

U.S. gears up for war on Venezuela



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

By JEFF MACKLER and BRUCE LESNICK

The relentless U.S. imperial beast has embarked on a full-scale, openly declared, bipartisan regime-change war aimed at overthrowing Venezuela's democratically elected government headed by President Nicolás Maduro.

Top U.S. officials—from President Donald Trump, Vice President Mike Pence, National Security Adviser John Bolton and special envoy Elliot Abrams of Iran/Contra infamy, to Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and pretend socialist Bernie Sanders—almost daily take to the airwaves, with the world's corporate media cheering in lock step, insisting that “all options are open,” including overt war via direct U.S. military intervention.

Sanders demanded that Venezuela open its borders to “humanitarian aid,” while DSA Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez waffled on the issue.

There are only two sides in the present conflict, pe-

riod. One either supports the victory of the Maduro government over the U.S. onslaught, or one sides with the imperialist aggressors. There is no third option! And since the imperial U.S. war machine serves the same wealthy 1% that is responsible for cutbacks, austerity, exploitation, repression, and devastation in the U.S., the effects of a defeat of the Venezuelan people would be keenly felt by all working people here at home. This is why we must mobilize to demand:

- U.S. Out Now!
- End the Sanctions!
- Hands Off Venezuela!

President Trump's most determined thrust toward war was set for Saturday, Feb. 23, at the Colombian border town of Cúcuta and at a manufacturing site at the Brazilian border, where U.S.-financed and orchestrated “humanitarian aid” conveys attempted to force their way into Venezuela, without success. The move was thwarted by Bolivarian National Guard forces and thousands of Venezuelan workers, peasants, and

(Above) Feb. 19 protest in Santo Domingo, D.R., against U.S. intervention in Venezuela.

youth who blockaded the various bridges leading into their country.

The planned imperialist intervention was designed to serve as spectacular media opportunity depicting “murderous” Maduro forces turning back unarmed “humanitarian aid” trucks filled with food and medical supplies bound for the “starving people” of Venezuela.

Center stage in this crudely-orchestrated scenario was assigned to the U.S. and CIA-appointed puppet “president” Juan Guaidó, who slipped into Colombia to lead what was touted as a massive rebellion against the Venezuelan government. The high point of the event was projected to be mass desertions from the Bolivarian Armed Forces and Guaidó's return to Venezuela, via a U.S. escort to be sure, as the nation's new

(continued on page 8)

Pa. waste facility is a threat to waterways

By JOHN LESLIE

Elcon Recycling, an Israeli-based company, has proposed the construction of a toxic waste processing plant in suburban Philadelphia. The plant would boil toxic chemical and pharmaceutical waste to remove the water from it, reducing the materials to a toxic sludge. The resulting muck, which could contain elements such as lead, cadmium, and mercury, would be disposed of or stored elsewhere.

Elcon projects that the facility would treat between 150,000 and 210,000 tons of waste annually. Dozens of trucks would transport hazardous waste to the facility every week via local highways.

The proposed plant, to be located on the old United States Steel Fairless Works site in Bucks County, Pa., is less than a mile away from a creek that empties into the Delaware River. The former steel mill site is already environmentally compromised by decades of steelmaking before production was terminated. The 3000-acre property, considered a brownfield by the Environmental Protection Agency, is already the location of a trash incinerator and landfills owned by Waste Management.

Ten percent of the U.S. population lives within 100 miles of this plant. Proximity of the proposed facility to the river is a concern because 17 million people get their drinking water from the Delaware. If a spill were to occur, water supplies could be threatened for weeks. Any release of hazardous materials into the river would threaten recreational boating and fishing.

Elcon estimates that the plant would create from 100-120 construction jobs, plus



50 full-time jobs for plant employees. Opponents argue that the jobs created are not a sufficient gain for the community, considering the jobs that could be lost if the river were contaminated by toxic waste. However, building-trades unions have been vocal in their support for construction of the facility.

An attempt in 2015 to get approval for construction initially failed to get past a Phase I review by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) because of insufficient information on potential flooding. The application was successfully resubmitted for a Phase I review later that year and then subjected to a more rigorous Phase II review. In May 2017, the Phase II application was rejected because of incomplete information provided by Elcon. The current DEP Phase II review

will continue until May 2019.

Activists have expressed concerns about Elcon's lack of transparency in the application process. The company has been vague or deceptive about investors, what materials would be processed, and safety procedures. Others have expressed doubts about the company's possibly questionable practices in Israel, including the burying of "gray" waste in a landfill. It is unclear what effect the treatment process would have on air quality, noting that lower Bucks County has the worst smog levels in Pennsylvania.

At a community meeting on Feb. 6, residents heard an update from organizations that are fighting against construction of the toxic plant. These groups, which include 350 Bucks County, Delaware Riverkeeper Network, Protect Our Water and

Air, and the Coalition for Peace Action, have relied on legal challenges, lobbying the DEP and putting pressure on the local township council to halt the project. There is discussion of running an activist for council.

Lobbying politicians and getting elected are not enough. A broad-based mass struggle against toxic capitalism and climate change is necessary if the planet is to survive. Capitalism, a system based on maximizing profits at any cost, is a threat to the future of humanity and nature. Reformist solutions are inadequate for the tasks ahead; we need a revolutionary solution to the climate crisis.

Many of the provisions of the Green New Deal (GND) would contribute to a more stable and sustainable future. However, as long as the GND is trapped in a capitalist framework, the results will be distorted in the interests of capital.

Trump's recent rhetoric against both socialism and the GND is calculated to reinforce the mythology that capitalism is the only possible system. Trump's claims that a transition to clean energy would lead to increased unemployment, the elimination of cows, and no air travel are ridiculous.

But the only way to resolve the climate crisis in a way that favors the interests of workers and oppressed people is to take steps towards the socialist reorganization of society. A workers' government would immediately expropriate the energy industry and launch a transition to renewable energy production. It would restructure industries, transportation, energy production and distribution, and communities along democratic and sustainable lines. ■

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 LISA LUINENBURG

On Feb. 15, President Trump declared a National State of Emergency in order to appropriate billions of dollars to build his much-touted wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Even though Congress had granted him \$1.375 billion for the border wall in the latest federal budget bill, this wasn't enough for Trump. He wanted \$5.7 billion!

Since Trump started campaigning for the presidency in 2016, he has been vilifying immigrants as dangerous criminals and rapists, here to steal jobs and corrupt U.S. society. This most recent maneuver is just the latest tactic in an ongoing campaign to scapegoat immigrants and to keep them too afraid to fight back for their rights.

In reality, though, the U.S. economy heavily depends on the cheap and easily exploitable labor of undocumented immigrants. It is also a highly mobile workforce, which the capitalist class can easily draw on when and where it is needed.

Recent immigrants currently make up around 17% of the U.S. workforce, often taking difficult, dangerous, or low-paying jobs that U.S. citizens don't want. They work as field laborers, factory workers, and care providers for children and the elderly. And while undocumented immigrants hardly use any public benefits at all (mostly because they are not eligible for them), they contribute an estimated \$11.6 billion in taxes each year, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.

In fact, Trump himself heavily relies on the labor of undocumented immigrants to line his already rich pockets with even more profits. In mid-January, the *Washington Post* reported that Trump had knowingly been hiring undocumented immigrants to work in his chain of golf clubs. While workers at the Westchester County, N.Y., club were suddenly told their documents had been audited and were found not to be valid, these same workers reported to the *Post* that the managers at the golf club either knew they had false documents or helped them obtain them.

About a dozen workers were fired from the New York club starting on Jan. 18, following a story reported by *The New York Times* late last year that featured an undocumented worker who worked at one of Trump's golf clubs in New Jersey. In an e-mail statement, Eric Trump said, "We are making a broad effort to identify any employee who has given false and fraudulent documents to unlawfully gain employment. Where identified, any individual will be terminated immediately."

While Trump's sons are busy denying any culpability, trusted workers who have contributed years of their lives to Trump's business are now left without a means of supporting themselves and their families. Gabriel Sedano, a Mexican worker who had worked in maintenance at the club since 2005, said to the *Post*, "I started to cry. I told them they needed to consider us. I had worked almost 15 years for them in this club, and I'd given the best of myself to this job. I'd never done anything wrong, only work and work. They said they didn't have any comments to make."

One of the former managers at the club said, "It didn't matter. They didn't care [about immigration status]. It was, 'Get the cheapest labor possible.'" Several of the immigrants are now working with an attorney to sue Trump's business for the firings.

While Trump's blatant hypocrisy was being exposed in the national press, opposition to his plan to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border was already generating waves of opposition. On President's Day, there were about 250 protests planned across the country against Trump's declaration, organized by a coalition of community organizations. To date, 16 states, including California and New York, are suing the president over the wall, along with many non-profits, including the Border Network for Human Rights, the ACLU, and the Center for Biological Diversity.

On Feb. 27, the House passed a resolution with a vote of 245-182 opposing the wall. The resolution will next go to the Senate for consideration, but even if it passes, the president has threatened to veto it, meaning it will have little meaningful impact to stop Trump's heavy-handed project.

Why are all these players so mad about the wall? First of all, as reported by National Public Radio, Trump has said he plans to allocate a total of \$8 billion to the construction of the wall. Ironically, Trump plans to obtain the money by diverting \$3.6 from military construction projects and \$2.5 billion from the Department of Defense's counter-drug activities.

Despite the fact that military officials are now up in arms about their funding being diverted to Trump's pet project, this allocation of money also highlights how much of the bloated military budget could be di-

Trump calls fake 'Emergency' to pay for border wall

Marty Goodman / Socialist Action



(Above) Painting on Mexican side of the border wall near Tijuana.

verted towards stemming the real emergency that is occurring—the thousands of migrants from Central America and their children who are now waiting in squalid camps on the Mexican side of the border, with little access to sanitary conditions, clean food and water, or medical care, while they wait for months to apply for asylum in the U.S.

But how realistic is Trump's project of building a physical wall along the U.S.-Mexico border? According to an investigation by *USA Today* into the logistics of the project, there is little clarity on the logistics involved or the actual cost and environmental impact of building the proposed wall. *USA Today* found that despite about \$2 billion having been spent to date on border construction, only about 350 miles of the 2000-mile-long border currently has fencing meant to stop people (not vehicles) from crossing.

