

No to U.S.-backed regime change!

Trump and corporate titans target Venezuela



By BRUCE LESNICK

Ruling elites have united behind the Trump administration in its illegal, unjust, and brutal attempt to meddle in the internal affairs of Venezuela. Democrats and Republicans alike have fallen in line, revealing the degree to which the two parties march in lock step when the geopolitical prerogatives of the one percent are at stake. The governments of some 20 countries—including Canada, Britain, Spain, Germany, France, Australia, Brazil, Israel, and Argentina—have all pledged fealty to the U.S. and its hand-picked puppet in Venezuela.

The New York Times, champion of the “liberal” wing of the ruling rich, editorialized in support of the Trump administration’s transparent coup plotting on Jan. 24, insisting, “the Trump administration is right to support Mr. Guaidó.”

Pretend socialist and Democrat Bernie Sanders shed crocodile tears, decrying violence and economic disaster in Venezuela while failing to note his

own government’s hand in creating those conditions. Sanders provides left cover for U.S. military intervention, asserting, “The United States should support the rule of law” in Venezuela. To date, self-described “democratic socialist” Alexandria Ocasio Cortez has been silent on U.S. aggression in Venezuela.

On the heels of a multi-year, evidence-free propaganda offensive denouncing Russia’s supposed interference in the 2016 U.S. election, it is beyond ironic to see politicians, pundits, and corporate media moguls cheer for the proven, documented, and admitted interference by the U.S. in Venezuela. As reported by *Al Jazeera*, “On Venezuela, Democratic Party leaders are often hard to distinguish from their Republican counterparts ... most, like Nancy Pelosi, have staked out openly pro-coup positions.

And after two years stoking anti-Russia panic, MS NBC’s standard script offers little guidance to confused liberals seeking to triangulate a political position—Trump is for the coup but Russia is against it—what to do?”

(Above) Caracas rally for President Maduro.

Soon after Donald Trump assumed the Presidency, Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) and Vice President Mike Pence began a concerted campaign to convince Trump to adopt a plan to oust elected Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. As *The New York Times* reported, “Mr. Rubio’s approach has generated unusually bipartisan support, including from leading Democrats like Senators Richard J. Durbin of Illinois and Robert Menendez of New Jersey.”

In September 2018, *The Times* ran the headline, “Trump Administration Discussed Coup Plans With Rebel Venezuelan Officers.” The article reports, “American officials eventually decided not to help the plotters, and the coup plans stalled.” But the machinations didn’t end there. The focus shifted to finding some figurehead who could claim to be the “legitimate” Venezuelan ruler. After considering various opposition politicians, Rubio and Pence settled on

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Mobilizing against attacks by the far right

By STEVE XAVIER

On Jan. 19, there were reports of threats and intimidation against women's rights events in several cities, including Boston and Orlando, Fla. According to a source, Proud Boys and allied rightists attacked the Portland, Ore., Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) hall and a Democratic Socialists of America meeting in the same city.

Previously, on Sept. 27, Proud Boys attacked a DSA social event in Louisville, Ky., spraying participants with pepper spray.

Mass united-front counter-mobilizations are the main weapon in our arsenal right now against fascist and rightist attacks.

The value of such mobilizations was shown last year on Nov. 17, when about 20-25 rightists rallied on Philadelphia's Independence Mall and were met with a spirited counter-protest of about 600 people. Because of the public organizing for the counter-mobilization, some militia groups, and quite a few Proud Boys, opted not to attend; they were afraid of a large demonstration by opponents. In the aftermath, the dissension among the rightists sowed further disunity and finger pointing.

Mass united action helps workers and oppressed people feel their potential power—in the streets and at the point of production. Isolated street-fighting tactics do not impart these lessons. Quite the opposite, they teach that a small group can substitute for the actions of workers and oppressed people.



Susan Watts / Getty Images

(Left) Proud Boys spokesperson and chief Gavin McInness (ctr.).

Mass action is part of the method we use not only to build an effective anti-fascist movement but also to build the confidence and organizing capabilities of the working class for the major class battles of the future.

Self-defense and physical force

Socialists also support the right of working-class and oppressed people to self-defense.

In the "Transitional Program" of the Fourth International, Leon Trotsky wrote: "The struggle against fascism does not start in the liberal editorial office but in the factory—and ends in the street. Scabs and private gunmen in factory plants are the basic nuclei of the fascist army. *Strike pickets* are the basic nuclei of the proletarian army. This is

our point of departure. In connection with every strike and street demonstration, it is imperative to propagate the necessity of creating *workers' groups for self-defense.*"

The recent attacks on oppressed peoples, including the mass shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, provide an opportunity to introduce the question of workers' defense guards, built by the unions and other labor organizations, to defend against right-wing attacks.

Whether we are dealing with defense against the ultra-right and fascists or against strikebreakers, it's appropriate to explain the political importance of carrying out self-defense in a collective way—not in isolated formations.

One problem with the antifascism that

relies on "physical force" is that it relies on a tactical response to a strategic problem. I know from personal experience in anti-Klan and Antifa work in South Texas in the late 1970s and early '80s that there's a limit to that perspective. We need a response to fascist mobilizations and attacks that can impart lessons that advance the struggles and consciousness of working people.

Defending meetings from attack

In the 1970s, reactionary gangs, as well as groups of ultra-left Maoists, staged a number of physical attacks on meetings and rallies of socialists and the antiwar movement, which posed a grave threat to free speech. The movement took appropriate steps to build united-front defense guards to defend their speakers' platforms and meetings against disruption and violence.

Today, the far right is displaying the same kind of thuggish behavior. We must give unconditional support to the rights of left and workers' organizations (DSA, IWW, etc.) to meet without threats and intimidation. It's appropriate to build united-front defense guards and to call on the labor movement to defend meetings as well. If the far right is able to successfully shut down the meetings of left groups, union meetings and picket lines will be next.

By calling for the united-front defense of IWW and DSA meetings, or any other meetings, socialists demonstrate our politics in action. ■

JOIN SOCIALIST ACTION!

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.

In the process we hope to bring activists together from different backgrounds into a revolutionary workers' party that can successfully challenge the wealthy elite—whose profit-driven system is driving down living standards and threatens all life on this planet.

We are active partisans of the working class and believe in the need for independent working-class politics—not alliances with the bosses' parties. That is why we call for workers in the U.S. to break from the Democratic and Republican parties to build a Labor Party based on the trade unions.

We support the struggles of those who are specially oppressed under capitalism—women, LGBT people, national minorities, etc. We support the right of self-determination for oppressed nationalities, including Blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans. We are internationalists, and hold that workers of one country have more in common with workers of another than with their own nation's capitalist class. We seek to link struggles across national boundaries, and to build an international revolutionary movement that will facilitate the sharing of experiences and political lessons. We maintain fraternal relations with the Fourth International.

Socialist Action believes that the capitalist state and its institutions are instruments of the ruling class, and that therefore they cannot be used as tools of the working class but have to be smashed. That is why we fight for revolution. When we fight for specific reforms, we do so with the understanding that in the final analysis real social change can only come about with the overthrow of capitalism, the establishment of a workers' government, and the fight for socialism. Our ultimate goal is a truly democratic, environmentally sustainable, and egalitarian society organized to satisfy human needs rather than corporate greed. We invite you to join us in the struggle to make the world a better place!

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By JOHN LESLIE

Prisoner advocates and defenders of civil liberties have condemned the Jan. 28 action by Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner to contest the court decision granting Mumia Abu-Jamal the right to further appeals. Judge Leon Tucker's ruling was a major victory in the decades-long fight to free Mumia. Krasner's appeal would add years to the continuing travesty of justice in Mumia's case.

Of course, the head of the cop "union," the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), praised Krasner's determination to proceed. Police "unions" have been buying for Mumia's blood for decades.

Mumia's return to court was made possible by the *Williams v. Pennsylvania* case, which ruled that prosecutors who subsequently become judges must recuse themselves when hearing a case they were previously involved in. During Mumia's previous appeals, Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Ron Castille refused to recuse himself. Castille had been an Assistant District Attorney of Philadelphia when Mumia's case was heard and later rose to the office of District Attorney from 1985 to 1991.

Krasner filed the appeal despite the fact that, on Jan. 5, activists for the Mobilization4Mumia had delivered a petition with 4227 signatures asking him not to do it. He also ignored the labor movement's statements of support for Mumia. This included letters from International Longshore and Warehouse Union International Executive Secretary-Treasurer Edwin R. Ferris and Japanese rail workers.

The NAACP was quick to condemn the filing of an appeal to Tucker's decision, calling on the DA to reconsider. NAACP head Rodney Muhammad said, "The NAACP is not here to argue guilt or innocence of Mr. Jamal, we are talking about due process."

On Jan. 30, Mumia supporters confronted Krasner at an event on "Probation & Parole Trends" and demanded that he retract the appeal. Krasner refused to answer them but stated obliquely that he thought he was "playing a chess match" in regard to Mumia's appeal.

On Feb. 1, a planned Krasner appearance, as a keynote speaker at a "Rebellious Lawyering" (RebLaw) conference at Yale University, was cancelled by conference organizers. RebLaw directors expressed disappointment and outrage at the DA's decision to challenge Judge Tucker's ruling.

A coalition of lawyers and law students posted a petition demanding that the invitation to Krasner be withdrawn. They wrote, "... the so-called progressive Larry Krasner is hell-bent on keeping (Mumia's case) out of the appellate process. Larry Krasner was voted into office by the Black, working-class people of Philadelphia, but in the hour of truth he has upheld the rulings of racist judges and is doing the bidding of one of the country's most corrupt and homicidal police forces."

RebLaw opted to rescind the invitation, writing, "We were disturbed to hear that DA Krasner will challenge the court decision giving Mumia Abu-Jamal the right to re-appeal his conviction in the 1981 death of a white Philadelphia police officer. Mumia, a longtime political activist and writer who has always maintained his innocence, spent decades on death row and is now serving a life sentence without parole. Mumia's case was marred by injustices, including clear evidence of systemic racial bias, political targeting, conflicts of interest, and police corruption."

We must keep the pressure on the "progressive" District Attorney Larry Krasner. Krasner, formerly a defense attorney, was known in activist circles for defending protesters in court. Those credentials inspired liberal and left activists, including the local Democratic Socialists of America, to get active in his campaign. In office, Krasner has offered up some reforms and promised to review wrongful convictions. However, in Mumia's case, it appears that Krasner has prioritized his relations with the FOP.

Missing evidence in concealed boxes

On Dec. 28, one day after the decision by Judge Tucker opening the door to further appeals by Mumia, employees of the Philadelphia District Attorney's office "found" six boxes in a storage space, while allegedly looking for office furniture. Five of the six boxes are marked "McCann," the name of a former head of the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office Homicide Unit. Five of the boxes are also marked with Mumia's name. This discovery was revealed to the public more than a week later in press reports.

