,000 to 40%, and for earners with income over \$900,000 to 50%.

6) Do you commit that under your leadership the NDP will demand greatly expanded public ownership and economic democracy to include Canada's railway system, major hydro, oil, gas and other energy corporations, the giant telecoms, and at least two of the major banks?

7) Do you commit that under your leadership the NDP will fight for a Green Industrial Revolution to shift rapidly from carbon and nuclear energy towards safe, clean and renewable energy technologies, and that this rapid transition be funded by conscripting the profits of big oil and gas, and put a high priority on the employment of displaced, indigenous and young workers?

8) For indigenous peoples, it's time not just for "reconciliation" but for restitution. If diamond mining corporations in the north can provide their employees world class housing, food, health care and recreation, they should do no less for Canada's original peoples, who deserve to share the wealth that has been plundered, or the resource extraction firms should face expropriation. Do you agree with that, and commit to a policy of No More Pipelines?

9) The NDP should be transformed from a mainly electoral machine into a vast social movement that fosters greater democracy. Do you commit that under your leadership the NDP will partner with unions and social justice groups, ensure more time for policy debate at its conventions, and make them more accessible rather than use them chiefly as a fund-raising exercise? Do you commit to end the present practice that allows party leaders to ignore adopted policies? Do you commit to increase funding of Electoral District Associations and put an end to top-down interference with local candidate nominations?

10) Do you commit that under your leadership the NDP will fight for a national Pharmacare and Dental Care programme, and a national \$10 a day quality child-care service, to be funded by steeply progressive taxation?

**We want answers.** The NDP Socialist Caucus is posing questions to the registered candidates for federal NDP Leader because we think that party members deserve to know where the candidates stand—beyond vague generalities and broad slogans.

Do you agree? Would you like to help? See the SC's 17-point platform for socialist leadership at [www.ndp-socialists.ca](http://www.ndp-socialists.ca). Call us at: 647-986-1917. ■

## Beyond optics, toward politics: Report from CLC Convention

By JOEL HARDEN

CUPE Local 1281 (published with permission of RankandFile.ca)

At its best, the recent 28<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Convention of the Canadian Labour Congress demonstrated how far unions have come on Indigenous rights, Palestinian rights (more on that later), racism, queer or trans rights, mental health, and environmental justice. Delegates made passionate appeals to support these and other important struggles.

Impressive speakers like Angela Davis, Candy Palmater, Cindy Blackstock, and Mary Walsh argued unions must champion issues suppressed by powerful insiders. Heartfelt videos acknowledged former CLC President Bob White, outgoing Secretary-Treasurer Barb Myers, the 25-year anniversary of the 1992 Westray Mine disaster, and the ongoing crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. On the fourth day of CLC Convention, a union "street party" occupied Bay and King Streets, the heart of Canada's financial district.

At its worst, the 28<sup>th</sup> CLC Convention also illustrated the limited thinking that exists in union circles, particularly at the leadership level. Election leaflets festooned the halls making few, if any, specific promises.

A 5 per cent pay increase (indexed to inflation) was approved for CLC leaders who currently earn over three times the average wage in Canada, despite stiff opposition from convention delegates. UNIFOR (the largest private sector union) and Local 113 of the Amalgamated Transit Union continued their public feud after an attempted raid by UNIFOR failed earlier this year. Premier Rachel Notley arrived to celebrate

achievements made by the NDP government in Alberta, but ended with a pitch for export-driven oil pipelines, the impact of which would undermine current efforts in Canada to meet global climate change targets.

At a time when organized labour faces existential challenges, these optics at union conventions leave

many cold. Before going to the 28<sup>th</sup> CLC Convention, I canvassed my Facebook contacts to see who else was attending, and this reply earned the most praise: "I'll be raking leaves in my yard during CLC Convention, which is likely to add more to the class struggle." Ouch.