Much of the border runs through either private property or inaccessible desert regions. All told, 4900 parcels of property sit within 500 feet of the border in Texas and would need to be seized by the U.S. government in order to build a wall. After the 2006 Secure Fence Act, over 300 condemnation cases were brought by the U.S. government against land owners. As of 2017, 85 of those cases were still in litigation.

It has been clearly documented that the increased militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border over the past several decades has forced immigrants to cross at more dangerous locations. This has resulted in a dramatic increase of deaths along the border, at a time when border apprehensions are at their lowest point in four decades (based on Border Patrol data). Thousands of deaths along the border have never been reported. At the same time, a physical border is unlikely to stop drug trafficking, and a human smuggler told *USA Today* that a border wall won't stop people from crossing, but will allow him to charge people more money for the privilege.

The environmental impacts of building the wall are dire. As reported by *National Geographic*, a physical wall along the border will cross through six diverse ecological regions, bisecting the geographic range of 1506 native animals and plants, including 62 species listed as critically endangered. Biologists say that the jaguar will become extinct in the U.S. without access to Mexico. In addition, a wall is expected to exacerbate flooding in the region and will disrupt several wildlife refuges and parks.

Because of the REAL ID Action passed in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Homeland Security has authorization to waive any laws in the name of national security, including over 30 federal environmental laws such as the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act.

Native American tribes, such as the Tohono O'odham Nation, whose traditional lands sit on an estimated 2.7 million acres in the Sonoran desert, straddle the border between Arizona and Mexico. Tribe members worry that the building of a wall will sever their tribal

ties to Mexico, where they currently have the ability to pass back and forth across the border with their tribal ID cards. A border wall will cut them off from their sacred lands. "It will be in my backyard—the wall, and all its political policies along with it," said Ofelia Rivas, a member of the tribe.

Despite all the barriers he faces, Trump is not alone in utilizing the State of Emergency power to get what he wants. In fact, according to a report in *The Atlantic*, 60 states of emergency have been declared since the National Emergencies Act was passed in 1976, and there are currently 30 in effect, having been renewed on a continual basis without any review by Congress. Once a State of Emergency is declared, the president has access to a broad range of more than 100 special provisions. For the most part, the president is free to use any of these powers he wishes, even if they don't relate at all to the emergency currently on hand. This has many worried that these special presidential powers are ripe for abuse.

Most states of emergency have been declared in the past in order to impose economic sanctions on other countries. Or they have been used in response to terrorist attacks or natural disasters. But other powers give the president the ability to activate laws allowing him to shut down electronic communications inside the United States, to freeze bank accounts, or to deploy troops inside the country in order to subdue domestic unrest.

As Justice Robert Jackson wrote in his dissent in the 1944 Supreme Court decision that upheld the internment of Japanese Americans, each emergency power "lies about like a loaded weapon, ready for the hand of any authority that can bring forward a plausible claim of an urgent need."

It is clear that despite growing opposition to Trump's State of Emergency declaration and his proposal to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, Congress has little ability to offer any kind of meaningful roadblock, while the best lawsuits can do is tie up the plan in the complex legal system, at great expense. Meanwhile, migrants who have risked their lives to come to the U.S. seeking a better life for their families are languishing at the border in squalid refugee camps.

What is needed now is a mass movement of immigrant workers and U.S.-born workers joining hands to oppose Trump's plan, the kind we saw in 2006 when millions poured into the streets to oppose the reactionary Sensenbrenner law. While the immigrant rights movement is currently at low ebb in the U.S. (along with most other social movements), there are still many opportunities to organize around this critical issue. Organizing efforts are currently underway in hundreds of U.S. cities to declare, "No Border Wall! No Human Being is Illegal! Immigrants and Refugees are Welcome Here!" ■



(Left) Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), a member of Democratic Socialists of America, speaks at an Oct. 1, 2018, rally in Boston against nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court.

Books: A round-table discussion on socialist electoral strategy

By ERWIN FREED

The Haymarket/Jacobin/Verso jointly edited collection of articles titled “Socialist Electoral Strategy: A Report” is timely and interesting but ultimately does not put forward what its title promises. Almost the entire history of the electoral practices of independent socialists, the working class, and oppressed nationalities in the United States is missing from the book. More than any other piece of analysis, this burning absence shapes the content of the essays in this collection. What the reader is left with are partial ideas on how the socialist left ought to orient towards the electoral arena.

A common theme of the book is that the left must support Democratic Party candidates since it is not strong enough to run candidates on its own ballot lines right now, although doing so should be a goal in the future.

The three exceptions which call for an immediate break with the Democratic Party are Kim Moody’s article “From Realignment to Reinforcement,” Socialist Alternative City Councilwoman Kshama Sawant’s “The Case for Strong Independent Campaigns to Build the Left,” and Todd Chretien’s “A Million Votes for Peace: Notes on Independent Politics.”

Taken together, these three articles make the argument that the Democratic Party is not an empty ballot line but rather a hierarchical, tightly controlled organization; that the Green Party is fatally oriented toward the electoral process, insufficiently anti-capitalist, and internally undemocratic; and that the best way forward to build workers’ power in the electoral arena is for socialists to run independent candidates.

The only really concrete suggestion in this category is Sawant’s argument that the “DSA is well-positioned to run at least five to ten strong [independent] campaigns ... throughout the country this year aiming not just at winning votes but also to popularize socialist ideas and build movements. This could be a step toward running strong independent socialist candidates in most major cities next year and in 2020.”

The qualitative changes that would occur if the DSA adopted this perspective and cut all ties with the Democratic Party can not be underestimated. The whole organization, or at least its most active members, would be forced to think about how to formulate their own demands to build class consciousness and not depend on the minimum demands of Democratic Party politicians. They would also have to begin to struggle with keeping their candidates in line with this program and have a real internal discussion about whether the job of socialist politicians is to administer the capitalist state.

Unfortunately, despite providing an example that proves independent socialist candidates can win elections, Sawant and Socialist Alternative have fallen into the trap of attempting to administer the bourgeois state. Underlying Sawant’s support for police unions and chiefs, coalitions with “progressive” Democrats, and ultimately Socialist Alternative’s recent support for Bernie Sanders is the organization’s apparent loss

of confidence in the working class to organize their own fights.

This adaptation to capitalist politics by Socialist Alternative and other left groups undoubtedly reflects an impressionist response to the decades-long ebb of militant activity by U.S. workers, which has been worsened by the lack of class-struggle leadership in the labor movement. Left political activists are also surrounded by arguments like the ones in this book—i.e., that the important goal of electing socialists is to pass legislation rather than organizing and educating workers.

DSAers for Sanders

Against this, DSA members and regular authors for *Jacobin* magazine Meaghan Day, Seth Ackerman, and Ben Beckett all argue that the important thing is to support Democrats right now while making sure that they call themselves socialist and use “class-struggle” rhetoric. The strongest article in this category is Day’s, who makes all of the right arguments for why socialists use the electoral arena but fails to take the essential next step of definitively calling for the working class to form its own party.

What she is right about is that participating in electoral politics allows revolutionaries to talk to thousands of workers about their program, gives us the chance to measure how popular our program is, and shows that we are serious politically by participating in the “normal” political arena. What she is wrong about is that these things remain true when campaigning for Bernie Sanders.

When socialists campaign for Sanders or any Democrat, they are supporting that candidate’s program, political past, and inter-class alliances. Socialists supporting capitalist politicians say to working people that they are not capable of really accomplishing anything on their own initiatives in the political arena.

Electoral strategy is not just an abstract question; as Eric Blanc points out in the book, the political arm of the 2018 teachers’ strikes was destroyed by running militant teachers as Democrats and not as the bud of an independent labor party. (In other articles, unfortunately, Blanc fails to advocate adhering to a clear working-class line in politics. In 2017, he argued in *Jacobin* for a “dirty break” with the Democrats, in which working-class and socialist candidates would use the Democratic Party ballot designation along the way to building a labor party.)

Bernie betrays

In general, all of the articles agree that Sanders and his newly elected democratic socialist cohorts are not ideal candidates. Instead, they are said to represent the best of what is considered to be possible. There is a consistent narrative running through most of the articles that the supposed “neoliberal wing” of the Democratic Party is being contested by “insurgent” campaigns by Sanders, AOC, and others.

Behind this argument is the recognition of the Democrats as administrators of austerity, war, and racism. On the other hand, the solution to this problem is

supposedly realized by different formulations of the classic “inside-outside” strategy. This strategy, based on the idea that the left should support the “least bad” bourgeois candidates while building a movement outside of electoral politics that will “keep their feet to the fire” has persistently failed for the last 150 years.

In the case of Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, Julia Salazar, and the rest of the democratic socialist candidates, these authors see an alternative to “business as usual” Democrat elites. At the same time, they surely have read Kim Moody’s article in the book, which describes the necessary discipline these candidates undergo from those very same apparatchiks.

All of these perspectives, while giving rhetorical support to workers’ self-agency, leave open the door for positive developments in the workers’ movement to come from outside of that movement and outside of our class. Looking for a possible driver of the historical agency of the working class to come from capitalist politicians leads to a wholly imagined history for Sanders. Whereas he has consistently voted with the Democrats on everything from budgets to immigration policy, to his “socialist” supporters he takes on the figure of an oppositional current and embodiment of the actual demands of the working class.

His cultivated image as an “insurgent class-struggle” candidate surely was part of the reason that led to his appointment as Outreach Chair of the Senate Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee.

Need for a labor party

The year 2018 was the strongest showing of worker militancy since the 1980s. To say that the best way to maintain momentum is to offer support for Democrats with “class-struggle” rhetoric is to miss an important political moment. As the teachers’ and hotel workers’ strikes showed, a broader vision of class struggle is developing within a section of the U.S. working class. An important way to facilitate the growth of this class consciousness is to educate about the need for a workers’ party based in the trade unions.

No one in the collection, including Sawant, who ultimately advocates what sounds like a multi-class populist third party, puts forward the formation of a labor party as one of the burning questions of the day. Even Barry Eidlin’s “The Phantom Limb” leaves the matter in the abstract, saying it is necessary but without mentioning how. What is clear from Eidlin’s essay is that the presence of a party based in the trade unions, with all of the bureaucratic and reformist implications, is a step of infinite importance for winning any demands for the working class.

The big historical pieces in the book give important information and context on the development of U.S. capitalism, its white supremacy, and its two-party stranglehold. What they miss is the long history and experience of independent parties of workers and oppressed peoples.