At a Jan. 15 news conference in Philadelphia, attorney Rachel Wolkenstein, a supporter of Mumia and member of a previous legal team for Mumia, said:

'Progressive' DA Krasner sells out Mumia Abu-Jamal



Sam Mastriano / Socialist Action

"What these missing boxes represent is confirmation of what we've known for decades: There's hidden, exculpatory evidence in Mumia's case, and that is evidence that Mumia's guilt was intentionally manufactured by the police and prosecution, and the truth of his innocence was suppressed."

Supporters believe that the boxes were packed away to hide evidence of Mumia's innocence; in essence, it is a cover-up of a frame-up. Their contents should be released to the public, and all charges against Mumia should be dismissed. Judge Tucker has asserted his jurisdiction over the boxes and the case; Mumia's attorneys have said that they will inspect the contents of the boxes as soon as they can.

The Philadelphia District Attorney's office has a history of suppressing evidence and is known for the infamous training video that taught Assistant DAs how to keep Blacks off juries. The sudden release of the boxes demonstrated the systematic denial of due process in Mumia's case. Mumia was denied justice at every turn, with no right to self-representation and no jury of his peers.

The notion that boxes of material from Mumia's case had been "misplaced" seems particularly suspicious in light of earlier efforts to tamper or withhold evidence in the case. The ballistics evidence was very questionable, for example. The bullet that police recovered was too damaged to be matched to Mumia's gun. A forensics report from the medical examiner noted that the bullet was a .44 caliber—but Mumia's pistol was a .38 caliber.

Similarly, crime scene photos taken by photojournalist Pedro Polokoff showed cops holding guns taken in evidence with their bare hands and showed the hat of deceased Officer Daniel Faulkner placed on top of Mumia's brother Billy Cook's Volkswagen, though it appears on the sidewalk in the official police photos.

Dismiss the charges! Free Mumia!

Speaking at the Philadelphia press conference on Jan. 15, Pam Africa, a leading organizer for Mumia's defense, demanded his freedom, saying, "After almost four decades in prison suffering from cirrhosis of the liver, Hepatitis C and related ailments, years of court delays will be nothing less than a death sentence and a denial of justice for Mumia. The evidence is here! Our job is to stop the conspiracy to torture and murder Mumia. After 37 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit, we are demanding that the charges be

(Above) Pam Africa of the International Friends and Family of Mumia Abu-Jamal speaks at a rally at the office of Philadelphia DA Larry Krasner on Dec. 28.

dismissed and he should be freed."

Earlier, at a Jan. 12 meeting at the People's Forum in New York City, Pam Africa said that the recent court victory and the "discovery" of the boxes must be credited to the "power of the people." She continued, "There's still a lot of work that needs to be done. Radio stations, churches, subways, communities—letting people know what is going on 'cause every minute, second, Mumia's closer to death. We're doing what they said we'd never be able to do, and that's bring Mumia home."

Mumia also addressed the New York meeting, via telephone. Moderator Robyn Spencer asked him, "How are you feeling now with the potential of the doors opening?" Mumia responded, "This is probably the first time I've been before a state judge in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania who was not paid by the FOP, and that means something."

Spencer then asked, "What can we take away from this [meeting]?" Mumia answered, "Resistance, organizing, movements, work. To quote John Africa: 'When you're committed to doing that which is right, the power of righteousness will never betray you' (quoted in New York *Amsterdam News*, Jan. 17, 2019).

Supporters of Mumia are projecting a mass action in Philadelphia on April 20 to demand his release. That will be followed by a student walkout on Mumia's birthday, April 24.

Now is the time to re-energize the fight to free Mumia—an innocent man who was framed-up because he dared to tell the truth about the corrupt and racist police and the court system. We cannot rely on politicians or their courts to win a victory. To win we need to build a powerful, *united* movement to free Mumia. We need to reach out to new forces—in the Black community and the labor movement, and among all of the oppressed.

The incarceration of radicals like Mumia, the MOVE 9, Leonard Peltier, and the almost two-dozen former Black Panther Party members who remain in America's prisons points to the fundamental injustice of the system. Together we can fight to free all political prisoners! Free Mumia! Free the MOVE 9 and all political prisoners! ■



... U.S. targets Venezuela

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the little-known engineer serving as president of the Venezuelan National Assembly, Juan Guaidó.

According to AP and the *Washington Post*, the preparations for the current coup and secret meetings with Guaidó date back at least to December 2018: "In mid-December, Guaidó quietly traveled to Washington, Colombia and Brazil to brief officials on the opposition's strategy of mass demonstrations to coincide with Maduro's expected swearing-in for a second term on Jan. 10."

On Jan. 22, Trump, Pence, and National Security Advisor John Bolton met to discuss options. According to *The Times*, Pence advised Trump to assure Guaidó that the U.S. would recognize his bid for power if, by chance, he were to make such a claim. Trump agreed. Later that day, Pence called Guaidó to give him the good news.

Pence then posted a video on-line asserting that elected President "Nicolas Maduro is a dictator with no legitimate claim to power." In the video, Pence went on to proclaim U.S. support for Guaidó. Then, surprise, surprise: Guaidó claimed he was the rightful president the very next day. The Trump administration and U.S. imperial allies around the world quickly endorsed Guaidó's claim.

Shortly after declaring himself "interim president," Guaidó moved to seize Venezuelan oil revenue held in the U.S. so as to use those funds to finance his assault. As the *Washington Post* reported, "For now, the hope is to use the newly declared interim government as a tool to deny Maduro the oil revenue from the United States that provides Venezuela virtually all of its incoming cash, current and former U.S. officials said."

On Jan. 29, the U.S. imposed additional sanctions on Venezuela's state-owned oil company, PDVSA (Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.). *Forbes* reports, "The restrictions would amount to \$7 billion in blocked assets today, and an estimated \$11 billion in export revenues over the course of 2019, according to [National Security Advisor John] Bolton." In an interview on *Fox Business*, Bolton bragged of how U.S. corporations would benefit from the new sanctions: "You know, Venezuela is one of the three countries I call the troika of tyranny. It will make a big difference to the United States economically if we could have American oil companies really invest in and produce the oil capabilities in Venezuela. It'd be good for the people of Venezuela. It'd be good for the people of the United States."

On Jan. 25, the Bank of England refused to allow Venezuela access to \$1.2 billion in its gold reserves. *Bloomberg* reports, "The Bank of England's decision to deny Maduro officials' withdrawal request comes after top U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton, lobbied their U.K. counterparts to help cut off the regime from its overseas assets." The U.S. Treasury department released a statement the same day announcing, "The United States will use its economic and diplomatic tools to ensure that commercial transactions by the Venezuelan Government, including those involving its state-owned enterprises and international reserves, are consistent with" U.S. recognition of Guaidó as the interim president.

Among the rationalizations presented in the corporate media for replacing Maduro with Guaidó is that the process that resulted in Maduro's 2018 election victory was flawed. But former U.S. President Jimmy Carter declared in 2012 that "the election process in Venezuela is the best in the world." In February 2018,

the main right-wing opposition parties, fearing defeat, pledged to boycott the presidential election scheduled for May. Two minor opposition candidates did participate. Maduro won the election, but as intended by the boycott, there was lower than normal voter turnout. The U.S. and the main Venezuelan opposition groups refused to recognize the results.

Guaidó and his backers among politicians and the media also cite Article 233 of the Venezuelan constitution as justification for his ascension. But that article refers only to a procedure to be followed if the elected president (Maduro in this case) were to become permanently unavailable. And in such a case, the next in line for the presidency would be Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, not Guaidó, who is the leader of the National Assembly.

Economic destabilization

Also cited as justification for attempting to illegally oust Maduro are severe inflation and other economic difficulties currently confronting Venezuela. In a perverse twist, corporate apologists seek to tie the current hardships in capitalist Venezuela to the "failure of socialism." Bret Stephens, writing in an Op-Ed for *The New York Times*, calls Venezuela a "socialist catastrophe," insisting that, "Twenty years of socialism, cheered by [Jeremy] Corbyn, [Naomi] Klein, [Noam] Chomsky and Co., led to the ruin of a nation."

What coup supporters fail to mention, however, is the campaign of harsh economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. and its imperial allies against Venezuela, dating back to the Obama administration. Those sanctions, together with U.S. moves to block loans to Venezuela from the world's leading financial institutions, have wreaked havoc with the Venezuelan economy.

In his recent report, former UN Special Rapporteur Alfred de Zayas characterized the sanctions as "economic warfare." He went on to recommend that the International Criminal Court investigate the economic sanctions against Venezuela as possible crimes against humanity. As quoted in the London-based *Independent*, de Zayas explained, "What's at stake is the enormous, enormous natural resources of Venezuela. And I sense that if Venezuela had no natural resources no one would give a damn about Chavez or Maduro or anybody else there."

Eugenia Russian of FUNDALATIN, a Venezuelan human rights organization formed before Hugo Chavez was elected president, explained to the *Independent*, "It is insufficient to see only the errors or deficiencies that the government may have, without seeing the environment of international pressure under which this population lives."

Familiar pattern

We should note that this latest campaign of U.S. imperial intervention is not the first of its kind directed against Venezuela or other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that refuse to march in lock step with U.S. corporate interests. Other hostile actions include:

- The illegal, decades-long economic blockade of Cuba.
- The CIA-backed invasion of Guatemala in 1954.
- The Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961.
- The invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965.
- The U.S. supported coup in Chile in 1973.
- The Contra war against Nicaragua from 1981-1990.
- The invasion of Grenada in 1983.
- The invasion of Panama in 1989.
- U.S. backed coups and occupations in Haiti in 1991,

1994, and 2004.

- The U.S. supported coup in Honduras in 2009.
- Material aid to Nicaraguan opposition groups from at least 2016 to the present.
- Support for Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.
- The U.S. supported coup against Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in 2002.
- Economic sanctions against Venezuela from 2006 to the present.
- A special \$5 million fund for Venezuelan opposition groups established by Barak Obama in 2011.
- Coup attempts against Venezuela's Maduro in 2015 and 2018.

The Wall Street Journal reported on Jan. 30 that the current U.S. attack on Venezuela is but the first move in a strategy to "reshape Latin America." In particular, "After Venezuela and Cuba, U.S. officials are eyeing Nicaragua."

Fighting back

When first elected in 1998, the Chavez government promoted significant reforms. It used revenue from the nationalized PDVSA energy sector to increase social spending by 60% from 2002-2012. By 2012, Venezuela had reduced inequality by 54% and poverty by 44%. Extreme poverty was reduced from 40% in 1996 to 7.3% in 2010. Medical care became free, as did education from preschool through university. But today, under relentless economic and political attack by U.S. imperialism and its allies, many of these reforms have been whittled away and the living conditions of the working class have become ever more dire.

Socialists support Venezuela's right to self-determination unconditionally. But this does not imply agreement with every policy or pronouncement of the Chavez and Maduro governments. Within Venezuela, the only force strong enough to beat back the current assault and future imperial offensives is the masses of working people.