While such cynicism is understandable, I'll offer another perspective here:

Yes, union conventions are spaces where top-down strategies get used for particular outcomes, but they are also moments where activists can shift beyond optics to politics. With the right strategy, activists can organize, appeal for support, and advance important work. ■

## Another delegate's comment: The missing ingredient

By JULIUS ARSCOTT

OPSEU Executive Board Member, and organizer,  
Workers' Action Movement

Missing at the CLC convention was a critical element—an organized class-struggle left wing. Such a radical caucus could unite militant workers, speak to issues, try to amend resolutions, even run candidates on a socialist platform.

Some small break-time meetings did occur. One was a forum hosted by Avi Lewis to discuss the pro-environmental, anti-capitalist LEAP Manifesto. Another, organized by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, discussed creating links between organized labour and community grassroots organizations—a theme addressed by the CLC bureaucracy the next day.

Neither of these meetings, however, led to any effort to form an organized left wing in the labour movement to challenge the status quo.

In fact, in the latter case, organizers asked that the actual convention proceedings not be discussed as it might upset some union officials.

Needed now more than ever is an organized left wing, similar to initiatives on a modest scale in OS-STF and OPSEU, to oppose concessions bargaining and the austerity agenda of the Bay Street political parties, as well as to fight for democracy in our labour movement.

Efforts by Socialist Action during the convention were well received by delegates, who bought over 100 copies of SA newspaper and accepted many more copies of *Turn Left* magazine. The SA booth in the Exhibitors' area, alongside affiliated unions and labour allies, welcomed many visitors. ■



# DA's office refuses to release Mumia files

By the MOBILIZATION FOR MUMIA COALITION

In the latest attempt to further deny freedom to Mumia Abu-Jamal, the Philadelphia District Attorney's office has contemptuously refused to release the files they were ordered to make public by Common Pleas Court Judge Leon Tucker.

On April 24, Abu-Jamal's 63<sup>rd</sup> birthday, his attorneys presented an appeal before Judge Tucker asking that the Philadelphia district attorney's office release all documents relevant to former DA Ronald Castille's involvement in Mumia's case, which Tucker ordered just days later, on April 28.

Judge Tucker ruled that the DA's office must produce and turn over all records and memos regarding Castille's involvement in Abu-Jamal's case: pre-trial, trial, post-trial, and direct appeal proceedings; communications between Castille and his staff; and any public statements Castille made about Mumia's case during or after his tenure as district attorney of Philadelphia. These records were to be handed over to Mumia's attorneys by May 30.

Instead, the DA's office submitted an intentionally deficient response to Tucker's order at the end of the workday on May 30 with a two-page cover letter denying any "direct involvement" by Castille, and 54 pages of front-page court filings that were already part of the public record on the case.

They offered nothing new, nothing

that couldn't be found by perusing court records. In other words they are still going to great lengths to hide the truth.

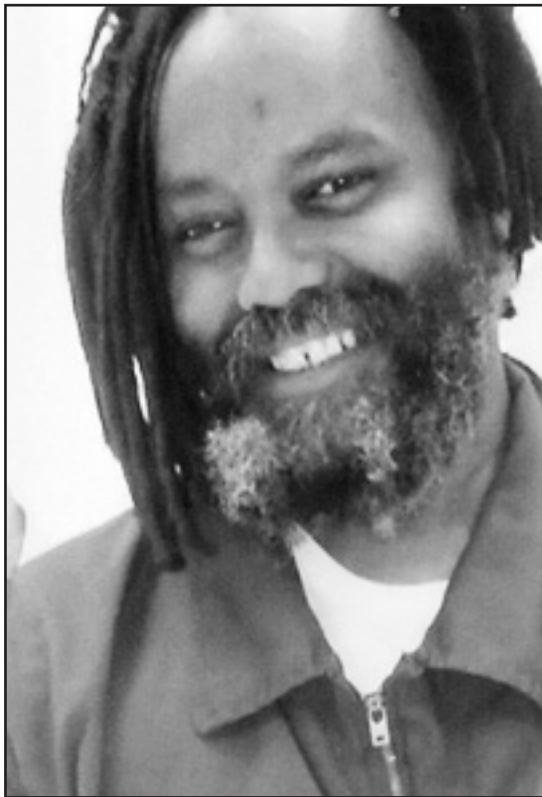
Abu-Jamal's attorneys have 15 days to challenge the DAs coverup.