With all of the talk about getting a socialist message in front of large amounts of people, there is no discussion of the hundreds of campaigns the Socialist Workers Party ran, including the first Black and Latino candidates for president (Clifton Deberry and Peter Camejo respectively), with the latter receiving over 90,000 votes in 1976. There was also the Raza Unida Party, a militant Chicano party that refused to support Democrats and won hundreds of thousands of votes and even some elections on its own ballot line in the 1970s.

More recently, Socialist Action has made a contribution to independent left electoral politics by running its own candidates for president, Senate, and Congress. The most recent of these campaigns, Fred Linck for U.S. Senate in Connecticut, succeeded in putting our program in front of tens of thousands of people. We collected close to 11,000 signatures for ballot status and were ultimately illegally knocked off the ballot by mostly Democratic Party state election officials.

The question of what a winning strategy looks like is on the mind of virtually all socialist activists. Although “Socialist Electoral Strategy: A Report” offers a decent spectrum of answers to the question, none are totally satisfying. The book works best as a whole, giving a view of current debates within the movement. The content of these debates also reveals the current limits of discussion—namely, a lack of urgency to form either a labor party or a unified socialist electoral organization with a revolutionary program. ■

Protests bust up New York's Amazon deal

Vanessa de la Torre / WNPR

By MARTY GOODMAN

On Feb. 14, Amazon, owned by the world's richest man, Jeff Bezos (\$166 billion), announced that it was pulling out of a deal made with top New York Democrats for a second Amazon headquarters in Long Island City, Queens, near Manhattan, due to opposition from local politicians. But the resistance was much deeper. Community groups, housing activists, unions, and immigrant-rights advocates sprang into action to take on the seemingly invincible trillion-dollar tech giant.

Amazon said that its new New York headquarters would cost over \$2 billion to build and provide 25,000 jobs, with an average salary of \$150,000. Outrageously, the agreement reached last November with Mayor Bill de Blasio and Governor Andrew Cuomo, two "progressive" Democrats, was negotiated in secret and included an outrageous \$3 billion bribe/incentive in tax breaks to Amazon.

Adding fuel to the outrage was a report released by the Institute on Taxation and Economic (ITEP) policy on Feb. 13, which revealed that the tech giant would not have to pay a penny in federal taxes for a second year in a row, despite a whopping \$11.2 billion in profits!

The protests, the outrage over the \$0 taxes, and opposition to the \$3 billion giveaway forced Amazon to retreat—at least for now.

Amazon's new headquarters (HQ2) was to be located next to the Queensbridge Housing project, the largest, low-income public housing complex in the U.S., an ethnically diverse community that would have faced an acceleration of the gentrification that is already engulfing Long Island City (see *Socialist Action*, January 2019).

Acting quickly, about 100 community organizations mobilized, including Make the Road NY, Desis Rising Up and Moving, and many others—even some Democrats, like Queens Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Protesters rushed to the proposed HQ2 location for angry rallies. Amazon opponents stormed a high-profile hearing on Amazon at the Democratic Party controlled City Council, where demonstrators chanted and did a banner drop, all caught on TV. Protesters also rallied in front of an Amazon bookstore.

The Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union denounced the deal at a City Hall press conference. Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), despite its illusions in the Democratic Party, mobilized significant numbers for community outreach and protest.

Amazon's record of unhealthy work conditions

Labor viewed the deal with suspicion, given Amazon's reputation as an exploiter of labor with a union-busting strategy. Amazon is synonymous with very long workdays at low wages, wages so low in fact that many Amazon workers are on food stamps. Moreover, as documented by *The New York Times*, there is a militarized work culture at Amazon and unhealthy working conditions, such as excessive heat and cold.

At a City Hall press conference sponsored by unions, Rashad Long, a Staten Island Amazon worker, told of his complaining to supervisors about excessive workplace heat. When asking that the air conditioning be turned on, he was told, "Robots cannot work well in the cold."

At the moment, there is an ongoing union drive at Amazon's relatively new location on Staten Island, which is already infamous for mistreating workers. If successful, the union would be the first of its kind in the U.S. In Europe, however, coordinated strikes against Amazon have broken out in Italy, France, Germany, Poland, Spain, etc. (see the RWDSU's union report, "What's Wrong with Amazon?").

New York immigration activists have mobilized against Amazon for its use and sale of facial recognition technology. A report from the ACLU revealed the company's sale and marketing of "Rekognition" to police departments and government agencies like Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

A protest letter to management from Amazon workers said, "We already know that in the midst of historic militarization of police, renewed targeting of Black activists, and the growth of a federal deportation force currently engaged in human rights abuses—this will be another powerful tool for the surveillance state, and ultimately serve to harm the most marginalized."

The workers also demanded an end to Amazon's cloud-hosting services with Palantir, a Silicon Valley data analysis firm. "We know that ICE relies on Palantir to power its detention and deportation programs," said the letter.

The announcement of Amazon's New York pullout will not stop the creation of the Arlington, Va., Amazon location, in a very wealthy area negotiated with Virginia's



(Above) On Nov. 14, community groups and labor protest Amazon in Long Island City, Queens, N.Y.

Governor Ralph Northam (Democrat), who was recently exposed for appearing in a disgustingly racist college photo. Amazon's Virginia ransom was "just" \$573 million, based on 25,000 jobs created with an average salary of over \$150,000. However, studies of corporate deals on "job creation" for massive tax breaks reveal a trail of broken promises at all levels—and few, if any, jobs (see the recent "Truthout" article, "Amazon HQ2: Why New Yorkers Were Right to Be Skeptical").

In addition, Gov. Northam also picked out an area in Loudoun County, Va., 30 miles west of Washington, D.C., for expanding Amazon's Web Services, designating it as a site to receive millions in tax breaks under Trump's billionaire-loving tax-break legislation—money supposedly to aid "distressed" areas.

Role of N.Y. "progressive" Democrats

The reaction to HQ2 shocked the neoliberal political establishment, which includes New York City's "progressive" leader, the self-proclaimed "democratic socialist" Mayor Bill de Blasio. The mayor actually lit up the Empire State Building in Amazon orange to deliver his billionaire-loving message to Bezos.

Wannabe progressive leader Governor Andrew Cuomo has said, kidding on the sly, "I'll change my name to Amazon Cuomo if that's what it takes." Cuomo also said that the cost to New Yorkers would be a mindboggling "nada" because, supposedly, Amazon's future tax payments and contributions to the economy would compensate for the \$3 billion tax gift to Bezos—an assertion that astonished serious observers.

Since taking office, Mayor de Blasio has pretended to

be a defender of working people and the poor. His 2014 first-term election theme was that New York City had become "A Tale of Two Cities," a reference to a 19th century novel describing extremes of wealth and poverty.

De Blasio led the 2018 re-zoning (gentrification) of upper-Manhattan's low-income Hispanic Inwood section—with overwhelming support from the Democratic-controlled city council—which many activists called, "ethnic cleansing." Inwood was the fifth de Blasio re-zoning scheme to pass; all except one are in Black, Latino, and Asian working-class neighborhoods.

The fight against Amazon proved that mobilizations work. Unfortunately, Amazon is not leaving New York, nor will the real-estate grabbing tech giant Google, but will merely adjust its tactics. On March 1, *The New York Times* printed a letter signed by CEOs from Mastercard and Goldman Sachs, the New York State AFL-CIO, several large public unions, and others asking Amazon to reconsider New York for its HQ2, with the mayor and the governor on board.

According to *The Times*, top Democrats, including Ocasio-Cortez, are waffling in their opposition. Will they cut a rotten deal on gentrification and exploitation? Stay tuned! It is certain that the Democratic Party will continue to serve the goals of big business. To win, labor and the oppressed communities must mobilize in massive numbers until Amazon's plans are defeated once and for all. ■

Haitians say president must go

By MARTY GOODMAN

"We have a little minority (of) rich people in this country, running this country, earning everything, and we have the mass of the population dying, hunger, and misery like this. It's impossible," said a Haitian protester, Valckensy Dessin, last month. Feb. 7, 2019, marked 33 years since nationwide protests forced the 1986 downfall of the U.S.-backed dictator, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier.

Haitians were back in the streets for much of February. All major cities were on fire with protest. Schools, public offices, and private businesses were closed. Burning tires lit street intersections, gas stations were torched, and banks trashed.

The demonstrators demanded the ouster of the pro-U.S. businessman, President Jovenel Moïse. "Moïse Must go!" and "Give me the money!" crowds yelled. Tragically, at least 26 were killed and about 77 injured, according to UNICEF.

Rage continued over the theft of \$4 billion in oil credits from Venezuela's "PetroCaribe" program, intended for aid to Haiti's poor. Two Haitian Senate reports and another by government auditors, identified billions stolen from PetroCaribe funds. The reports cited Moïse's companies and other corrupt elements. The funds came from the 17-nation PetroCaribe program before imperialist oil sanc-

tions were instituted against Venezuela. By declaring Venezuela "terrorist," President Obama paved the way for Trump's sanctions.

Haitians were also furious at the Haitian government when it voted in the Organization of American States on Jan. 10 to condemn Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro as "illegitimate"—even after Venezuela's \$4 billion gift!

Today, 60% of Haiti's population lives in poverty. The World Bank and its enforcement arm, the IMF, imposes austerity, which resulted in the doubling of gas prices last July to maintain debt payments. The measure sparked massive protests. The system is maintained by U.S. support for corrupt, pro-U.S. regimes and reinforced by years of a U.S.-led UN occupation. About 1000 troops remain in Haiti today.

In related news, on Oct. 3, 2018, a U.S. District Court prevented Homeland Security from terminating Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for some 240,000 TPS recipients from Haiti, Sudan, Nicaragua, and El Salvador living in the U.S. On Feb. 28, TPS was officially extended until Jan. 2, 2020. Considering conditions in Haiti, the fight must go on to protect all TPS recipients from deportation!

Tragically, no opposition force has emerged in Haiti worthy of trust. The building of a working-class revolutionary party remains top priority to escape from the boot of capitalist misery. ■

The Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution



(Left) Fidel speaks in front of Presidential Palace in January 1959.

By LAZARO MONTEVERDE

"A Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution: How the working class shaped the guerrillas' victory," by Steve Cushion. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016.)

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. Given its durability, revolutionaries should pay close attention to both its successes and failures. This is not always easy to do, given the deluge of propaganda we in North America have been exposed to over the last 60 years.