Unfortunately, the Venezuelan United Socialist Party, led by President Maduro, has failed to fully prioritize working class interests. Despite its name, it has demonstrated—by its consistent defense of private industry, land, and banking, and by its failure to fully mobilize the independent power of masses of working people—that it is a capitalist rather than a socialist party.

When faced with similar aggression in the 1960s, the Cubans took a different road, leading ultimately to the arming of the workers and peasants, nationalization of key industries and banking under workers' control, and the creation of committees of workers and farmers in every village, neighborhood, and workplace to defend their revolution.

Up to now, Maduro, and Chavez before him, have sought to *tame* Venezuelan capitalism in the hope of gaining enough breathing space to implement reforms. Meanwhile, attacks from the still-powerful Venezuelan capitalist class and their imperial boosters continue unabated.

In this manner, the Venezuelan working class has been fighting with one hand tied behind its back. Unleashing the full strength of the working class and openly challenging the capitalists for power offers the best chance of defeating the current and all future attacks against the Venezuelan people.

Nevertheless, we do not place conditions on our support for the self-determination of the Venezuelan people. Changes or improvements in the Venezuelan government are for the Venezuelan people alone to make. The U.S. imperial machine has no progressive role in Venezuela or elsewhere!

The last thing U.S. corporate leaders want is a truly mobilized, active and empowered Venezuelan working class. In the U.S., antiwar and working-class activists must take to the streets to demand, "U.S. Out Now! Hands Off Venezuela!"

Same enemy, same fight

Working people in the U.S. must understand that the same corporate behemoths that push for cutbacks, layoffs, offshoring, and austerity here at home—all to maximize corporate profits—are behind the latest threats against Venezuela. Working people in the U.S. gain nothing, and stand to lose much, if the one percent succeeds in imposing their will on the Venezuelan people. For this reason, we must do all that we can to stay the hand of the warmakers, understanding that in this context as in so many others, an injury to one is an injury to all.

The power of organized, mobilized workers is the only thing that coup plotters, war hawks, and capitalist oligarchs in the U.S. or Venezuela truly fear. Two recent examples demonstrate this point:

The first is the recent strike of the Los Angeles teachers. Inspired by their brother and sister unionists who fought and won strikes in West Virginia, Virginia, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Arizona, the 34,000-strong

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Hartford teachers fight superintendant's assault

By ERNIE GOTTA

Across the country, teachers in their thousands are fighting back against poor working conditions, low wages, overflowing classrooms, and unusable health care. Following teachers in Arizona, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and West Virginia, Los Angeles teachers erupted in a strike last month. They are 34,000 teachers strong and taking a stand against austerity in the country's second largest school district.

From L.A. to Hartford, Conn., urban areas are being hit hard with austerity. Hartford itself has a lot of contradictions. It is one of the poorest cities in the country, yet it is in one of the wealthiest states and surrounded by affluent suburbs. The needs of a city rich with Latino, Afro-Caribbean, and African-American culture is routinely ignored by the state government while at the same time it regularly squeezes more and more out of its residents.

Today, the city's mayor, Luke Bronin, through his appointed officials on the school board along with Superintendent Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, is attempting to weaken the Hartford Federation of Teachers by demanding greater and greater givebacks. In their last contract, teachers agreed to take a pay freeze to help out the struggling city. The superintendents newly proposed contract seeks to cut even more, and teachers don't want another lousy contract.

Below is an interview with Joshua Blanchfield, one of the 1900 rank-and-file members of the Hartford Federation of Teachers who has been active in the contract fight. He discusses the issues and ways in which teachers in Hartford are fighting back.

Ernie Gotta: I've been following your tweets about the developing situation with Hartford teachers. What would you say is the root cause of the Superintendent's attack on the Hartford Federation of Teachers?

Joshua Blanchfield: The proposal from the Superintendent and the Hartford Board of Education is unfortunately in line with other anti-union, anti-teacher contracts that have been pushed across the country, especially in urban districts. Hartford, like many urban school districts, operates under the inherently undemocratic system of mayoral control of educational governance.

This component of the city charter enables the mayor to stack the Hartford Board of Education with political appointees and sycophants. They comprise the majority of the board and simply act as a rubber stamp for the superintendent. When you have a power structure like this, anti-union policies, and in this case contracts, become the norm, and this has played out across the country.

EG: What are biggest issues that Hartford teachers feel need to be addressed?

JB: The financial crisis of the municipality of Hartford has been front-page news for many years now, worsening each year. In a good faith effort, the Hartford Federation of Teachers has proven time and again that we love our city and our students. In the previous contract negotiations two years ago, as a tangible example of our commitment, we agreed to a wage freeze. It hurt, but we



(Above) Hartford School Superintendent Leslie Torres-Rodriguez (ctr.) at community meeting to discuss closure of several schools.

wanted to help our city in a very real way.

Keep in mind, no other organ of Hartford Public Schools did this: principals kept getting raises, and most grotesquely, the Superintendent's shameful salary continued to balloon. It now is a quarter of a million dollars. In this latest fight, the Superintendent demanded another two years of wage freezes, while at the same time forcing every teacher into a high deductible (\$4000) health savings account, with deductions from wages increasing. This would represent four years of frozen wages and higher health-care costs, so all of it is massive wage cuts for every teacher.

But really, that's the tip of the iceberg in this contract fight: cutting all prep time, cutting the sick time bank in order to terminate sick workers more easily, ending standardized documentation of student discipline, and cutting lines in the salary schedule to punish highly educated workers.

Finally, the most boldfaced attack on our union was to force the HFT to have only one detached duty officer, down from three. These three teachers, the president and our two vice presidents, coordinate over 1900 teachers. And even now they are overworked. To cut it to one would effectively kill the union.

EG: How are teachers responding to the current situation, considering that in the last contract they agreed to a pay freeze?

JB: Basically, by using all the tools in the tool box. Everything from social media to directly confronting the Superintendent at nonpublic "executive session" board of education meetings has been employed. The pressure from all these angles did effectively shame the Superintendent back to the negotiating table even after pushing the whole process to arbitration.

EG: Are teachers linking their fight and needs to the needs of the broader Hartford community? If so how are those connections beginning to unfold?

JB: We have always operated by the maxim that the working conditions of the teachers become the learning conditions for our students. When you devalue teach-

ers, you devalue students. Families and students are the best ones to vocalize this—and they have. At the most recent board of education meeting, the public comments hammered the Superintendent and Board for this action. It is amazing how powerful a force it is when the students, families, and teachers are galvanized and have total solidarity.

EG: Do you find a connection between the insurgent teachers' struggles that have emerged across the country and the response to attacks on Hartford teachers?

JB: Ever since the election of Karen Lewis and Jesse Sharkey as the leaders of the Chicago Teachers Union, we have been more in touch with the struggles of teachers nationwide. The CTU reinvigorated our struggle, as well as the fight to defend public education, and we owe them a great debt. This teacher militancy and urgency to defend public education has now spread everywhere.

Like never before though, Hartford teachers have begun discussions of labor unrest, especially within the punitive Connecticut system, which explicitly outlaws teachers from striking. I will just say we're discussing all options.

EG: Do you see this situation being resolved with a favorable outcome for the teachers?

JB: Because of Connecticut's binding arbitration laws, we will at this point be handed a contract and have no vote on it, nor will the Hartford Board of Education members. Discussions involving both sides have progressed before the three-member arbitration panel, and it seems because of pressure on the Superintendent, there has been movement away from such a punishing, antagonistic contract.

EG: Anything else you'd like to add?

JB: The larger goal of teacher militancy and worker control needs to extend beyond the contract fight. That is where the real work lies. ■

Books

Cuba-Canada relations: Diplomacy from below

By BARRY WEISLEDER

"Other Diplomacies, Other Ties: Cuba and Canada in the Shadow of the U.S.," Luis Rene Fernandez Tabio, Cynthia Wright, and Lana Wylie, ed., 363 pages, University of Toronto Press, 2018.

In the wake of Ottawa's vocal support for the latest U.S.-backed attempt at a coup d'etat in Venezuela, studies on foreign relations take on a profound sense of urgency.

Setting aside the cumbersome title, this book's 12 chapters, produced by historians based both in Canada and Cuba, cover the subject of relations with Cuba thoroughly, even with some duplication. Convenient summaries conclude every segment.

For me, the chapter on Cuba's pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal was particularly riveting. I remember visiting that World's Fair, titled "Man and His World / Terre des Hommes", and that unique pavilion. I and dozens of my fellow junior high school students were chaperoned from Toronto by our teachers. I recall the building's futuristic cube structure, the huge, austere black and white photos, and the evocative, radical slogans on the walls: a combination that blew my then apolitical mind.

The book puts in context a moment of world social upheaval, shaped by the revolutions in Cuba and Algeria; the example of Che Guevara, soon to be assassinated; and the multiple revolts of 1968, from France to Italy to Prague to the Tet Offensive in Vietnam.

"Other Diplomacies" reminds us that defending a revolution is harder than making one. Exploiting the contradictions, however relative and small, between the imperialist powers is a high priority. Its examination of Conservative Prime Minister John Diefenbaker's differences with Washington over Cuba, not to mention whether to accept nuclear weapons on Canada's territory, shows an autonomy that arises from a different relationship of class forces.

The fact that Canada and Mexico did not break diplomatic relations with revolutionary Cuba, unlike all the other countries of the Western Hemisphere in the 1960s, provided an important lifeline to the first workers' republic west of Europe. The impact endures. Canada remains Cuba's fourth biggest partner in trade; 1.3 million Canadian tourists visit Cuba every year. Sherritt International, the Canadian-based nickel extractor, is still the largest corporate investor in the island.

These and other features of the relationship are at least partly a product of a relatively more class-inde-

pendent workers' movement in the Canadian state, including Quebec, and the efforts of at least three generations of socialists and Cuba solidarity activists north of the U.S. border. The Fair Play for Cuba Committees, on both sides of the divide, well deserve the recognition afforded by the book.

Diplomats as spies, and mass media scribes as shameless propagandists for a corporate agenda, continue to ply their trades. Educational and cultural exchanges continue to make inroads against anti-communist bias. Cuba is embraced by a world that has received its generous gifts of top-notch medical care and disaster relief aid. Washington remains powerful but more politically isolated than ever, its economy in decline, its military apparatus strained by chronic overreach.

Following the 60th anniversary of the overthrow of the made-in-USA Fulgencio Batista dictatorship, Cuba's leadership and people are wrestling with choices, the need to strike a balance of economic development, social equality, and *Poder Popular* (peoples' power), yearning for the next revolutions that will quicken the pace to world socialist transformation.

Not by conventional diplomacy, such transformations will certainly be informed by the "Other Diplomacies" that animate working class solidarity. ■

Books: The Nicaraguan revolution betrayed

LVDS / TelesurTV



BY LAZARO MONTEVERDE

A review of *What went wrong? The Nicaraguan Revolution: A Marxist Analysis* by Dan La Botz. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2018.