Abu-Jamal's case was one of 16 petitions considered by the court on April 24 by 14 prisoners with similar legal issues. All the cases are based on a June 2016 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Williams v. Pennsylvania* that found it was a violation of a defendant's constitutional right to due process when a judge presides over a case in which they had had prior significant or personal involvement as a prosecutor.

The *Williams* case was adjudicated by Castille while he was on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court even though he had prosecuted the defendant as Philadelphia District Attorney years earlier.

Abu-Jamal's April 24 court proceeding was based on the post-conviction petition filed Aug. 7, 2016, by attorneys Judith Ritter and Christina Swarns charging that his appeal process denied him due process.

Ronald Castille was Assistant Philadelphia DA at the time of Abu-Jamal's 1982 trial and Philadelphia District



(Left) Mumia Abu-Jamal, framed for killing a police officer in 1981.

less likely to convict ... you don't want these people on your jury." Castille suppressed the existence of the tape and his own responsibility for it.

According to Philadelphia activist Pam Africa, "If we are not vigilant, the long history of corruption and suppression of evidence in the Philadelphia DA's office could stand in the way of Mumia's files from seeing the light of day."

Corruption and cover ups are nothing but business as usual for the Philadelphia District Attorney's office, an office that represents the city in the prosecution of criminal offenses, and is the chief law enforcement officer and legal officer of the city's jurisdiction.

Given the notorious history of that agency, close to 100 human rights activists and community members seeking justice for Mumia Abu-Jamal converged on the DA's office just hours before the May 30 deadline.

Despite an unnecessary and eventually unsuccessful effort by dozens of heavily armed police to use metal barriers to enclose and limit the protest, demonstrators held a press conference and rally outside the DA's office calling for the release of all the files and demanding an end to decades of corruption.

More information can be found through *Mobilization4Mumia* on Facebook or by contacting *mobilization-4Mumia@gmail.com*.

Attorney when his office opposed Abu-Jamal's direct appeals in 1988.

He was responsible for producing a jury selection training video for prosecutors with instructions on how to evade the historic Supreme Court decision on *Batson v. Maryland*, against racial bias in jury selection.

In the infamous DATV "Jack McMahon training tape" prosecutors are told: "Blacks from low-income areas are

## ... French election

(continued from page 12)

nounced the financial scandals they are involved in, and other candidates did not dare to do this.

Poutou denounced Le Pen for refusing to go to the judge that summoned her because she had misappropriated money from the European parliament. Poutou said that while le Pen could use her parliamentary immunity, when workers face repression, they don't have immunity.

The NPA campaign put to the fore the division between the bourgeoisie and the workers right in the middle of a somewhat "polite" and dull debate. After that debate, he was viewed with sympathy by lots of workers. In the campaign he appeared like an average worker that is not

a politician. But I think the NPA campaign might have done a better job of promoting current social struggles, struggles that didn't stop despite the electoral period.

CH: What are the NPA's plans after the elections? How do you see the anti-capitalist movement going forward?

JRF: As the elections were coming to a close, a very original initiative took place, the Social Front, with the active participation of revolutionary militants.

Several trade unions and militant collectives organized a demonstration on the day before the elections and another one the first day after Macron was elected. Some 3000 people showed up at the first demo and almost 10,000 at the second one, despite the fact that not a single national trade union or political leadership has supported this effort, and despite the state of emergency.

It was possible because during the Loi Travail movement, different militant sectors from different traditions

learned to work together. And also because a process of differentiation inside the labor movement is under way, with trade-unions especially breaking.

The Social Front aims at regrouping the militants who want to fight the government and who want to regroup the struggles. And now, in part thanks to the formation of this front, there is a big debate in the trade-union movement about a key question: should we discuss with and meet the new president as if it were possible to negotiate with your class enemy or should we at once organize the resistance?