The same people who purvey the disinformation are the same people who have fought a 60-year war against the revolution: the U.S. ruling class and the U.S. government. This war against the revolution included an invasion with a proxy army at the Bay of Pigs, numerous acts of economic sabotage, assassination attempts, and a 55-year economic blockade against Cuba that has yet to end. Under the Trump administration this war has escalated. Rolling back some of the policies of the Obama administration, the Trump administration has targeted Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela as the "troika of tyranny." (1)

The hatred of the U.S. ruling class stems from two factors: first, the centrality that Cuba played in the U.S. empire from 1898 to 1959; second, the Cuban Revolution as a "proof of concept" that revolution is possible in the Latin America.

After the Spanish-American War of 1898, in which the rising U.S. empire defeated the declining Spanish empire in Latin America and the Pacific, the U.S. restructured the Cuban economy to fit imperialist needs. Under the Platt Amendment, the U.S. converted Cuba into a colony that could be ruled indirectly by the U.S. It was a new form of colonialism that the U.S. pioneered and perfected in Cuba. Cuba became a source of great profits for the U.S. (along with Central America) in the first half of the 20th century. (2)

The second reason for the hatred of the U.S. ruling class is that the Cuban Revolution and Cuba today are a proof of concept—a demonstration that successful revolution is possible within the U.S. empire and that socialism is possible for the countries of Latin America. While the Cuban Revolution has been crippled by U.S. imperialism over the last 60 years, and while it had been distorted by the influence of Stalinism, it was a genuine socialist revolution made by the Cuban people, and Cuba remains to this day a workers' state. For how much longer, though, is anyone's guess.

Steve Cushion is an activist worker and scholar from London. He worked as a bus driver in London for 20 years, earned a Ph.D. in Caribbean Labor History, and has been active in labor and socialist struggles his entire life. He enjoyed unprecedented access to Cuban

**U.S. imperialism has placed Cuba on its hit list, along with Venezuela and Nicaragua. How can we best defend the Cuban Revolution?
Also, how do we build two, three, many Cubas?**

historical archives and received the help of numerous Cuban and non-Cuban historians. The result is a profound re-telling of the Cuban Revolution that transforms prior misunderstanding of the process. What follows is a brief synopsis based on Cushion's history.

The Cuban working class

By the 1950s Cuba had developed a relatively large urban and rural working class, as Cushion points out. This working class was also highly unionized, with "the highest percentage of unionized workers in Latin America" (Cushion, p. 22). These workers were organized in a single labor confederation, the CTC (Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba), that was state sponsored and initially influenced by the PSP (Partido Socialista Popular), the Stalinist Communist Party of Cuba. The CTC developed in 1935 after a failed general strike led by an earlier national labor federation.

Batista, representing the interests of the U.S., used the military to defeat the 1935 general strike and ruled indirectly until 1940, when he won the presidential elections with the support of the PSP. The CTC and PSP declared a class truce during World War II and tried to enforce a no-strike and wage freeze deal on the workers. When Batista's hand-picked successor ran in 1944 supported by the Stalinists, he lost (Cushion, p. 21).

The no-strike and wage freeze deal was met with resistance by rank-and-file labor activists. Perhaps the most dramatic and successful resistance occurred in Guantanamo in 1943, where railroad workers were led by Trotskyists in a strike in which they demanded payment of a 15 percent wage increase that had already been agreed to by the railroad. The Trotskyists were members of the POR (Partido Obrero Revolucionario, the Revolutionary Workers Party in English), which since the 1930s had their center of activity among the workers and peasants of eastern Cuba.

These workers later formed an important network of support for the July 26 Movement led by Fidel Cas-

tro (Cushion, p. 33).

The international context changed at the end of World War II, when the U.S. adopted new anti-communist policies both at home and in its empire. The Communists were purged from the CTC national leadership in 1947, and Eusebio Mujal, a loyal Batista supporter with connections to both the AFL and the CIA, became the general secretary of the CTC. After the March 1952 coup in which Batista took power permanently, Mujal became an important supporter of the dictatorship.

In addition to the political changes brought about in the 1950s by the Batista dictatorship and the pro-capitalist policies of the Mujal trade-union leadership, the Cuban working class experienced important economic changes. In the 1950s, sugar accounted for 80% of Cuba's exports (Cushion, p. 43). Sugar production produced enormous profits for the U.S.; for instance, "between 1948 and 1955, \$637 million in profits from sugar alone were repatriated to the U.S." (Cushion, p. 45), and closely tied the Cuban ruling class to U.S. capitalism. When the price of sugar on the world market collapsed in 1952 because of overproduction, Cuba experienced an economic crisis.

The still young United Nations responded by calling an international conference of sugar producing nations in London. The London Sugar Agreement of 1953 established quotas for each nation in an effort to maintain prices. Not all nations participated, however, and individual countries had an incentive to break the quota to increase their own sales on the world market; the agreement was a failure and sugar prices stayed low.

The U.S. and Cuban capitalists responded with an effort to increase their profits on the backs of the workers by increasing productivity. Specifically, they sought to increase mechanization in harvesting, processing, and transporting sugar, thereby reducing both the number of workers needed and their labor costs. They also sought to break the unions and reduce wages and benefits. It was in the context of the economic crisis and the war on the working class that Batista seized power a second time in 1952.

On July 26, 1953, Fidel Castro and 135 others seized the Moncada army barracks with the aim of starting a mass insurrection against Batista. The attempt failed and Castro and others were tried and convicted. Castro's courtroom defense, "History will absolve me," was a stirring critique of the dictatorship. At the same time, the PSP turned away from its policy of peaceful coexistence with the capitalists and support for the government and turned "toward the working class" (Cushion, p. 113) and a strategy of mass action, especially strikes and strike support.

A turning point in the war on the working class took place in 1955 when Batista and the ruling elite aggressively imposed their program of wage cuts and mechanization. Cushion details the resulting wave of strikes in Chapter 3. He highlights the brutal nature of the attacks, along with the important role of women and students in the strikes. In 1955 there were 13 major strikes outside the sugar industry and 14 major strikes within the sugar industry along with numerous other smaller strikes and labor actions. In addition, a massive amnesty campaign succeeded in freeing Castro and other participants in the attack in 1955. Castro and his followers regrouped in exile, forming the July 26th Movement (Movimiento Revolucionario 26 de julio).

The strike wave met with both successes and failures, with both the PSP and the July 26th Movement gaining adherents. Their involvement in the mass struggles also placed the two groups in closer proximity, with the PSP slowly coming to realize the significance of Castro's group as a potential ally or competitor. After a number of defeats in the 1955-56 strike wave, workers took stock and re-assessed their

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... Cuban history

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strategies and tactics.

Workers adapted in two ways. First, they started to combine strikes with industrial sabotage. Second, they formed clandestine cell structures within their unions and communities. This clandestine cell structure later formed the basis for the July 26th Movement's workers' section [sección obrera]. Meanwhile, militants and leaders in the PSP moved toward embracing the general strike as a way to bring down the dictatorship.

Into this pre-revolutionary crisis stepped Fidel Castro, who arrived with other militants of the July 26th Movement on the boat *Granma* near the end of November 1956. Supported by workers who helped prepare the way by stockpiling food and arms, as well as engaging in supporting strikes, Castro and his militants set up bases in the Sierra Maestra, in Eastern Cuba.

The Batista regime responded with a reign of terror against workers and domestic political opponents, as Cushion details in Chapter 5. Activists and political leaders of all stripes were arrested, tortured, and sometimes killed, constitutional rights were suspended, and press censorship was enforced. This did not curtail the activism, however, and 1957 saw another wave of strikes, albeit mainly defensive in nature. At the same time, activists in local areas from both the PSP and the July 26th Movement, along with activists from other political tendencies came together in local areas and cooperated with one another, a kind of political convergence at the base.

The general strikes

The most successful political action against the dictatorship was a general strike in August 1957 (described in Chapter 6). The August general strike in eastern Cuba started when Frank Pais, the leader of the July 26th Movement underground in Santiago, was captured and executed at the end of July. The strike is often described as spontaneous, a term Cushion notes is often used by historians when they don't know who organized an event. Cushion shows that the strike was organized by the network of militant trade-union activists who were "able to react quickly and seize an opportunity without requiring orders to do so" (Cushion, p. 157).

The strike did not spread beyond eastern Cuba but did paralyze a number of towns and factories in the east. The strike was most successful in places where the July 26th Movement and the PSP cooperated with one another and where there were clandestine workers' cells. Women played a crucial role in this strike, as did a number of Trotskyists who had joined the July 26th Movement.

The August 1957 strike led to increased cooperation at the base between the July 26th Movement and the PSP. The leadership of the two organizations drew different conclusions from the strike. The PSP saw the strike as evidence of the strength of their mass-struggle approach and emphasized a 20% wage increase as a crucial part of their program.

The July 26th Movement, on the other hand, felt that the dictatorship was on the verge of collapse, and that a single push from a general strike combined with a guerrilla offensive would end the dictatorship. The July 26th Movement called for a general strike on April 9, 1958. Workers had not prepared for the strike—the call came as a surprise to most workers but not the government, who was expecting a strike at any time.

While the strike activities in Havana and outside of the capital (see Cushion, pp. 167-168 for a list of the strikes outside of the capital) were impressive, the July 26th Movement had not done the hard work and careful preparation needed for success. The strike ended in defeat and was considered a disaster by both the PSP and the July 26th Movement.

The failure of the strike produced a tactical convergence between the July 26th Movement and the PSP. Castro and his leadership team realized the importance of careful preparation, economic demands, and collaboration with the PSP. The PSP realized the importance of insurrection (of which the armed struggle in the mountains, the *focos*, was an important part), armed support for the strikers, and of cooperation with the July 26th Movement, which they now viewed as the leadership of the revolutionary struggle. While the April 9 general strike had failed, it laid the foundation for the defeat of Batista and the success of the revolution.

Chapter 7 details the rapid developments that took place after the failed April 9, 1958, strike. These developments produced the defeat of Batista at the end of the year. The guerrillas adopted a policy of leniency and fair treatment to captured enemy soldiers (in contrast to the extreme brutality and torture used by



Batista's troops). This encouraged many of the troops to surrender or change sides. The July 26th Movement and the PSP decided to form a united front of all workers organizations and created a joint organization, the FONU (Frente Obrero Unido Nacional/United National Workers Front, in English).