When I visited Nicaragua in 1983 as part of a delegation of religious activists from the Central America Movement, I thought I was witnessing a miracle. The country was radically transformed both economically and culturally. So different was it from my previous visit in 1978, when the country was ruled by the brutal caudillo Anastasio Somoza Debayle and his family, that I did not believe my eyes.

So different too was it from my beloved Honduras, which had been ruled by General Melgar Castro in the 1970s, another caudillo, and which was now in the 1980s ruled almost directly from the U.S. Embassy. Our delegation had first visited Honduras. The difference between the two countries, and the differences in Nicaragua before and after the 1979 revolution struck all of us.

The political history of Latin America is the repetitive story of the caudillo. A caudillo is a strong man or woman who exercises authoritarian rule, using the military and a political party. Caudillos can be of the right or left, or in some cases both, as with Peron in Argentina, who moved from left to right. Caudillos dominate the history of Latin America because of the institutional weakness of the Latin American ruling classes and because of the comprador nature of the elites, serving not just their own interests but the interests of the imperialist powers.

Latin America has witnessed at least six significant revolutions (and many more pre-revolutionary situations), beginning with the historic Haitian revolution of 1791 to 1804 (1). The second was the Mexican Revolution of 1910 to 1920. The Mexican Revolution was ultimately "interrupted," and a one-party nominally democratic state serving Mexican capital arose led by the PRI, the Institutionalized Revolutionary Party (2).

The third revolution was the Cuban Revolution of 1958-59, which resulted in a revolutionary socialist government (3). The fourth was in Chile, from 1970 to 1973, under the leadership of Salvador Allende. This "third way" revolution, a revolution based on winning elections, was destroyed in the U.S.-backed military coup of Sept. 11, 1973 (4). The fifth was the Grenadan Revolution of 1979, which ended after the U.S. invasion of 1983 (5). And the sixth was the Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979 to 1990, analyzed in "What went wrong? The Nicaraguan Revolution: A Marxist Analysis," by Dan La Botz.

La Botz's new book is the single best history of the Nicaraguan Revolution to appear. It is a must read for serious revolutionaries and antiwar, anti-imperialist activists. He has synthesized a great deal of the his-

'Ortega has become a caudillo, basing his power in the army and the FSLN, which now operates as a patronage machine.'

tory of the revolution from both Spanish and English sources. His book will also be essential reading for years to come for all who wish to understand the dynamics of change in Latin America and who seek to build a world socialist revolution.

A Marxist analysis

La Botz presents a Marxist analysis of the Nicaraguan revolution, that is to say, an analysis grounded in the political and cultural history of Nicaragua that focuses on questions of social class and class power. The book is dense with historical facts and analysis at the same time that it is highly readable and engaging. I wish to summarize a small portion of the text so that the reader will have an idea of his achievement.

La Botz begins in Chapter 1 with the pre-colonization history of the indigenous peoples, traces the conquest of the region by the Spanish, and the independence of Central America from Spain in the early 19th century. Much of Chapter 1 details the post-independence period of Nicaragua from 1821 to 1893, an especially important time. It was during this time that conservative and liberal wings of the ruling elite fought each other for control of the government, with neither faction of the ruling class gaining control.

It was also during this period that Great Britain and the U.S. competed for imperial dominance of Nicaragua and all of Latin America. The famous, in Latin America we would say infamous, Monroe doctrine, articulated by President James Monroe in 1823, declared all of Latin America to be in the U.S. sphere of influence, to be essentially "our backyard." Saying it does not make it so, however, and the U.S. had to struggle against Great Britain, and to a lesser extent the vestiges of Spanish power in Cuba and Puerto Rico, for almost 100 years before the U.S. empire totally dominated Latin America in the early 1920s.

This period includes the efforts of Cornelius Vanderbilt to construct a transoceanic canal through Nicaragua, starting in 1849, and the invasion and occupation of Nicaragua by William Walker in 1855-1857. Walker and his backers in the U.S. hoped to expand slavery into Latin America (Nicaragua had abolished slavery in 1838), made English the official language, and awarded vast tracts of land to Walker's U.S. soldiers. When Walker returned to the U.S. he was treat-

ed as a hero. He spoke at a mass meeting of 20,000 whites in New Orleans in 1860, on the eve of the U.S. Civil War.

Chapter 2 examines the period of 1893 to 1935, when the Nicaraguan ruling class and the U.S. imperialists built the modern Nicaraguan state and capitalist economy. During this period the U.S. directly occupied Nicaragua from 1909 to 1927. After withdrawing U.S. troops in 1927, the U.S. re-occupied Nicaragua from 1927 to 1933 to fight against the troops of Augusto Sandino in an extraordinarily violent civil war. Sandino had a nationalist and anti-imperialist political program but he was not a socialist.

In the mid-1920s, the U.S. pressured a number of Latin American countries through treaties with the U.S. to form their own national guards or armies. These national guards were trained and shaped by the U.S. as instruments of local political and military control. Sandino, with approximately 2000 troops, fought against 5000 U.S. Marines and 2000 Nicaraguan National Guard troops. The Great Depression in the U.S. and the resistance of Sandino

and his troops led to new elections in Nicaragua in 1932 and the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 1933.

A truce and peace conference was soon announced, and soon afterward Sandino laid down his arms. A year later, after dining with the president, Sandino and his top advisors were ambushed and executed by the Nicaraguan National Guard.

Chapter 3 outlines the rise and dominance of the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua from 1936 to 1975. During this period the Somoza family ruled Nicaragua as loyal servants of U.S. and Nicaraguan capital. They tried to modernize the Nicaraguan state and economy in the service of themselves, their cronies, and their U.S. masters. In this, the Somoza family formed alliances or pacts with various local capitalists, the labor movement, and political parties. The Somoza family itself dominated the Liberal Party, one of the two traditional political parties in Nicaragua, as well as controlling the National Guard. They became a classic Latin American caudillo dynasty.

Cuban revolution inspired Nicaraguan youth

Chapters 4 and 5 shift the narrative focus away from the development of the Nicaraguan state and economy to the emergence and triumph of the FSLN. La Botz traces the history of the FSLN and its key figures to the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN-Partido Socialista Nicaraguense), the Stalinist Communist Party of Nicaragua. All the founding members of the FSLN were young militants in that party, which backed the Somoza dynasty at various times.

These young militants were deeply influenced by the Cuban revolution, which triumphed in January 1959. They broke with the PSN around two issues. The first was the subordination of the struggles in Nicaragua to the needs of the USSR. The second was the use of armed guerilla struggle based on the Cuban model of "focos" nuclei of militants fighting in the jungle or mountains with connections to peasants and workers.

This break with the PSN and an embrace of armed struggle led to the formation of two guerrilla groups—the New Nicaragua Movement, formed in 1961 by Carlos Fonseca, and the Sandinista Revolutionary Front by Eden Pastora. Under pressure from Cuba, their main sponsor, both groups merged in 1961-62 under the name the National Liberation Front (FLN), a tribute to the Algerian revolutionary organization. The group soon added Sandinista to its name to become the FSLN.

For most of its 18-year struggle, the FSLN remained a marginal and ineffective force. They sent their best militants into the jungle to take up armed struggle and never succeeded in forming close connections with peasants and workers. Nor did they succeed in

(continued on page 7)

... Nicaragua

(continued from page 6)

growing the organization and threatening the Somoza dynasty.

They did emerge as the only steadfast and uncompromising political force against the dynasty. In the mid-1970s they carried out some spectacular actions, including assassinations and kidnappings. Also in the 1970s, two important developments occurred. First, radical Christians influenced by Vatican II adopted a theology of liberation that was highly critical of capitalism and imperialism. A number of priests and nuns began working closely with the FSLN to form a socialist revolution. Second, the PSN and the FSLN began working together closely in 1976 and formally merged in 1978.

Alongside these advances, the FSLN suffered substantial losses due to military attacks, including the death of Carlos Fonseca in 1976 and the near total destruction of all the focos. With the death of Fonseca, the primary leader of the organization, a split occurred within the group. Two currents emerged, the Prolonged People's War current, led by Tomás Borge, and representing the historic orientation of Fonseca, and the Proletarian Tendency, which sought to develop organizations among urban and especially rural workers.

The Prolonged People's War current expelled the Proletarian Tendency and threatened to kill them. At the same time, a third current emerged, led by Daniel Ortega and his brother Humberto, that favored a mass insurrection and alliances with capitalists and capitalist political parties. This current became known as the Third Tendency, or Terceristas in Spanish.

As popular discontent with the Somoza dynasty was on the rise, including a spontaneous and brutally repressed mass insurrection in 1978, Fidel Castro sought to re-unify the FSLN. Given the defeat of virtually all the guerrilla focos in 1976, the Prolonged People's War group was not the dominant faction in the reunified organization. The Terceristas allied with the weaker Proletarian Tendency to gain effective control. The reunification was announced in March of 1979 with a directory of nine commanders (comandantes), three from each tendency. The Terceristas under Ortega's leadership was in effective political control. Using cross-class political alliances and with Sandinista leadership of a mass urban and rural insurrection, the Somoza dynasty ended on July 19, 1979.

Chapters 6 and 7 detail the FSLN in power immediately after the overthrow of the Somoza dynasty, through the Contra War of the 1980s, to their electoral defeat in 1990. Originally working in coalition, the FSLN was able to consolidate its power over the state by smashing the existing state apparatus and rebuilding it along Sandinista lines. Chapter 6 and 7 discuss the successes of the revolution, including the literacy campaign and the health campaigns, and the revolution's initial failures, such as the relations with the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean coast.

La Botz does not discuss the incredible success of the revolution in feeding the Nicaraguan people and eliminating malnutrition, one of the main achievements. In these chapters La Botz also highlights the lack of democracy within the FSLN and within the top-down mass organizations they created. Chapter 7 details the Contra War and the U.S. efforts to destroy the revolution. Given the massive literature on this subject, La Botz's chapter is necessarily brief but to the point.

Chapters 8 and 9 trace the restoration of the neoliberal capitalist regime in Nicaragua from 1990, when the Sandinistas lost a crucial election, to Ortega's return to power in 2006. This period marked two important developments. First, the restoration of a neoliberal capitalist government and economic model in Nicaragua, beginning with the government of Violeta Chamorro (1990-96) and then under the governments of Alemán (1996-2001) and Bolaños (2001-2006). These regimes were also corrupt.

Second, the capitalist restoration of the state and economy was carried out with the collaboration of the FSLN, especially the Ortega brothers. This restoration included a number of political pacts and agreements and two massive give-aways of state assets to the leaders of the FSLN. The Ortega brothers, Borge, and others became multimillionaires overnight, and they converted the FSLN and its unions into giant patronage machines. The capitalist restoration could not have taken place without the active participation of the FSLN leadership, who prevented any democratic decision-making in the party and drove out many of the original cadre who did not accept the betrayal of the revolution.