The Social Front organized another demo, this time in front of the parliament, the day after the general elections. If this initiative is a success, we hope to pressure the labor leaders to call for a national strike quickly, because Macron has already stated that he will destroy the Labor Laws without even consulting the parliament. ■

## ... Women and gender politics in the Russian Revolution

(continued from page 6)

Rural women made huge strides as well. The records show us that peasant women and men often had opposing views. They debated the Family Code and how it applied to peasant units in which land was owned collectively by more than one family. They participated in national conferences under the Women's Department in which all sectors came together to debate and assess what was good in theory but not in practice.

The revolutionary government had to take measures to provide for workers in industry and the orphaned children in the midst of deprivation and civil war. Communal kitchens and other alternatives to domestic labor became mass affairs.

Women filled the workshops. Alexandra Kollantai was recorded as gloating that the family was dead. But in the midst of the civil war that threatened to roll back the revolution completely, those driving forward on the plans to emancipate women were premature in their conclusion that the old order—that of the compulsory family with its double burden and sexual repression—was over.

As soon as the war ended, the revolutionary government was forced to try to revive the war-torn economy through applying some market measures. Factories were forced to implement strict accounting related to productivity. There were mass layoffs, with women being chosen to be the first to be laid off by old-fashioned supervisors.

Under these measures, collectively known as the

New Economic Policy, many child-care centers and other communal facilities were closed. But the ideal was not lost, and up through about 1925 there was still progress in consciousness and practice.

In short, while not always successful, and with the limitations imposed, the overall achievement of the Bolshevik revolution is diametrically opposed to that of global capitalism today. Even an underdeveloped country, torn by imperialist invasion and war—but under working class leadership—could make advances far beyond what the most sophisticated capitalist economies have been able to do in the last 100 years.

We should not only learn from the advances made in Russia but from the retreat. By 1925, the left forces around Trotsky were essentially defeated by a reactionary bureaucracy headed by Stalin. As the bureaucracy consolidated its power, it moved quickly to re-establish the compulsory family as a social and economic unit.

Stalin's turn toward the strategy of enriching a section of the peasantry necessitated a tolerance for the social mores of the patriarchal peasant family. Motherhood became the object of awards. The Women's Department was abolished. In 1930, abortion was made illegal. By 1936, the family was celebrated as a unit of social order and used to bolster the authoritarian regime.

And homosexuality was once again criminalized. Eventually, it was officially described as a "bourgeois deviation." This was the position not only of the Soviet

Union but of all the Communist Parties in the world, including in the United States. From the Russian experience, we have learned to expect these adaptations to the reactionary social past in any period of reaction or retreat. Women's fate is inextricably tied to the fate of the whole working class.

What does this show activists today?

We must build a social feminism that seeks to strengthen the movement of women, immigrants, women of color, the working-class movement as a whole, and all those who are struggling independent of the bosses' parties.

We must strive to win victories on many fronts against the forces that seek to limit and roll back the rights of women and other oppressed people. But history shows us that to achieve deep and lasting gains, the strategy for women's and sexual liberation must chart a course towards a break with capitalism and toward the working-class seizure of power.

Of course, we are not on the verge of a revolution in any of the advanced capitalist countries. But activists, including those in the women's movement, are at a moment of decision regarding which strategic road to take.

On this 100th anniversary of the bravery of the women of the Bolshevik Party and the millions of women in the Soviet Union who saw the future and fought like the devil for it, the road marked out by these revolutionaries provides important lessons for today. ■



## French election results: No choice for workers



Thomas Samson / Agence France-Presse

CHRIS HUTCHINSON interviews  
JEAN ROCH-FORT

Emmanuel Macron, a French banker and longtime establishment politician, emerged victorious on a “third party” ticket in this year’s French elections. His victory follows the breakdown of the traditional center left and right capitalist parties through major corruption scandals.

The candidate of the Republicans, a center right-wing party, Nathan Fillon, was particularly ridiculed for his outrageous nepotism and boldfaced lies. Candidate Marie Le Pen, of the far-right National Front (FN), lost decisively in the run-off election. While significant numbers of workers voted for Le Pen, it is also true that they voted in substantial numbers for other candidates like reformist Jean-Luc Melenchon of the Left Front.