FONU very quickly started organizing united-front groups of workers in all areas of the country and in all industries. FONU planned for a national strike to start in January 1959, in conjunction with the start of the sugar harvest. In preparation for the strike, FONU organized two democratic national workers conferences (in July 26th Movement controlled territory) of rank-and-file militants.

As a consequence of these national workers conferences (which Cushion argues have been generally ignored by historians), FONU undermined the last vestiges of authority of the pro-capitalist labor movement. Equally important, the July 26th Movement gained enormous status as the leadership of the working class. While the FONU never really existed as a single united organization at the national level (there simply was not enough time to merge the national leadership of the two groups), it was a potent symbol and, more importantly, there were united-front actions among workers in various industries, cities, and regions.

Chapter 7 describes the end of the Batista dictatorship, which happened quickly. Batista was not able to maintain the conditions for normal economic activity, and the economy ground to a halt. The capitalist class abandoned him, hoping to replace him with someone who could drive down wages and defeat the July 26th Movement. In May 1958, Batista's forces launched an offensive against the guerrillas; the offensive failed completely. By August, two columns of guerrilla forces were marching west. The July 26th Movement seized Santiago de Cuba on New Year's Day when they heard the news that Batista had fled the country.

The revolutionary process was now at a crucial turning point. A number of capitalist politicians sought to seize control of the government in a coup. Castro addressed the country by radio from Santiago, calling for the start of the general strike. The strike paralyzed the country, prevented any pro-capitalist coup, and guaranteed the victory of the July 26th Movement. Castro himself acknowledged the importance of the general strike, which "was decisive in delivering the fortresses of the capital of the republic, in defeating the final maneuvers of the enemies of the people, and in giving all power to the revolution" (Cushion, p. 198).

Cushion ends his analysis with Chapter 8, on the first year of the Cuban Revolution, and with a final concluding chapter. The united front between the PSP and the July 26th Movement broke down almost immediately, with internal divisions and realignments in both groups. Eventually, both groups split, and then the left wing of both groups merged to form the Cuban Communist Party. The conclusion is especially worth reading, as it provides a succinct summary of the historical lessons of the Cuban Revolution.

The myth of the foco

The Cuban Revolution has generally been understood, or rather misunderstood, on the basis of two myths. The first is the myth of the *foco*, the small band of revolutionaries fighting in the mountains that makes the revolution. The other is the myth of the middle class in revolt, bringing down the hated dictator Batista, only to have their democratic revo-

(Above) The Cuban general strike of 1933. Another tremendous strike followed in 1935.

lution hijacked by Castro and the radicals. Cushion alludes to both of these portrayals of the revolution at the very beginning of his book in the form of two contrasting movies: *Che*, a movie about the heroic revolutionaries fighting in the mountains, and *Ciudad en Rojo*, a Cuban film about the urban, middle-class opposition to Batista in the final days of the dictatorship.

Cushion's invaluable work shows that it was the working class, led by the vanguard MR 26-7 and Fidel Castro, that made the revolution. The isolated focus fighting in the mountains, as Cushion shows, could not have survived without the active support of networks of urban and rural workers who supplied them with food, weapons, logistical support, and information. In many respects, the Cuban Revolution followed the basic pattern of the Russian Revolution, although more by accident than because of a grounding in Marxist theory.

The portrayal of the revolution as a consequence of heroic revolutionaries fighting in the mountains is in part a creation myth created after the fact, just as the portrayal of the revolution as a middle-class struggle (many in the middle class did oppose Batista, especially at the very end) hijacked by Castro is also a myth.

The origin of both myths is complex, and they are embraced by very different groups. The *foco* myth owes much to a book by Regis Debray, a French philosopher who taught at the University of Havana in the 1960s and who was a friend of Che Guevara. In 1967 Debray published "Revolution in the Revolution," which soon became a type of handbook for revolutionaries throughout Latin America. (3)

Cushion does not address the *foco* strategy of guerrilla warfare but his historical research is directly relevant to questions of revolutionary strategy. Cushion's pathbreaking historical research should put to rest any question about how revolutions are made. Revolutions are not made by small groups, but by the working-class masses. These masses need a revolutionary vanguard, but this vanguard is itself made up of the most advanced members of the working class.

Armed struggle may be an important or necessary tactic, but it is the use of strikes and protests, including the general strike, which will ultimately bring about a mass insurrection. The way ahead, for revolutionaries everywhere, is what is generally thought of as the Leninist strategy.

"Socialism in one country"

Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky all envisioned socialist revolution as a world revolution, starting perhaps in one or a few countries and then spreading in both the capitalist core and the capitalist periphery. None of them believed that socialism could survive in one country, let alone a country in the underdeveloped and neo-colonial periphery of the capitalist world system. The abominable Stalinist doctrine of "socialism in one country" made a virtue of a grim necessity and was used to justify the reactionary policies of the Soviet bureaucracy.

The leaders of the Cuban Revolution knew better. In an article in the January 2019 issue of *Monthly Review*, journalist Ron Augustin has offered a timely analysis of the Cuban Revolution and the problem of socialism in one country. (4) Augustin focuses on the views

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... No U.S. war on Venezuela!

(Photo) Antiwar protesters in Miami, Fla., on Feb. 18.

Marty Goodman / Socialist Action



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president. A vivid eyewitness account was presented by the weekly *Latin American Summary* (*Resumen Latinoamericano*) in a Feb. 23 on-the-scene article entitled, "Bolivarian Venezuela Scores Another Strategic Victory":

"Suddenly, as they rolled across the bridge on the Colombian side, they [the "aid" trucks] were set on fire by a group of guarimberos [road blockers] who sprayed the vehicles with gasoline while they were being filmed and photographed by many reporters.

"But since the hegemonic media are the violent advance units of mass mind poisoning, they invented another matrix of lies by accusing Chavismo supporters of starting the fire. What's more, they told us that it was the members of the Bolivarian National Guard, who were stationed far from the scene, who were to blame for this clumsy action. And this morning every major corporate news agency from the National Public Radio (NPR), *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *BBC*, *the Guardian* on down were reporting this as the gospel.

"What they didn't say is that the thugs 'hired' by the opposition addicted to Guaidó and protected by the Colombian police (there are videos on the internet as evidence) became irate because things didn't go well and they didn't get paid their agreed upon fees. That's why a hooded mob gave the 'contractors' a good beating. This also happened to Guaidó supporter Congressman José Antonio Olivares, who was hit in the face and head by a group shouting, 'thieves, pay what you promised.'"

In a Feb. 27 address to the UN Security Council, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza claimed that some of the "aid" trucks sent to Colombia's border with his country were found to contain nails and wire—which could be used in constructing barricades. He produced photographs to back up his assertions.

Antiwar activists may remember how in the 1980s President Ronald Reagan's Deputy National Security Adviser, Elliot Abrams, and his CIA cohorts used planes with fake Red Cross markings to send arms to the Contras, who were fighting to overthrow the popular government in Nicaragua, violating U.S. and international law in the process.

In the end, Guaidó, who now calls for direct U.S. military intervention, was compelled to admit that his "humanitarian aid" gambit was a failure, as was his boast that 600,000 Venezuelans would mobilize in Caracas to demand the government's resignation. The small groups that did take to the streets in Caracas threw rocks at government soldiers. Guaidó's claim that some 400 Venezuelan soldiers had deserted to his side was left unsubstantiated; the Venezuelan government put the figure at 20.

U.S. economic warfare

While Guaidó's hoped-for triumphant re-entry into Venezuela as the nation's savior proved to be farce, the real war waged by the U.S. against Venezuela

remains deadly serious. The sanctions and related economic measures imposed by the U.S. against oil-rich Venezuela have been draconian, if not unprecedented. These include instructions to all U.S. banking institutions to seize hundreds of billions of dollars in Venezuelan accounts and transfer the funds into accounts payable to puppet president Guaidó.

The details of this have been well documented. Here it is sufficient to report that the full force of the U.S. leading capitalist banking elites, from the Bank of America to the J.P. Morgan Chase financial behemoths, have joined in stealing funds generated from the sale of Venezuelan oil in the U.S. and around the world. Add to this the U.S.-pressured decision of the British ruling class to sequester Venezuelan gold deposited in British banks to the tune of \$1.3 billion, and the severing of Venezuelan access to the world's lending institutions, and you have nothing less than a U.S.-led war against the Venezuelan people.

Indeed, a U.S. Army document published in September 2008 by Wikileaks demonstrates that the U.S. government sees economic aggression as a key component of its warfare strategy.

On Feb. 25, Vice President Pence demanded that all Latin American countries "freeze the assets of Venezuela's state oil company, PDVSA." Pence, according to the Feb. 25 *New York Times*, "also warned some countries in the region that have conspicuously sought to remain neutral in the crisis convulsing Venezuela that they cannot remain so, singling out Mexico and Uruguay." The endlessly pontificating and threatening Pence declared, "We believe there can be no bystanders. No one on the sidelines of this, particularly in our hemisphere."

Despite Guaidó's abject failure at the border, the U.S. persists in demanding that its allies accept Venezuela's being effectively expelled from the world economy. Insisting on the present legitimacy of the historic U.S. imperial credo embodied in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, Trump's partisan warmakers proclaim that Venezuela is today situated in the U.S. "backyard" and, therefore, barred from exercising its sovereign rights as a nation.

In the same breath, they assert that Venezuela's dire economic straits, including major food and medical shortages and a raging inflation, are of Venezuela's own making! "The nation with the largest oil reserves in the world," according to the cynical imperialist interveners, "can't feed its own people." Nothing could be further from the truth!

Pence announced that U.S. military planes were consciously violating Venezuelan airspace to find future "humanitarian aid" access routes into Venezuela from Brazil and Colombia.

"There is no turning back," Pence insisted, declaring that, as in Libya, where U.S./NATO and allied forces from Qatar and other Gulf State monarchies destroyed the infrastructure of that nation and murdered thousands, including its president Muammar Gadhafi, the U.S. was seeking to construct yet another "coalition of the willing" to do its bidding.

With the world's largest oil reserves, Venezuela makes a prime target for U.S. profit-hungry corporate titans. However, there's another dimension to the current aggression. U.S. oligarchs, who represent a tiny portion of the population but wield the lion's share of political and economic power, cannot abide any group stepping out of line, be it at home or abroad. Though they pretend to support democracy, in truth, democratic rule by the majority is to the ruling rich like a cross to a vampire. They will never give up their power and privileges voluntarily, regardless of the wishes of the other 99% of the population.