In Chapter 10, La Botz traces the period from 2006 to the present, when Ortega won election to the presidency and became a new caudillo. He immediately set



(Above) President Daniel Ortega and wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, following their election with 72 percent of the vote in 2016.

about consolidating his hold over society, changing the constitution to permit his re-election and the election of his wife as his vice-president. He also installed his children as the heads of key media corporations or government agencies. Ortega and his family are creating a new caudillo dynasty to rule over Nicaragua in the interests of capital (although not necessarily U.S. capital).

Chapter 10 also highlights some of Ortega's reactionary policies, especially against women, Indigenous peoples, independent unions, and the environment. Ultimately, as La Botz shows, the Nicaraguan revolution has degenerated into a tragedy.

While "What went wrong? The Nicaraguan Revolution" is a germinal work, it is not without its political weaknesses. La Botz rightly emphasizes a major failing: the lack of democracy within the FSLN and within the Sandinista government. He also notes the failure of the FSLN to carry out a revolutionary program, especially to give land to the peasants. This criticism, also important, has been made by Socialist Action from the early 1980s onward and was communicated by SA directly to the Sandinistas.

But La Botz does not spend enough time examining the imperialist intervention beginning immediately after the overthrow of the Somoza dynasty and continuing through 1990. No isolated revolution can survive for long without support. Socialism in one country is a Stalinist myth and cannot exist in the real world.

Lessons for today

"The lessons of the Nicaraguan Revolution," La Botz writes, "that is, the answers to the question 'What went wrong?' therefore have valuable broader implications, not only for understanding the past, but also for contemporary politics and the struggle for socialism in the future" (p. 1). In my opinion, La Botz highlights some of these lessons but not all. What then are the lessons for today?

First, the current Ortega government is not a revolutionary government. Ortega has become a caudillo, basing his power in the army and the FSLN, which now operates as a patronage machine. Ortega is now a wealthy capitalist himself, as are other top Sandinistas, and he is building a family dynasty.

The U.S. does not forget or forgive easily, and while Ortega is a capitalist and a pro-capitalist politician, he is also pursuing an independent foreign policy that is critical of the U.S. This by itself would place him on the U.S. imperialists' "enemies list." But it gets worse since Ortega and the Sandinistas are close allies of China, and especially seek Chinese investment, such as for the proposed transoceanic canal in Nicaragua.

The correct position for U.S. anti-imperialist and anti-war activists to take is the one adopted by the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International on Oct. 28, 2018: Solidarity with popular demands and against Ortega's repression and U.S. intervention (6).

Second, the foco strategy, and more broadly guerrilla warfare, is a political dead end. Following the Cuban revolution, and also under the influence of the Vietnamese revolution, many revolutionaries around the world turned toward a foquista strategy, believing that revolution is best brought about by small groups of revolutionaries (focos) fighting in the mountains or jungles to build a base of resistance to the regime.

This strategy failed in Nicaragua, and elsewhere, starting with Che's tragically doomed efforts in Bolivia. As La Botz shows, when the FSLN modified their foquista strategy to include organizing among the working class and mass urban insurrections, they were able to achieve success—although, unfortunate-

ly, only in coalition with capitalist elites.

A guerrilla strategy excludes the masses and makes socialist revolution unlikely. But what about Cuba, you may ask? The history of the Cuban revolution is more complicated than the official story. It followed a pattern similar in many ways to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the July 26 movement used many of the elements of the Leninist strategy. The Cuban revolution was a mass revolution carried out by the urban and rural working class, led by a vanguard organization, the July 26 movement. The real path forward is by adopting a Leninist strategy.

Socialist revolutions can only be made by the masses, with the leadership of a vanguard party. The FSLN took the role of the vanguard in Nicaragua, but as long as it sought to substitute itself for the masses it failed.

Making a revolution is not the same as making a successful revolution. To be successful, the vanguard must have a revolutionary program. There must be democracy in the vanguard and in the mass organizations. And ultimately, there must be world revolution, for socialism cannot be built or survive in one country. This is the essence of the lessons of all the revolutions in the 20th century.

Nicaragua now

Nicaragua is again in the news. In April 2018 mass opposition to the Ortega government erupted after Ortega cut social security benefits. Students soon joined their parents and grandparents in protesting the cuts and demanding that Ortega resign and new elections be held. These protests spread and were violently repressed by Ortega and his security forces. At present, many from the political opposition are in hiding or exile.

Many on the left treat the Ortega dictatorship as a progressive and revolutionary force, seemingly following the logic of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Nothing could be further from the truth, as La Botz's evidence proves time and again.

This is not to say, however, that the U.S. is not conspiring to overthrow Ortega and replace him with a loyal servant to U.S. imperial interests. This is exactly what happened in neighboring Honduras in 2009 when the U.S. backed a coup that overthrew the democratically elected president who dared propose minor reforms that would hurt corporate profits and improve the lot of the Honduran people.

The subsequent U.S. puppet regimes, backed strongly by the U.S., have undermined the rule of law in Honduras and produced the wave of violence that now forces thousands of Hondurans to flee their homes for the U.S. and Mexico.

While U.S. covert operations in Nicaragua are difficult to pinpoint, it is clear that the U.S. government has made an effort to strangle the Nicaraguan economy (yet again) with the NICA Act of December 2018, signed into law by Trump. The act seeks to cut off international aid and loans to Nicaragua, a classic imperialist tactic of economic warfare.

I saw with my own eyes what difference a revolution could make, and my heart is shattered by the betrayal of that revolution by the FSLN and the defeat of that revolution by U.S. imperialism. But having seen revolution, I have hope. I know that revolution is complex, difficult, hard; but revolution is also possible and necessary. If you wish to make a revolution, you need to learn from past revolutions. Dan La Botz's book is essential for that purpose. ■

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

RCMP ambushes Indigenous defenders of the land

By GARY PORTER

The Canadian state brutally violated the Rights of Unist'ot'en and Gidimt'en clans of the Wet'suwet'en Nation, in the interests of the Oil and Gas Barons. Demonstrations immediately occurred in over 30 cities as thousands of Canadians showed they are fed up with Official Racism.

The RCMP moved to enforce a B.C. Supreme Court injunction to allow pipeline workers to pass through two Wet'suwet'en checkpoints on Jan. 9. A heavily armed SWAT team attacked peaceful indigenous protesters and violently arrested 14 land defenders.

Over the next two days, virtually spontaneous demonstrations occurred in dozens of towns and cities in reaction to repeated state violence against Indigenous people and against the pollution that emanates from the global corporate profit machine. Mass media was excluded by the cops from the site of the attack, but photos taken by Indigenous bystanders show protesters being cruelly attacked by many police officers, pushing their faces into the snow.

The permanent Unist'ot'en camp, and the more recently established Gidimt'en checkpoint, are part of an ongoing effort by Wet'suwet'en hereditary leaders and members to protect unceded lands from pipeline construction. "The proposed pipelines are a threat to the watershed, as well as to the plants, animals and communities that depend on them," the Unist'ot'en Camp states on its website.

While more than one proposed pipeline would cross through Wet'suwet'en traditional territory, Trans Canada's Coastal GasLink project is at the centre of the current injunction dispute.

The proposed Coastal GasLink pipeline would span 670 kilometres across northern British Columbia. It is intended to supply natural gas from near Dawson



Elizabeth Wang / The Ubysey

Creek, B.C., to the planned LNG Canada export facility near Kitimat, B.C., where it would be converted to liquefied natural gas for export. Construction is estimated to cost about \$4.8 billion.

According to LNG Canada, Coastal GasLink would be the only pipeline to supply its facility in Kitimat, B.C. on the Pacific coast. A company spokesperson called it an "essential component of the LNG Canada project." This \$40 billion project to be built by a global consortium will subject the entire area to heavy gas fracking operations. Preliminary fracking was recently halted in the wake of earthquakes. Moreover, the project makes it impossible for B.C. to meet its carbon reduction goals.

Jody Wilson-Raybould, recently demoted by Prime Minister Trudeau from Justice Minister to Veterans' Affairs Minister, issued a 1100-word tract on her demotion. Citing the PM's own words, that the relationship between Canada and Indigenous people is the "most important" one, she reminds all that "the work that must be done is well known," and "legislative and policy changes based on the recognition of title and rights, including historic treaties, are urgently

needed." Toward the end of her letter she pledges to "continue to be directly engaged" in advancing "fundamental shifts."

Wilson-Raybould is a woman of Kwakwaka'wakw heritage who was previously the Regional Chief of the BC Assembly of First Nations. And her words were being written the week after a heavily armed RCMP contingent used force to remove Wet'suwet'en activists from a "checkpoint" on the road to a work camp for gas-line workers. The line crosses lands where, courts have ruled, hereditary chiefs hold historic and traditional title. Those chiefs, it seems, were not part of the "consultation and accommodations" promised for the project.

The elected Band Council is a creation of the colonial settler federal government-imposed Indian Act of 1876, which treated Indigenous people as wards of the state, essentially as children. In an attempt to destroy the traditional basis of indigenous government, the Act created elected Band Councils, which, the government assumed, could be more easily swayed than traditional hereditary chiefs.

It turns out that was true in this case. The Band Council came to terms with the Trans Canada Pipeline. But the hereditary chiefs were not included and do oppose the pipeline. The clans for the most part are following the hereditary chiefs.

The big question remains: By what right is Trans Canada Pipeline able to get a court injunction to allow their workers onto un-ceded Indigenous land in the first place? By what conceivable logic can the RCMP, claiming to be "neutral" and merely "enforcing the law," send heavily armed SWAT team members onto Indigenous land and brutally attack a peaceful road blockade, arresting 14 native land defenders in the process. The cops are far from neutral. They are imposing the will of settler capitalism on the Indigenous people. They are enforcing the laws of the white man to seize Indigenous land and using it to generate white profits.

The settler government has consistently violated indigenous sovereignty and the right to self-determination in the interests of white capitalist profit and racist social policy. The Canadian federal government, for decades, organized the forced removal of Indigenous children to brutal Residential Schools. In those schools, many were physically, sexually and psychologically abused, over-worked, under-fed and punished for speaking their own language. Many children died.

In 2010, Ottawa endorsed the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The latest Trudeau/RCMP action violates the declaration dramatically. The racist policy and practice has to cease. Trans Canada Pipeline should get off Indigenous land. Protesters should be released and RCMP excluded from Indigenous land. No to the pipeline! No to the LNG Canada fracking operation! Self-determination for Indigenous people! ■

In Canada, the right to strike exists ... until you try to use it

Postal workers, power workers, teachers, and bus drivers are recent victims of a disturbing trend—loss of the right to strike. In the case of members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, federal Liberal back to work legislation on Nov. 27 put a halt to five weeks of rotating strikes. Up to then, no cross-country work stoppage occurred, and there was only a minor mail backlog.

On Dec. 20, the Conservative Ontario government passed a no strike law aimed at 6000 Power Workers' Union members who run hydroelectric stations and nuclear plants *before any job action began*. Back in the spring, a Liberal Ontario regime broke the strike of teaching assistants, members of CUPE Local 3903, at York University.