In general, the contradiction and surge of support for non-traditional parties in this year’s election highlights the anger of the working class with the continued capitalist austerity assault. The introduction of the “Loi Travail” was a major attack on French workers in 2016. The labor law was a tool to benefit the corporations and their shareholders by hamstringing the unions and allowing the bosses to more easily fire workers, lower wages, and attack collective bargaining to increase ruling-class profits.

In opposition, over a million workers and youth poured on to the streets on the night of March 31, 2016. The occupation of public squares during the “Nuit Debout” movement failed to stop the labor law but certainly played a role in shaking up this year’s election. A French trade unionist and activist in the New Anti-Capitalist Party, Jean Roch-Fort had this to say about the electoral race:

**JFR:** What stands out is how poorly elected Macron was. First, without even taking into account the part of the population that doesn’t have French citizenship, you have less than 67 million people composing the French population. 18.5% are under the age to vote, 10.5 % are disenfranchised. Among the voters,

18% of the population abstained, 4.5% left a blank vote, and the spoiled ballots reached a historic high of 1.6%.

Of the 31% of French people who voted for Macron, around half did it just to oppose Le Pen. So, you have around 18% of the population that supports Macron, which is a very low percentage for someone who’s just been elected.

Significant minorities of the working class voted both for Le Pen but also for Melenchon [in the first electoral round], who defended a kind of reformist outlook. And between the two rounds of the presidential election, we could see a sizeable portion of youth and workers who said, “We want neither Le Pen nor Macron.” You had spontaneous high school demonstrations under that slogan, and several trade unions—for example, the national CGT federation of chemical industries—officially took that stand.

A large number of workers so despised the previous government and Macron, who was one of the main architects of the Loi Travail, that they were immune to the pressure to vote for Macron at all costs. This was a much weaker outlook than in 2002, when Jacques Chirac and Le Pen’s father were the two standing in the second round of the presidential election.

There is a significant minority that has been electorally won to the FN, but they are far from all being fascists: it is all the treasons of the traditional left that has enabled the FN to pose an “anti-system” force. The hatred for austerity and the traditional political forces is running deep, and that’s what makes the situation unstable. Even Macron has temporarily succeeded in presenting himself in the eyes of a mainly middle-class audience as the new kid on the block, capable of waging a new politics.

**CH:** In the U.S., we’ve seen those sympathetic with the far right emboldened following the election of Trump. Covered widely on social media, the recent murder in Portland, Ore., of two men and serious injury of a third for defending a Muslim woman against harassment is clear indication of a small but growing far-right trend. The U.S. media portrayed le Pen

(Above) Workers in Paris protest the Loi Travail in May 2016.

and Trump as having similar Islamophobic and anti-immigrant views. Did this election see a rise in popularity of the far right? Has the far-right movement gained influence and been emboldened? How can we stop them?

**JFR:** “The FN has had a difficult time. They prepared this election campaign for a long time, and they draw a negative balance sheet of it. Their leadership doesn’t agree on how to proceed now. They are having a difficult strategic debate. The FN is the result of an institutional strategy of sectors that come from the fascist tradition; they try to seize power basically through elections, but even now the ruling class doesn’t want the FN to rule, they don’t need them to rule.

There is pressure on them to alter their program to make it acceptable for the French bourgeoisie. A part of the FN leadership wants to adapt and drop the slogan of opposing the euro currency, while a part wants a hardening of the “anti-EU” profile of the FN. For now, they are not in a good position.

But the main danger is not the temporary success of the FN to this or that election. The problem is that the policies waged by all the successive governments for decades have paved the way for a reinforcement of their ideas. The best way to fight the FN is not to vote for the ones who pave the way for them but to overthrow them and capitalism altogether!

**CH:** The New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) got on the ballot and put forward an independent socialist option to the ruling elite and reformist parties but did not make it out of the first round of voting. The goal was not solely to get elected but rather to put forward a program for workers to take on the capitalists. Jean reflected on the impact of the NPA campaign:

**JFR:** Philippe Poutou made a kind of breakthrough when he quite explicitly attacked Fillon and Le Pen in the main TV debate. He attacked them for being capitalist politicians and lackeys of the status quo. He de-

(continued on page 11)