The current attack on Venezuela demonstrates what happens when a majority democratically decides to defy the dictatorship of the wealthy 1%: at such a time, those at the top shed their democratic masks and strike out with vicious, deadly force. While mobilizing today to defend Venezuela's democratic right to self-determination, working people in the U.S. would do well to remember this lesson of who really supports democracy and who really promotes violence.

The U.S. is no newcomer to engineering coups in Venezuela. Its 2002 effort, backed to the hilt by the Bush administration, lasted for 48 hours and included the arrest of President Hugo Chavez by a core team of U.S.-paid generals. In the

intervening hours before massive mobilizations forced Chavez's release, the coup makers passed 49 decrees abolishing the government's progressive social measures while privatizing Venezuela's oil industry, all in the name of returning the country to economic and social stability.

Similarly, the U.S.-engineered 1973 coup against the popular Salvador Allende government in Chile put the rightist General Augusto Pinochet in power. Capitalist stability was restored by Pinochet's slaughter of 60,000 Chilean workers herded into a sports arena or otherwise murdered out of public view. The string of U.S.-backed coups in the region also includes Haiti in 1991 and 2004 and Honduras in 2009.

Cuba calls for worldwide mobilizations

Anticipating the possibility of another such regime-change slaughter, the Cuban newspaper *Granma* published a government statement entitled, "It is imperative to halt the imperialist military adventure against Venezuela." Cuba's revolutionary government called for massive worldwide mobilizations in support of Venezuela's sovereignty.

On Feb. 23, the "humanitarian aid" invasion date set by Trump and Co., an estimated 150 antiwar protests, mostly in the U.S., demanded, "U.S. Hands Off Venezuela!" and "No to a U.S. Coup!" The Oakland, Calif., demonstration of 200 activists, initiated by a broad range of antiwar and social justice forces, including the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), won the unanimous endorsement of the delegates to the San Francisco Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO.

To the consternation of U.S. officials, Cuba, as well as Iran, Russia, and China—all sanctioned or threatened with severe economic measures by the U.S.—joined forces to deliver tons of food and medical supplies to beleaguered Venezuela. Russian and Chinese agreements to expand purchases of Venezuelan oil are justly seen by the Maduro government as vital and widely viewed, regardless of motivation, as mutually beneficial.

Estimates of the cost of the U.S. economic war against Venezuela exceed \$7 billion this year and is expected to rise to \$30 billion in the years ahead.

No doubt the solidarity of revolutionary Cuba, itself invaded (in 1962), embargoed, and blockaded by the imperialist beast for nearly 60 years, is widely seen among Latin America's working masses as an example of socialist politics in action. It was revolutionary Cuba that, along with Venezuela in 2005, when Hurricane Katrina had devastated much of New Orleans, offered to send serious humanitarian aid to the people of that city, including vast numbers of doctors and medical supplies. U.S. officials rejected this "no strings attached" offer.

In contrast, today, the strings attached to the phony U.S. "humanitarian aid" include a military invasion, conquest of Venezuela, and its return to colonial status. Demonstrating his extreme imperial arrogance,

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Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

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Trudeau gov't rocked by scandal; Different laws for SNC Lavalin?

By GARY PORTER

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau often brags about his “feminism” and his devotion to Indigenous rights in Canada. His surprising demotion of Jody Wilson-Raybould (JWR) from Justice Minister to Veterans Affairs Minister, and her subsequent resignation from the federal Liberal cabinet made a mockery of his claims, and raised eyebrows across Canada. Wilson-Raybould, a respected Indigenous lawyer, is reputedly a champion of good governance and accountability. Her crime was to take her job seriously.

The *Globe and Mail* revealed that the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and Trudeau himself pushed the Justice Minister to allow SNC Lavalin, a Montreal-based mega-corporation, to negotiate a Deferred Prosecution Agreement instead of SNC's facing charges of fraud and corruption in court. One might ask, why, in the first place, was legislation permitting such an escape clause for corrupt corporations approved by Parliament on Sept. 18, 2018? And why was it made to apply retroactively to criminal charges in progress?

Needless to say, SNC lobbied hard for the new act. Wilson-Raybould's apparent refusal to accede to demands by the PM, choosing instead to do her job, meant she just had to go.

On Feb. 27, Wilson-Raybould shocked many observers with her testimony before the House of Commons Justice



Chris Wattle / Reuters

(Above) Former cabinet member Jody Wilson-Raybould.

Committee. Trudeau, under great pressure, had just lifted the constraints of client solicitor privilege and cabinet confidentiality. JWR revealed that between early September 2018 and at least January 2019, Finance Minister Bill Morneau, Prime Minister Trudeau and senior staff persistently urged her, even in a threatening way, to reverse the decision of her chief prosecutor not to offer a Deferred Prosecution Agreement (DPA) to SNC Lavalin.

JWR warned Trudeau that this pressure was in violation of the independence of the judiciary and subverted the rule of law. She advised them to cease, but they did not. She ex-

plained that as a lawyer who had seen how the law and judicial independence have been applied selectively to Indigenous people, she swore it would not occur on her watch.

SNC Lavalin employs 52,000 people worldwide. It reaps \$10 billion USD annually in revenue from its global project management and infrastructure construction and operations business. SNC is considered by Canadian capitalism to be “too big to fail.”

The unfolding scandal has tarnished the image of Trudeau. It may even topple the government. But deeper lies the lesson. Myths about respect for the rule of law and the independence of Canada's “justice” system have taken a beating. These myths underpin the social contract according to which private corporations obtain natural resources, social infrastructure such as energy, transportation and communications systems, and the labour of millions, supposedly in exchange for creating wealth to the benefit of society as a whole.

Part of the bargain is that the vast surpluses created by labour during this process are appropriated by private owners who operate under laws that supposedly enforce fairness and regulate the greed into which unregulated masters would otherwise sink.

SNC Lavalin has a long history of anti-competitive, anti-market practices and other insidious acts. This behaviour is not limited to foreign jurisdictions where, according to arrogant racists, corruption is the norm. SNC executives were found guilty of making illegal payments to obtain huge contracts to build the Jacques Cartier Bridge in Montreal and the McGill University Health Centre.

Canadians are taught that in a liberal capitalist democracy, politicians do not interfere in the even-handed application of reasonable laws. We are assured that politics and politicians cannot corrupt the Canadian justice system. In truth, the only thing that is never violated under capitalism is the soulless drive by owners and bosses to maximize private profit, however corrupt and destructive their behaviour is.

Apologists for Trudeau and the unelected bureaucrats of the PMO insist that SNC Lavalin must be saved. Think of those 9000 jobs situated in Canada and the families involved! But corporations and their executives who violate the public trust, abuse their wealth, and misallocate social resources should lose their freedom and their wealth.

A truly “just” society would jail the criminal executives and expropriate SNC Lavalin, so that those who do the hard, honest work can run this massive enterprise in the public interest. ■

... Venezuela

(continued from page 8)

Trump bragged that Cuba and Nicaragua were next in line for colonial conquest.

Venezuela's foreign minister, Jorge Arreaza, while stating that the events of Feb. 23 demonstrated that “the momentum of the coup is over,” took great care to make clear that Venezuela was incapable of resisting a full U.S. invasion. Venezuela's sole defense, he stated, was in the expected solidarity of the Latin American people, a factor that he obviously held high in cautioning that a U.S. invasion would extract a great political price across the continent. Arreaza added that should a U.S. invasion become a reality, the Venezuelan people would defend their country with their lives.

Socialist vs. “pink” revolutions?

Venezuela's “pink revolution”—as with all of Latin America's recent experience with the political rule of social-democratic, reformist, or left nationalist governments that promised to improve the lives of the working masses without fundamentally challenging their nation's capitalist and private property foundation—has proved to be inadequate to the task.

John Pilger's Feb. 22, 2019, *Counterpunch* article entitled “The war on Venezuela is built on lies” makes this absolutely clear. Pilger, a longtime admirer and friend of former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and a sympathetic, anti-imperialist friend of Venezuela, explains in great detail what has been widely viewed as Venezuela's democratic electoral process and its significant social achievements.

But Pilger's balance sheet includes this painfully accurate yet contradictory statement: “For all the Chavistas' faults—such as allowing the Venezuelan economy to become hostage to the fortunes of oil and never seriously challenging big capital and corruption—they brought social justice and pride to millions of people and they did it with unprecedented democracy.”

The iron laws of capitalism, whether in the U.S. or anywhere else in the world, repeatedly demonstrate that advancing the interests of the vast majority is inherently incompatible with defending the prerogatives of the minority ruling-class capitalist elite. Venezuela is a classic case in point. The Chavez/Maduro governments, as Pilger painfully notes, “never seriously challenged big capital,” that is, the overwhelm-

ing ownership and control by the “1 %” of Venezuela's major industries—including its oil, partial “nationalizations” notwithstanding—its land, banking, and related financial institutions, basic resources, systems of transportation, shipping, etc.

Venezuela's land largely remains the private property of big landowners. Its oil resource, vast as it is, remains dependent on imperialist ownership and control of the necessary infrastructure—refineries, pipelines, transport, etc.—to bring it from the ground to the market place. Indeed, Venezuela's thick oil is largely incapable of passing through its pipelines without the importation and utilization of refined U.S. oil products to sufficiently dilute Venezuela's crude.

In short, the Chavez/Maduro project of “coexisting” with capitalism left it incapable of developing a rounded economy capable of producing its own food—Venezuela imports almost all of its food—and instituting a semblance of planned and balanced economic growth aimed at satisfying human needs as opposed to capitalist profits. Today, 70 percent of Venezuela's economy remains in capitalist hands, not to mention some 70 to 90 percent of its media.

Rhetoric aside, Venezuela is no socialist economy. The rhythms of its economic, and therefore social development, are contingent on the exigencies of the world capitalist market. When world oil prices, always manipulated by the U.S. and a few of the most powerful oil producers, plummeted from over \$110 per barrel to less than \$40 over the past decade, Venezuela's economy suffered greatly and become increasingly subject to imperialism's ever-deepening destabilization measures.

The Chavez government's conscious decision to avoid any fundamental break with capitalism left it unprotected, as was the case with similar reform-minded governments in Brazil (Lula), Ecuador (Correa), Nicaragua (Ortega), and all the others. The Chavistas sought to coexist with the “boli-bourgeoisie” (Venezuelan capitalists) who occupied essential parts of the government infrastructure and were included in Venezuela's United Socialist Party. Capitalism and government corruption are inseparable. In a true socialist society, real power resides in the democratic ownership, operation, and control of society's wealth and resources by the working-class majority.