In May 2015, Queen's Park stopped secondary school teachers from exercising their "right to strike" at three school boards. In 2009, the government imposed a back-to-work law on striking Toronto Transit Commission workers.

According to the Canadian Foundation for Labour Rights (CFLR), a serious erosion of the fundamental and universal human right to organize into a union, and to engage in free collective bargaining is spreading.

Federal and provincial governments in Canada passed 224 pieces of legislation since 1982 that have limited, suspended

or denied collective bargaining rights.

Authorities restricted the right of unions to organize. Collective agreements have been torn up. Negotiated wages and benefits have been taken away. Employers' proposals have been legislatively imposed on workers and the right to strike removed. Both the private and the public sectors have been hit.

The CFLR finds that "there has been a major change in the frequency and severity of back-to-work legislation in Canada in recent years. Since the early 1980s, the number of instances of back-to-work legislation is higher than any other period in the history of labour relations in Canada. In the last three decades, the federal government alone passed 19 pieces of back-to-work legislation while provincial governments across the country have enacted 73 pieces of back-to-work legislation.

"Most of this legislation (50 of the 92 pieces of legislation) not only forced workers back to work after taking strike action, but also arbitrarily imposed settlements on the striking workers. In 2011 postal workers were locked out, then had terms and conditions imposed on them.

"A common phenomenon in the public sector throughout the 1980s and 1990s has been the suspension of collective bargaining rights. With the exception of Saskatchewan, public sector workers across Canada gained the right to collec-

tive bargaining in the decade between 1967 and 1977. In the three decades that followed, most public sector workers have had their collective bargaining rights suspended anywhere from three to ten years.

"There have been 53 pieces of legislation passed in the federal Parliament and provincial legislatures that have suspended the collective bargaining rights of public sector workers.

"Since 1982, there have also been 80 instances where federal and provincial labour laws have been amended to further restrict unions' ability to organize and bargain collectively. Nine pieces of legislation have actually denied certain categories of workers the right to join a union and nine pieces of legislation have restricted the certification process hurting the labour movement's ability to organize the unorganized.

"There have been 62 instances where the federal and provincial governments passed legislation that restricted the rules and/or scope of bargaining, denied the right to strike and limited the mechanisms available for settlement of disputes or allowed for greater government and/or employer interference in internal union matters."

In a recent news release, Fred Hahn, President of CUPE Ontario asked, "When are we going to see 'back to the bargain-

ing table' legislation forcing employers to deal with workers' representatives fairly and appropriately?"

Clearly, the bosses' agenda is not about bargaining. It is about squeezing workers, and using the law to deprive workers of a legal recourse. Thus, what pressure can workers hope to apply? Traditionally, less than two per cent of collective bargaining led to a legal strike. Today, even that low incidence is being reduced to a rarity.

Why? Because the capitalist rulers have fewer crumbs to offer. They seek to solve their deep economic problems on the backs of working people. Conservative labour leaders and cowardly social democrats compound the problem by acquiescing to concessions demanded by management. General Motors, after milking the public for billions of dollars in aid, is planning to shut down auto production in Oshawa—and seems to be getting away scot-free.

What is the solution? Workers should look to history to see how the first unions were built, and how improvements were won. May 1, 2019, marks the 100th anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike.

A general strike—now there's an idea whose time has come again! History teaches that *struggle decides, not the law*.

— Compiled by BARRY WEISLEDER

Self-proclaimed ‘feminists’ on Heritage Foundation panel speak against transgender rights

By AUTUMN RAIN and ERWIN FREED

On Jan. 28, the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing and anti-LGBTQIA group, hosted a panel titled, “The Inequality of the Equality Act: Concerns From the Left.” The speakers were trans-exclusive radical feminists (TERFs) who argued against rights for transgender people, ostensibly “from the left.” Yet one would rightly ask why self-avowed leftists would (1) make the denial of rights to one group of people their central political goal and (2) accept help from a notorious reactionary institute to elevate their platform.

The views held by TERFs are anything but leftist, and they have a long and sordid history courting the right.

Speakers on the panel opposed the Equality Act, a Congressional bill that would amend the 1964 Civil Rights Act to explicitly prohibit discrimination of LGBTQIA people, and specifically based on “gender identity.” Instituting protections for trans people would, in their view, have a deleterious effect on cis lesbians, gays, and bisexuals.

Panelist Hacı Horvath, who formerly identified as transgender, called being transgender “the new eating disorder” and “the new goth.” He made wild claims that children are being manipulated into transitioning at a young age by the media and doctors, a fantasy that mimics the outdated right-wing conspiracy of homosexual “recruiters.”

In truth, World Professional Association for Transgender Health guidelines recommend giving options to children who consistently, persistently, and insistently express an identity other than the one assigned them, and desire to transition.

Julia Beck, who was removed from the Baltimore LGBTQ Commission for her transphobic views, used her time to mock a trans woman for identifying as a lesbian. In her view only cis women can be lesbians. She claimed that the “T” in the LGBT acronym is opposed to the first three letters, meaning that advancing transgender rights will only take rights away from gays, bisexuals, and especially lesbians. Beck believes that gender identities “erase” homosexuals, and that trans men, denied the right to transition, would and should become lesbians. She lamented, “we are losing an entire generation of sisters to this madness.”

Two panelists on the 28th were members of the Women’s Liberation Front (WoLF), a group that sued the Obama administration to remove bathroom protections for trans students. These protections, in the form of federal guidelines, were revoked by the Trump administration.

WoLF member Jennifer Chavez, who is a staff attorney for Earth Justice, according to their website, read letters from transphobic parents describing the disgust they had for their trans children’s identities and choices. While we were meant to sympathize with the parents, it was actually a rather brutal reminder of the homelessness afflicting young trans people due to family abuse and rejection.

WoLF co-chair Kara Dansky called the movement for trans rights a “men’s rights movement,” comparing activism for transgender rights to a movement that has committed very high-profile anti-women terror attacks in recent years. In her view, the transgender movement will cause women’s rights to “utterly disappear,” and that women are legally “erased” when trans rights are advanced in law. Dansky, whose



(Above) Oct. 24, 2018, rally in New York City in support of trans people.

bigoted views are quite public, is currently general counsel of the Sentencing Commission of Washington, D.C., where she is empowered to determine what constitutes “fair” sentencing of individuals charged with crimes in the District.

TERFs and the political right

WoLF’s political courting of the right is not an aberration, nor is their collaboration with the Heritage Foundation. WoLF has even been the recipient of funding from the political right, including a \$15,000 grant from “The Alliance Defending Freedom,” which has supported the re-criminalization of homosexuality in the U.S. And WoLF collaborated with the Christian fundamentalist Family Policy Alliance in sending a joint amicus brief to the Supreme Court to argue against trans student Gavin Grimm’s right to use the boy’s bathroom at his high school.

WoLF is not alone. “Hands Across The Aisles” also seeks a united action between radical feminists and the Christian Right against trans rights. The group reached out to HUD secretary Ben Carson in hopes that he could be convinced to forbid homeless trans women from using women’s shelters. Members include Kara Dansky and Miriam Ben-Shalom, the lesbian activist who fought for years against the military’s “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy. Ben-Shalom has subsequently refocused her activism on attempting to thwart trans rights, and in 2016 Ben-Shalom was disinvited from being the grand marshal of the Milwaukee Pride Parade for her transphobia and opposition to bathroom protections.

The members of the right who collaborate with TERFs consciously view the work as a divide-and-conquer strategy. The director of “Concerned Parents and Educators of Fairfax County” Meg Kilgannon explained this succinctly: “For all of its recent success, the LGBT alliance is actually fragile, and the trans activists need the gay rights movement to help legitimize them. Gender identity on its own is just a bridge too far. If you separate the T from the alphabet soup, we’ll have more success.”

TERFs and socialists

It is extremely unsettling to find transphobia in the LGB community, and see homophobic talking points reworked in service of the anti-trans agenda. But

we should not at all be surprised when alliances are made by so-called “feminist” transphobes with the right, as their central political goal is the denial of rights to trans people.

The error many of us make is concluding that self-avowed LGB “radicals” and self-avowed “feminists” should be taken at their word. There is nothing feminist about fighting to throw certain women into men’s bathrooms and, worse, men’s prisons. There is nothing radical about denying children the right to transition despite expressing persistent and consistent desire to do so. And it’s reactionary, rather than progressive, to side with right-wing fundamentalists in their stated cause of furthering oppression of transgender people. In short, socialists must oppose the ideology and activism of TERFs and instead embrace the fight for trans liberation all over the world.

Political rights for trans people is an essential part of today’s class struggle. Right-wing organizations understand this basic fact and are doing everything they can to confuse the movement. Reactionaries have no problem offering a hand “across the aisle” to individuals and groups that can give them “leftist” credentials. They know that this allows them to enter into political coalitions with a section of the organized left that puts breaks on the left’s organizing united fronts that can effectively contest the bosses’ power.

By separating gender oppression from the larger struggle against oppression, and by extension class exploitation, in general, the right succeeds in politically isolating different sections of the left from each other. Obvious partnerships, like the lesbian and trans movements, are instead put onto opposing sides of the barricades.

Trans people are an extremely vulnerable and oppressed part of the working class, and the class struggle cannot advance when trans-specific demands are abandoned. Our aim as socialists must be to unite the various struggles of workers and oppressed people based on the principle that “an injury to one is an injury to all.” ■

Court in Japan upholds sterilization for trans people

By AUTUMN RAIN

The Supreme Court of Japan upheld an abhorrent law that explicitly requires trans people to be sterilized in order to have their gender recognized by the state—a terrible blow to trans people’s rights, and reproductive rights generally.

Trans people are denied the right to have their gender legally recognized in many countries. But even where they have attained this basic right of recognition, they face other forms of state repression.

In Japan, Law 111 allows for legal recognition of a trans person’s gender identity after transition. But it explicitly demands that the transition entail sterilization and surgical alteration of genitalia, which is not something universally desired by transgender people. Law 111 was challenged

by Takakito Usui, a trans man, but the Supreme Court of Japan upheld the law as constitutional on Jan. 24.

Among the governments of the world that allow individuals to legally change their gender, many still require medical or surgical interventions that lead to sterilization. Though the European Court of Human Rights ruled against these sorts of requirements in 2017, 14 European countries continue to demand sterilization as part of gender recognition (source: Transgender Europe)! And many states in the U.S. continue to demand surgical intervention to change important documents like birth certificates and state IDs, leaving pre-op and non-op transgender individuals at risk of being outed in a country with extremely weak protections, where they exist, against discrimination.

It is important to note that most governments where gender recognition is possible (including the U.S.) pathologize the state of being transgender, forcing trans people to go through a difficult process that makes their gender a question of medical inquiry. So even where invasive surgeries are not required, transgender people face hurdles wherein states treat them as abnormal medical subjects.