In contrast to Venezuela's reform-minded but capitalist-committed Chavistas, Cuba's socialist revolution of 1959 proceeded to rapidly, in Fidel's words, “nationalize the capitalist class down to the nails

in the heels of their boots.” It quickly established a planned economy based on meeting human needs, not capitalist profits; it distributed the land to the long-oppressed and exploited peasantry; and it armed its population to defend all of those gains. In consequence, Cuba's proud revolutionary achievements remain largely intact and a shining example to oppressed people everywhere, despite more than a half-century of U.S. imperialist efforts to restore it to its former neo-colonial status.

The way forward for Venezuela

Venezuela today stands at the threshold of social change. It can take the Cuban route and move toward a fundamental break with capitalist domination or it can continue on the dead-end path of “peaceful” coexistence with an imperialist-backed internal capitalist elite. The latter course, as history has repeatedly demonstrated, is a sure road to disaster.

Genuine socialist revolution, established via direct and democratic rule of the working-class majority, requires the formation of a deeply-rooted mass revolutionary socialist working-class-based party with a program and cadre that have absorbed the lessons of history and are prepared to challenge capitalist/imperialist rule fundamentally. While such a party does not exist in Venezuela today, the conditions for its formation, given the deep radicalization brought on by the immediate threat of a U.S. invasion and the experience of millions with the failures of previous reformist projects, are propitious.

In the current context, the best defense is a good offence. There is nothing the Venezuelan government can do to placate the rapacious capitalists in the U.S. or within Venezuela. Appeasement will not work. Power must be met with power. And the only source of power within Venezuela that can match the imperial behemoth at the gates is an emboldened, organized, mobilized working class headed by a mass revolutionary socialist party.

A defeat for working people in Venezuela at the hands of the U.S. ruling rich would be a setback for working people the world over. The social forces attacking Venezuela are the same as those blocking efforts to seriously address climate change; the same as those promoting mass incarceration, racism, sexism, deportations, homophobia, and economic inequality; the same as those attacking unions and pushing austerity; the same as those advocating endless war.

U.S. Hands Off Venezuela! ■

Lesbophobia past and present



1992 Gay Pride March, New York City. Photo: Lisa Kohane

By ANN MONTAGUE

Lesbians resist and rebel against institutions and belief systems that oppress us. Starting as young girls we fight against the tyranny of pink. Today, the situation is worse than ever for all girls, as multi-million-dollar corporations become the enforcers of oppressive sex stereotyping.

Over the last 10 years, Disney has marketed over 26,000 "Princess" items. This has not only become the fastest growing brand for Disney, it is also the largest franchise in the world for girls ages two to six. The products are all about clothes, jewelry, makeup, and of course, being rescued by the prince.

Disney enforces oppressive gender norms for girls by idealizing the institution of monogamous heterosexual marriage (Cinderella, Little Mermaid, The Princess, and the Frog). Princesses can only be imagined as heterosexual and their greatest success can only be the fairy-tale wedding, which renders them as property.

At the same time, the proliferation of pink sends more messages to girls. Pink becomes more than a color, and academics have even created the word "pinkification," which is defined as "teaching and reinforcing stereotypes that limit the way girls perceive themselves."

Peggy Orenstein, the author of a recent book, "Cinderella Ate My Daughter," asked a sales rep, "Is all this pink really necessary? There are other colors in the rainbow." He laughed, "I guess girls are just born loving pink." There are, of course, girls who rebel, turn their backs on imposed limitations, and shout, "Pink stinks."

As lesbians enter their teenage years, the struggle continues as it becomes clear that they are not even trusted to name their own experience.

A young Arab American lesbian did a Q and A interview about her first novel, which was a 2018 finalist in the Wishing Well Book Awards' "Books For Teenagers" category. She was aghast and appalled when the interview was published. Everywhere that she had said the word "lesbian," they had changed the word to "queer" in their quotations.

"I was rebranded," she said. "I became the mythological 'if the situation were right' lesbian. Queer has become the 'I am not going to rule anything out because I am an open-minded girl.' It doesn't carry the sting of 'lesbian.' The stigma of 'lesbian.' The boundaries of 'lesbian.' Lesbian is a solid 'no.'"

She added that she would never have said that the androgynous lesbian character in her book was "presenting a gender," as her interviewer had made up. "That unwillingness to bend is the very reason lesbians are targeted with insidious psychological warfare."

Why did she (Julia Diana Robertson "Beyond The Screen Door") have this strong reaction? It was not just that she was "misquoted," and it was not aimed at those who choose to identify as queer. It was because

lesbians of all ages are seeing themselves, as well as their history, erased. This, of course, is nothing new, but after past years of struggle there is now an aggressive resurgence.

She was shocked that words she would never use to describe herself or the characters in her novel were put into her mouth. The interviewer admitted unapologetically what she had done; she was trying to "provide space for all LGBTQ women." In doing that, however, she excluded Julia from her own story, and by extension, all lesbians.

Lesbian critical theory

These same issues are seen by Terry Castle, a literary scholar and currently Professor of Humanities at Stanford University. As a lesbian she started noticing that, throughout culture and specifically in 18th century literature, lesbians were always "in the shadows, in the margins, hidden from history." So she decided to write a book about what she was seeing in literature: "The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture."

Castle points out that throughout literature since the 18th century, as well as in general culture, lesbians have been "ghosted," made to seem invisible, disembodied—unlike homosexual men. Lesbians were portrayed as apparitions in the works of Dafoe, Diderot, Baudelaire, Balzac, Dickens, Bronte, Colette, and Proust. This tendency continued in 20th-century writings by Mary Renault and Lillian Hellman.

In addition, lesbian heroes from the time of the poet Sappho (circa 630 B.C.) have had their biographies sanitized in the interests of order and public safety. Radclyffe Hall's classic fictional defense of love between women, "The Well Of Loneliness," was banned in England in 1928 and referred to as poison: "Poison kills the body, but moral poison kills the soul."

Before the late 19th century, the misogynistic medical establishment did not write or believe that there was anything like lesbian identity and sexuality. Well, what did women do before men established the crucial nomenclature for women's desire for one another? The academicians' response was that women were involved in friendships that were merely "platonic relationships with epistemic confusion."

As recently as 1985 this concept that lesbians are asexual was continuing to be propagated with the claim that lesbians were simply another form of female "homosocial" bonding: "The bond of sister and sister, women's friendship, 'networking' and the active struggles of feminism" ("Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire," by queer theorist Eve Sedgwick).

Castle explains that she has avoided in her book, when talking about lesbianism, using "pseudo umbrella terms," such as "queer." Although the term "queer" has become popular in activist and progressive academic circles, it has a tendency "to disembody the lesbian once again." While Castle recognizes the contribution of Eve Sedgwick in both explicating

queer theory in the academic world and in bringing the subject of homosexuality into the academic mainstream, Castle points out that Sedgwick excludes lesbians. In "Epistemology of the Closet," Sedgwick defends her exclusion of lesbians and admits her addressing homosexuality is "indicatively male."

Among some queer theorists it has become popular to contest the very meaningfulness of terms such as "lesbian" or "gay" or "homosexual" or "coming out." They claim that no one knows what those terms mean; they lack "linguistic transparency." But lesbophobia appears because everyone knows exactly what is meant by the word lesbian. It is clear as a bell.

The sexual boundaries of lesbians are fiercely policed because of misogyny and homophobia on the right and the left. Throughout history men have imprisoned, killed, and institutionalized lesbians. Corrective rape of lesbians is still used around the world to enforce heterosexuality.

The Anne Lister controversy

The erasing of lesbians past and present converge in last year's protests around Anne Lister's memorial plaque.

Recently, a large number of diaries were discovered in an obscure archive in Yorkshire, England. In them Anne Lister (1791-1840) details her sexual affairs with women throughout her entire life. The eroticism of her letters was explicit and in some she developed a code to communicate secretly with her lovers. She often wrote of her disinterest in men: "I love, and only love the fairer sex and thus beloved by them in turn, my heart revolts from any other love than theirs."

The York Memorial Trust planned a plaque memorializing Lister in the English community where she had lived and worked. The original plaque referred to her as "gender non-conforming" but omitted the obvious fact that she was a lesbian. Thousands of Lesbians were outraged that here was a lesbian who had to write love letters in code in the 1800s, and once again in 2018 her identity was erased.

Julie Furlong started a petition protesting the wording on the plaque: "Gender non-conforming can mean anything, it simply means you do not conform to societal expectations. It has nothing to do with sexuality. Don't let them erase this iconic woman from our history. She was a lesbian." Thousands of lesbians signed the petition demanding that the plaque be changed.

This month, a reworded plaque will be unveiled. The York Civic Trust consulted with Lister's biographers and responded to the outcry over the erasing of Ann Lister's obvious lesbian identity.

The plaque commemorates what Anne Lister described as her marriage to Ann Walker at Holy Trinity Church in Goodramgate in 1834. This was 200 years before same-sex marriage was legalized in England. The plaque now reads, "Anne Lister 1791-1840 of Shibden Hall, Halifax. Lesbian and Diarist took sacrament here to seal her union with Ann Walker, Easter 1834."

Black feminist Claire Heuchan, who blogs under the name Sister Outrider, encouraged lesbians to sign the petition protesting the original plaque: "The discrimination she faced, and the challenges that came with being open about her sexuality, were a specifically lesbian experience. She wrote specifically about lesbian life, love and sexuality. It is important to acknowledge the specifics of lesbian reality, especially because countless lesbian lives have been hidden from the record. When Lister's diaries were first discovered by a descendant in the 1930s, friends encouraged them to burn them and purge Lister's voice from history. It's incredibly fortunate he didn't. It is difficult to celebrate how Lister blazed a trail for future lesbians when the word lesbian is, apparently, unspeakable."