But being trans is not a disease, and no one can vouch better for the gender identity of a person than the person herself. Instead of allowing the governments of the world to determine arbitrarily and cruelly which bodies should be deemed authentic, and which surgeries should be required of trans people regardless of their own desires, we should trust that no people other than themselves can determine their own gender

identities. Mere self-identification is the only thing that should be needed to legally change one’s gender.

It is dehumanizing to have to get permission from the government to be who you are, yet there are only a few countries in the world (such as Ireland) where people may legally change gender with a mere statutory self-declaration. We must stand in solidarity with the movements for self-identification, for rights to gender recognition, and against the pathologization and repugnant violations of bodily autonomy by all states against trans people in the world.

Furthermore, we need a trans inclusive reproductive justice movement that accounts for the myriad experiences within the working class, and the various ways in which the right to reproduce is denied to workers. The denial of bodily autonomy is paramount for the ruling-class goal of disciplining the workforce and creating oppressed “surplus” population. ■



... L.A. teachers' gains & losses

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process and are expected to call a late February strike to challenge the district's charter school proposals and planned school closures.

The new UTLA contract leaves all the current charters in place, perhaps with UTLA leaders invoking the rationale that negotiations on this key issue are "out of scope," or perhaps "illegal" with regard to California's teacher collective bargaining laws.

Example of "red state" strikes

UTLA members, as with teachers across the country, were no doubt inspired by last year's "red state" strikes, especially by West Virginia teachers—who defied threats of mass arrest and injunctions and closed down the state's entire school system to demand, and then win, major gains for teachers, students, public school funding and, amazingly, equal salary increases for all state public employees. The red state victories were powered by statewide strikes, often of wildcat origin, to demand that the same billions of dollars gifted to the corporate elite over the past decade be returned to state budgets, post haste, to finance public education and related social services.

No doubt West Virginia teachers, along with their sisters and brothers, to one degree or another, in Kentucky, Arizona, Oklahoma, Nevada, and other "red states"—that is, Republican-dominated states—paved the way, for the first time in a half century, to bringing to heel capitalism's one percenters who dominate all state and national legislative bodies.

But notwithstanding West Virginia's shining example, the UTLA strike was a loner—a single and almost totally isolated fightback, however impressive, in a state with 1100 school districts. A handful of districts, Oakland in particular, saw its teachers engage in partial one-day "sickouts" and other solidarity actions aimed at lending a statewide air to the UTLA action. Yet, few would dispute that all of the state's districts are suffering the same major cutbacks and related financial gutting of public education.

Indeed, UTLA strikers repeatedly pointed out that California would be ranked fifth in GDP in the world if it were designated as a nation, yet it ranks near the bottom of all 50 states in school expenditures, class size, and other key indices of the quality of public education. At \$11,000 annual expenditures per pupil (based on inflated and manipulated figures used by all school districts to demonstrate their "fealty" to public education), California's school funding compares pathetically to New York State's \$22,000 per pupil.

But even here, the statistics cover a bitter truth. Fifty years ago, when this writer was a New York City school teacher, a full 53 percent of all city high school students, after "completing" 12 years of public education, "graduated" as officially designated "functional illiterates"! Fifty years later, I would guess that the figures remain close to the same.

Class size Section 1.5

Contract gains were registered, albeit modest in the extreme with regard to class size. Here the major victory resided in the elimination of the heinous Section 1.5 provision in UTLA's last contract, wherein whatever class size maximums were negotiated could be unilaterally ignored whenever the school district decreed a financial emergency—which it did almost every year of the contract.

The class size provisions in the new contract, according to the UTLA, were as follows: "2019-2020: [class size] reduction of 1 student per grade level, and

an immediate reduction in secondary [schools] from an unenforceable 46 to a now enforceable 39 for English Language Arts and Math." In the following two years of the three-year contract, additional class size reductions will be implemented via one less and then two less students per year, for a total reduction of four over the course of the contract.

While undoubtedly a gain, it must be said that even with these reductions, Los Angeles class-size figures will remain far above most California school districts, including the already overcrowded districts in Oakland and San Francisco.

The fact that UTLA's previous contract contained a provision for "an unenforceable class size 'maximum' of 46"—that is, even more than 46 students could be crammed into classrooms—was obnoxious in the extreme. UTLA's strike, its first in 30 years, ended this atrocity, but the union has a long way to go in fighting for qualitatively greater class size reductions that are among the key factors related to student success, not to mention teachers' capacity to educate.

Strike gains

An UTLA *Bulletin #9* stated, "In waging a strike not for money for ourselves but for money for our students, teachers reclaimed the moral authority they've always merited." True enough, for without this moral authority, that is, without the broad support of Los Angeles' working-class communities, the strike would have been doomed from the start. UTLA listed other important contract gains as follows:

- **Nurses:** LAUSD will hire 150 full-time nurses for 2019-2020 and at least 150 for 2020-2021, to provide a full-time nurse at every school every day of the week.

- **Librarians:** LAUSD will hire 41 full-time teacher librarians for 2019-2020 and at least 41 more for 2020-2021, to provide a full-time teacher librarian at every secondary school every day of the week.

- **Counselors:** The district will hire additional full-time counselors by Oct. 1, 2019, to achieve a counseling service ratio of 500-1 per secondary school. The union honestly stated their victory with regard to counselors was far from perfect. The same bulletin reported, "Students' limited access to their overscheduled counselors is made worse by counselors' obligation to do yard duty during nutrition and lunch. One gain from UTLA's victorious 1989 strike was the elimination of yard duty for teachers. *We sought but did not get the same for counselors*" (emphasis added).

- **Salary:** On salary gains the union won a retroactive 3 percent increase for last school year plus an additional 3 percent for the current year, for a total of just over 6 percent, a modest and more than justified average gain of \$2250 for this year and the following two. But the seven-day strike cost the teachers close to \$3000 on average in lost pay for the year, fully justifying their claim that salary was not their central objective but rather improvements in the overall quality of education.

While the 6 percent was essentially the same proposal that was offered before the strike, a salary-related provision pressed by the district to make it harder for new teachers to have health-care retirement benefits was dropped at UTLA insistence, a positive signal to new teachers that they would not be sacrificed to the advantage of older teachers—a phenomenon that has become all too common in trade union contracts. There is zero doubt, however, that Los Angeles' salaries and, indeed, all teachers and working people more generally, have been hostage to a virtual ruling-

class-backed freeze on all wages for the past several decades. Los Angeles teachers are fully justified in seeking to win salary improvements as well as to be champions of broader working class interests, as was the case with their just-concluded strike.

Other modest contract wins

The UTLA contract included a provision beginning next year for a "joint UTLA/LAUSD committee tasked with identifying all district required assessments [standardized tests]. The committee will develop a plan to reduce the amount of assessments by 50%" But an UTLA statement made clear that "we have not made an issue of the tests mandated by the state and federal governments—that's a battle for another time and place." Thus, UTLA negotiators again acceded to the "law of the land," wherein massive and reactionary standardized tests are mandated on school districts and teachers as a condition for federal and state funding. Teachers are compelled to spend countless days and hours devoted endless, if not worthless, testing of students, not to mention the inevitable byproduct of "teaching to the test."

The truth is that standardized testing is aimed qualitatively more at providing school officials with so-called empirical data that they can use to "measure" teacher competence than it is to improve the quality of education. In time, punishing, firing, and otherwise scapegoating "incompetent teachers" is but another means to blame the "failure" of public education on teachers as opposed to the overarching massive broadside attacks on every aspect of the public education system, not to mention the demoralizing effects on students that are daily subjected to conditions of poverty and repression (the school-to-prison pipeline) that combine to undermine their efforts in the class room.

It is true that ending such mandated state and national testing is, among a myriad of other critical factors, deemed "out of scope" with regard to what is "negotiable" at the bargaining table. By the same token in decades past, if not today, unions themselves have been decreed by the state power to be "illegal," as has free speech during the McCarthy era and increasingly today, or school desegregation, women's and LG-BTQI rights, the right to assemble, the right to breathe clean air and to drink clean water, to name a few of the items banned or regulated by capitalist legislatures or the courts or by presidential decree. In all these matters, however, the "law" in all its "grandeur" has been proven to be subordinate to the mobilized challenges of its victims. Defiance, as with the West Virginia teachers, as opposed to compliance with reactionary legislation, is central to teacher unionism and to the future of public education.

Los Angeles teachers registered modest gains, and some losses in a broad range of negotiable items. They won a guaranteed daily preparation period for Regional Occupation Center teachers and the right of teachers to vote whether to convert their schools to Magnet schools. They established a LAUSD-provided "Immigrant Defense Fund" that includes a dedicated hotline and some attorney consultation for immigrant families.

"As teachers our loyalty is to our students. If it's a problem for them in their community, then it's a problem for us," said a union spokesperson. Similar modest gains listed by union officials include limited funding allocations for Community Schools—that is, schools in the poorest areas—and funds for Special Education. Modest, usually non-monetary advances were registered with regard to "Local School Leadership Councils, limiting the racist practice of 'random' student searches, Green Space, Substitute Educator, Adult Education, Workspace for Itinerant Employees, UTLA Rights, protection of health care for striking adult education and substitutes and Protection for striking substitute teachers."

The bottom line

The UTLA leadership published on its website both a summary of the new contract provisions as well as the entire contract. Its concluding "bottom line" public statement read: "We fought for this agreement for 21 months, worked without a contract for 18 months, and finally, forced to the wall, we struck for seven days. What we ended up with was vastly better than what was originally offered, and significantly better than what we were offered on the eve of the strike. There are certainly things lacking in this agreement, but it is a major step forward."

The battle over school funding

The LAUSD had taken to the airwaves with ceaseless claims that it was broke, in spite of the fact that it had assigned some 25 percent of its annual budget to the category of "reserves," that is, unbudgeted funds to the tune of nearly \$2 billion to be held for unknown future

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Teachers' strikes are women's strikes

David McNew / Getty Images

The new wave of teachers' strikes suggests one way that the fight for women's liberation from the privatized tasks of social reproduction may unfold. The recent one-week strike in Los Angeles, which featured demands to arrest the privatization of public education and improve student health services, reaffirms the potential of political strikes to socialize care work.

The wave of teachers' walking off their jobs in 2018 got a lot of attention, but it all started the year before on International Women's Day. The March 8 strikes were organized in the three months following the mass outpouring of four million women in marches across the country on Jan. 21, 2017. The enthusiasm from these marches and the launching of the International Women's Strike U.S. resulted in the closing of school districts as teachers and staff walked out on International Women's Day.

The first school districts that announced they were closing were in "right to work" states. Sixteen schools were closed in North Carolina and all the schools in Alexandria, Va. In addition, 33 teachers walked out of an elementary school in Philadelphia to protest working for four years without a contract, and 1700 teachers and transportation staff closed the school district in Prince George's County, Md.

In 2018, the teachers' strikes were no longer sporadic and by district but took place statewide. The strikes were organized and led by women. The question arises: What moved these women workers to organize major strikes, including political strikes?

While public sector unions have a strong strike tradition, in past decades they have been quiet. Public sector workers always have their eyes on the legislative budget process. In recent decades, their emphasis has been on elections. But in 2018 a massive and militant strike of women workers went to the

state capitols not to lobby disinterested politicians but to make demands and dare them to jail the strikers. They then refused to return to work until they were ready and saw the deal in writing. Of course, ever increasing cuts to education funding are still taking place, but the cutbacks were held in check through last year's strike action.

For the last few decades, the working class has been under assault. And for women this has been accompanied by extreme cuts to social services and pressure for women to "volunteer" to fill the gaps by working for free.

Teachers likewise are often compelled to fill the gaps in social services funding—for free. Additional work outside the classroom now includes programs to assist students who are homeless, addressing food insecurity, and dealing with cuts in positions for school nurses. In many schools they now serve both breakfast and lunch, and for homeless students they also pack additional food for the weekend.

Counselors, social workers, and teachers all work together to find better homeless shelters that are closer to the school and also deal with increased student anxiety. Teachers generally pick up clothes at garage sales for students.

The lack of parenting skills often lands on teachers who work with parents. Due to cuts in Children's Services, they must deal with crisis situations, which leaves children suffering from basic neglect to receive assistance from teachers and counselors.

Although gender wage disparity has disappeared from most salary schedules, it is easier for male teachers to take additional classes to receive higher pay than



it is for women teachers, because of their responsibilities in the home.

These extra responsibilities were a focus of the teachers' strike vote on Aug. 31, 2018, in the Los Angeles School District—the second largest school district in the country. The strike vote was 98%-2%. The two primary issues were the contract language on teacher/student ratios, which are up to 46 students without a class assistant. The other issue was "restoring essential support structures that students need." Examples they gave were nurses, social workers and counselors. One school currently has a half-time nurse for 2000 students. Social workers at schools never have enough time to work with students, so the work falls on teachers or counselors.

The increasing militancy of teachers will challenge state austerity budgets. The teachers have often advocated for all public workers in their strike demands. Next year, bargaining will start for state

worker contracts, and we will see if they will join together with teachers on the picket line.

The current strike wave will continue, although we can expect that employers will start pushing back. In Washington State recently, they threatened to replace teachers unless they returned to class.

Community support will be needed to resist the increasing pressures on teachers. In most strikes, both students and parents have supported the teachers' picket lines. The unions will also need to give support and solidarity in order to gain continued victories.

These strikes can set an example of how to fight against the deepening privatization of social reproduction and point to a future in which women can use proletarian methods to fight their oppression overall. ■

Excerpted from Socialist Action's forthcoming "Women's Liberation Resolution."

... Teachers

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contingencies. State law requires a contingency fund of only 1 percent! Needless to say, the district's reserves were set aside for all contingencies other than meeting the just demands and needs of Los Angeles teachers and parents. The same can be said of the California State Legislature's budget, geared to advancing corporate interests at the expense of all others.

Today, the great portion of California's education funding derives from local property taxes, or to be more accurate, the taxes imposed on homeowners. Commercial property is essentially excluded from the state's overall taxation system, the result of the infamous Proposition 13 or Jarvis-Gann ballot initiative of 1978 that reduced property taxes by some 57 percent and thus posed a major threat to public education funding.

Today, more than 40 years later, California homeowner property taxes have escalated in direct proportion to the incredible rise in property valuations. The 1 percent Proposition 13 cap on property taxes of four decades ago was levied on homes that then had an average market price of some \$40,000. Today, given the fact the average homeowner sells their property every five years, the same house has a market value of more than 10 times that amount. A Proposition tax of 1 percent in 1978 would have amounted to roughly \$400; the same house today, valued on average at \$570,000, would be taxed at \$5700 annually, plus the allowed addition of 0.5 percent for local or city homeowner taxes, bringing the total annual property tax to an incredible \$8550—a 21-fold increase!

No to regressive tax measures

In this context, the UTLA contract includes an agreement with the LAUSD to jointly lobby the state legislature to support a 2020 state ballot initiative that would modify Proposition 13 to include taxing commercial property only, a measure that could be expected to add additional tens of billions of dollars to the state, a portion of which would be set aside for public education. But this gain, to be achieved by tax-

ing commercial property, still leaves the highly regressive Proposition 13 homeowners' tax intact, leaving an ever-increasing portion of the working-class population totally incapable of ever buying a house and paying for property taxes, not to mention the multi-thousand-dollar costs of paying off impossibly high mortgages.

Tragically, teacher unions have largely accepted this regressive tax system, wherein the corporate elite and their trillion-dollar corporate entities are provided with endless tax exemptions, or "loopholes," to avoid taxation entirely coupled with outright grants for corporate services, while working people are always subjected to an endless variety of regressive tax measures.

West Virginia and other red state teachers faced this dilemma directly when they demanded that state legislatures tax the rich heavily and return the funds stolen from public education to their rightful place. The support of the NEA and AFT to continued and ever-deepening regressive tax measures can only serve to alienate their working-class base.

... Venezuela

(continued from page 3)

UTLA strikers faced down an intransigent school board and forced it to accede to a number of important demands that advanced the interests of teachers, students, and the broader community.

Then there was the response of La Guardia air traffic controllers to President Trump's recent government shutdown. On the day that federal workers missed their second paycheck, an unusual number of controllers at La Guardia Airport called in sick. Delays resulted and quickly spread to other airports. Within hours, the phony government shutdown was over! The political and economic cost was high enough to force bipartisan agreement to resume paying the salaries of government workers. That's power!

Unfortunately, taking the road of taxing the rich is the furthest thing from the minds of these top union misleaders. The AFT's president, Randi Weingarten, a member of the Democratic Party National Committee, as well as the top leaders of the NEA, have long subordinated the issue of school funding to mobilizing teachers in every state to fund and support Democratic Party politicians at every level, regardless of their anti-union policies. In blue state California, where Democrats hold perhaps the largest majority anywhere, school funding stands near the bottom of all states, while the corporate policies of the state's billionaires, among the largest in the nation, are prioritized to the hilt.

The future of teacher unionism, and indeed, of public education more generally, rests in the capacity of teachers to match and exceed the fighting example set by their red state sisters and brothers and in their collective capacity to help initiate their own working-class party based on renewed militant fighting unions and their allies among the nation's oppressed and exploited. ■

That kind of power can stop the U.S. warmakers in their tracks. It can stop the current U.S. aggression against Venezuela, and in Venezuela, it can be used to mount a potent defense against the current capitalist assaults from the internal coup plotters and their U.S. backers. ■

U.S. hands off Venezuela! All out against a U.S. regime-change coup and war! Join the protests scheduled for the coming weeks:

- Feb. 23, regional actions called by International Action Center: iacenter@iacenter.org.
- March 16, in Washington, D.C., called by ANSWER: info@answercoalition.org.
- March 30, bi-coastal marches in Washington, D.C., and Oakland, Calif., called by United National Antiwar Coalition and No to U.S. Bases Coalition: unacepeace@gmail.com.

L.A. teachers' strike: Gains, losses, and perspectives

AFP / Getty Images



By JEFF MACKLER

After seven solid days on the picket lines in drenching rains and in the face of a poor-mouthing school district that swore they were dead broke, 34,000 Los Angeles teachers voted overwhelmingly to approve a three-year contract. Most teachers saw the agreement as an important first step toward stemming the decades-long tidal wave of disastrous cuts imposed on teachers and students in the nation's second largest school district.

The strike was led off with a city-wide mobilization of 50,000 teachers and community supporters, a prime indication that the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) had prepared well in advance to engage the broad Los Angeles community—students, parents and working people in general—in a united and sustained effort for improved schools and to advance teacher and community interests.

UTLA, a long-ago merged union of CTA/NEA and CFT/AFT members, fully anticipated a bitter fight against a reactionary locally elected, corporate-oriented school board that had laid its own secret plans, separate and apart from any union contract, for a massive privatization/charter school project in Los Angeles. Its objective, according to UTLA-released documents, was, and perhaps remains, to break up the sprawling school district into 32 separate corporate-run private-school entities.

The charter school challenge

Indeed, School Superintendent Austin Beutner, a billionaire former investment banker, had made his fortune largely in the charter school business, wherein public schools are converted to private for-profit entities that are funded from public resources. Charters are largely exempt from statewide educational regulations.

Los Angeles schools today, already replete with a significant number of these largely non-union charters—22 percent, or almost 200, of the city's 900 schools to date—drain huge financial resources from the public school system. With slick corporate advertising campaigns, falsified achievement statistics, appeals to “school choice,” or “vouchers” paid to parents to use at parochial schools, and with across-the-board gutting of public education funds, they are touted as superior, if not a vibrant alternative for young people and their parents, who face a bleak future in capitalist America.

In truth, charters are part and parcel of the ruling class's overall strategic objective to boost declining profit rates by looting a myriad of social services and transferring the booty to the corporate elite—in the name, of course, of allowing the capitalist market to miraculously arrive at the “best possible educational outcome!”

Here we note in passing a recent study by Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) that revealed that students' test scores may prove that public schools are now outperforming charter schools. For the purpose of this article, however, it is sufficient to postulate that free, quality education for all—in the context of a humanitarian and egalitarian society that offers everyone a full and productive life with fundamental security and rewarding opportunities to maximize the potential in all human beings—is far superior to any private-for-profit institution based on measuring success on the always exploitive and predatory capitalist market system.

Today, 75 percent of the Los Angeles Unified School District's (LAUSD) students are Latino, 10 percent Black, and a similar percentage of Asian origin; 80 percent are low income, a terrible example of the on-

going racist process of school re-segregation wherein white students with financial means flee deteriorating, underfunded public schools to various forms of private enterprises, whether they be charters or parochial schools.

Charters are allowed to “cherry pick” students—that is, mostly white students—and exclude English as a Second Language (ESL) students, a significant percentage of Spanish-speaking youth. In some schools, within the confines of the same building, public and charters co-exist, with Los Angeles teachers repeatedly scoring this now legalized striking racial divide.

Tragically, the new UTLA contract makes no changes to this racist and corporatist scenario other than to record in their contract an “agreement” with the chartering school board, whose members spent an estimated \$11 million to win a pro-charter majority, that the school district would urge the state legislature to cap charters at 20 percent. (This Democratic Party-dominated “blue state” legislature currently has zero caps on charters.) For the corporate plunderers who run the state, capping charters is an oxymoron akin to capping profits.

Charter schools are no newcomers in challenging public education. Fully half of Detroit's school-age children attend charters or related private schools. The entire post-Katrina school system of New Orleans is today privatized.

Thirty percent of Oakland schools today are charters, with more in the works as well as an Oakland School District plan to close some 24 public schools over the next five years, likely to make way for even privateering schemes. Oakland teachers are currently in the final stages of the negotiations/fact-finding

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