These diaries illustrate that lesbians have been a part of communal life far longer than many have assumed. They make clear what lesbians have always known, that despite all the hostility past and present, we inject ourselves, visibly or invisibly, into the larger world. The numerous lesbians in Castle's treatise on literature and culture illustrate that the sense of sexual alienation or marginalization could never stand in their way. Somehow being obliterated and erased by one's society promoted them to assert themselves even more aggressively. We will surely see this happening again. Castle shows that lesbians are everywhere, and always have been. ■

By KYLE HARRINGTON
and RYAN BALBONI

IWS tour: 'If we stop, the world stops'

On Feb. 7 and 8, two leading feminists toured Connecticut. Audiences heard Lucía Cavallero, a member of Ni Una Menos, an Argentine feminist collective that has repeatedly put hundreds of thousands of women on the streets in protests against femicide, and Julia Cámara, a member of the coordinating body of the Spanish feminist movement M8, which initiated a feminist strike in Spain that included 5 million people. Together, they provided a gendered socialist perspective on organizing mass mobilizations of working women across the globe.

The two feminist leaders spoke to hotel workers in Stamford, students at Trinity College in Hartford, and student and community activists at the University of Connecticut. The tour was initiated by International Women's Strike CT and co-sponsored by the Women and Gender Resource Action Center at Trinity, the University of Connecticut Women's Center, and the Stamford Hospitality Workers of UNITE-HERE Local 217.

Overall, nearly 200 students and workers heard the stories behind the recent international mobilizations in defense of women's rights and against austerity and the vicious attacks on the social wage.

At the University of Connecticut, Cavallero began her speech by talking about the origin of her IWS organizing in Argentina in 2015. Cavallero radicalized when working in a call center and soon began organizing with other women forced into precarious work. The primary strategy, she said, was the development and strengthening of the relationship between feminists, workers, and the labor unions.

Cavallero asked audiences to consider three major points that organizers had asked themselves. First, what criteria is used to determine whether a task is a "job?" Answering this question, she said, puts all reproductive and care work, typically unpaid labor, under the same umbrella as waged jobs that have historically mobilized through striking. Second, who is authorized to call for a strike? Uniting the labor struggle with the feminist struggle provided an avenue for horizontally organizing the paid and unpaid labor that women carry out in their communities and homes. Finally, what are the reasons to call for a feminist strike?

Cavallero argued that when one understands women's reproductive work and care work as unpaid labor—and often *unrecognized* labor—the reasons to call for a strike to solve women's problems become obvious. The organizers in Ar-



(Left) Julia Cámara.
(Below) Lucía Cavallero.

gentina decided that struggle against unfair wages and working conditions must include women whose primary labor is in reproductive work and care work.

In addition, organizers argue that there is a precise link between labor exploitation and gendered violence. This concept became central to their conception of organizing a feminism for the 99%. When people understood the relationship between the economy and the huge numbers of femicides in Argentina, Cavallero said, it was a short step to motivating a strike against femicide. The movement realized, she said, that "the life of one woman is enough to call a strike!"

Finally, Cavallero encouraged the audience to consider how this illustrates the importance of international feminism and all that it can teach about how to build the International Women's Strike movement in their own communities.

Cámara drew from a similar perspective and understanding when explaining the mass mobilization she helped to organize in Spain. The background to the idea of the strike, she said, was the Indignados Movement that emerged in Spain in May of 2011.

That movement, she explained, was organized through unifying social networks such as Real Democracy Now and Youth without a Future around their common concerns regarding high rates of unemployment, cuts in social support programs, and frustration with the two-party system,

the banks, and corruption.

The organizing nodes first developed during the Indignados Movement joined with the fight for abortion rights in 2014 and 2015. This struggle actually deposed the minister who had proposed criminal punishment for abortion.

Then came the 2017 Women's Strike in Argentina, which had a profound impact on the thinking of Spanish feminists and ultimately led to the strike mobilization of five million women in 2018. Cámara explained that the feminist strike in 2018 was

the expression of the anger that was first articulated at the start of the Indignados Movement back in 2011.

She asked audiences to keep in mind that when she speaks of a "strike," she is referring to the entire movement, and not solely the individual day that the strike occurred. This idea of a strike as a movement is a useful reconceptualization to keep in mind when considering the network of International Women's

Strikes as being something larger than what is building to take place annually on International Women's Day on March 8.

How was the mobilization of five million organized? Cámara explained that when assemblies of women in various states across Spain met to discuss the strike to occur on March 8 2018, they had only two months to mobilize. The organizers began by asking what defines a "feminist strike" in theory and practice, and decided to build a movement based on four sectors of labor: a workers strike, a strike for domestic or care workers, a student strike, and a consumer strike. On this basis, they began connecting networks of immigrants, refugees, precarious workers, traditional unions, with the new anti-corporate feminist nodes stimulated by Argentina.

Connecting these often-separated areas of work began to politicize women, and the relationships built served as the foundation for an entirely new level of mobilization. Cámara explained that the support of a significant labor union was necessary in order for an officially recognized general strike to be called, and that the ability of the feminists to win such a call from two major national labor unions in Spain was a huge advance for the feminist movement as a whole.

Between the organizing against femicide in Argentina, and the organizing of unpaid and paid laboring women in Spain, an international dialogue and network has been created, and this communication is a cornerstone of the IWS movement.

As Cámara asserted, "the material conditions that sustain life rest on the backs of women," thus highlighting the significant potential that International Women's Strike organizing holds.

Through expanding understandings of the working-class movement to incorporate the unwaged reproductive and care work of women, the IWS slogan, "If we stop, the world stops", can become central in the continuous fight for our rights as people of the working class.

International Women's Strike Connecticut will follow up the tour with a March 9 forum, "In Solidarity with the Global Women's Strike," at the Elmwood Community Center in West Hartford. ■



... Oakland teachers

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strategy undoubtedly surpasses the OEA leadership perspective on charters and school closures expressed in the OEA contract summary slogan, "On to Sacramento," with which they expect that lobbying Democratic Party state legislators will bring significant results.

During the Oakland contract negotiations, school district officials argued that the inclusion of contract provisions restricting school closures was "out of scope," that is, barred by state law as a subject of bargaining. OEA negotiators acceded to this argument, although California Teachers Association attorneys have stated that anything that substantially affects teachers' working conditions is negotiable.

Dissident teachers presented this view during the Delegate Assembly debate, arguing that teacher power, allied with massive community support, was the final determining factor as to what was negotiable. For now, OEA leaders appear reluctant to fully exercise this power, and thus they felt compelled to settle for less than what the great majority of teachers and parents had set their sights on.

As with West Virginia's and last year's "red-state" strikes, Oakland teachers and their leadership are mainly women, a key factor in their union's decisive orientation toward forging critical alliances with other low-paid public employees and especially with working-class communities that rely on public schools to provide quality education as well as daily child care. In this regard, Oakland teachers went to great lengths to provide not only food and safe alternative spaces for children, whose parents respected their picket lines, but also to foster powerful ties to working-class communities that aim at binding the future success of teacher unionism to the well-being and security of all workers. ■

... Cuban history

(continued from page 7)

of Che Guevara and other members of the Cuban revolutionary leadership. Guevara knew that socialism in one country replaced "internationalism with chauvinism" (Augustin, p. 42). In the early years, Cuban leaders also believed that the development of socialism in Cuba depended on socialist revolutions happening elsewhere in Latin America (Augustin, p. 43).

Given the weakness of the Cuban state in the face of the imperialist juggernaut, Cuba did not have a lot of room to maneuver. While Cuba gave extensive support to revolutionaries throughout Latin America and Africa, especially before the demise of the Soviet Union, the main policy—at least in the past—was to convince by example, or as the Cubans say, to "send out moral missiles" (Augustin, p. 43).

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the hardships that ensued during what is known as the Special Period, Cuba has been forced to reintegrate its economy into the capitalist world system. This has placed enormous pressure on the Cuban state and economy, creating new tensions and problems. Augustin's conclusions are very relevant to our current political moment:

evant to our current political moment:

The fact remains that maintaining and transforming the country's socialist development does not depend on internal conditions alone. As long as Cuba has to go against the tide of present-day international realities, its process of socialist development will continue to be an extremely complex and difficult one.

Thus, the question is not so much whether the Cuban Revolution can survive but whether its isolation in a capitalist world will be broken by other social revolutions. Instead of making that tourist trip "before it's too late," it might be good to ask ourselves how we can help create two, three, many Cubas (Augustin, p. 47). ■

Endnotes

(1) See the speech by Trump National Security advisor John Bolton on November 1, 2018 at a forum at Miami Dade College. During the speech Bolton announced new sanctions against all three countries.

(2) See "The True Flag: Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, and the Birth of American Empire," by Stephen Kinzer. (New York: Henry Holt and Comp., 2017).

(3) "Revolution in the Revolution," by Regis Debray and Bobby Ortiz. (New York and London: Verso, 2017.) Originally published in the U.S. by Grove Press in 1967.

(4) "Cuba, Che Guevara, and the Problem of 'Socialism in One Country,'" by Ron Augustin. *Monthly Review*, January 2019, pp. 37-48.

After week-long strike, Oakland teachers' contract falls short



By JEFF MACKLER

Facing a pro-charter school board intent on closing or consolidating 24 schools in the next five years, presumably to replace some with private for-profit charters, 3000 teachers represented by the Oakland Education Association (OEA) began a district-wide strike on Feb. 21. On the seventh day of the strike, March 1, a tentative agreement was reached, which teachers ratified at a March 3 meeting.

Poor-mouthing Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) officials insisted during the months of futile negotiations and fact-finding before the strike that their proposed one percent pay increase over four years was all that the district could afford.

Soon after the strike began, however, the board upped its offer to 8.5 percent over four years. OEA negotiators still said, "No!"

Teachers won an 11 percent across-the-board salary raise over four years plus an additional three percent one-time bonus upon ratification. But the 11 percent is to be staggered in annual and semi-annual increments over the course of the contract—3 percent the first year, followed by 2 percent the second, and 2.5 and 3.5 percent added to the salary schedule in the middle of and at the end of the final year.

Narrow approval in contract vote

"We forced OUSD to invest in keeping teachers in Oakland—which will give our kids experienced teachers in their classrooms. Dramatic increases were won for subs, tying sub pay to the wage scale," said a March 1 OEA strike bulletin. Clearly, many Oakland teachers did not agree. The union's school site representative Delegate Assembly on March 2 narrowly approved the tentative agreement by a vote of 53-50, with many delegates arguing that the modest salary gains and the lack of progress on other key issues, including class size, school closings, and consolidations did not match the massive support the union had generated from the community on these issues.

With more than 70 percent of the union's general membership casting ballots the following day, 64

percent voted yes for the 2017-18 retroactive contract and 58 percent for the 2019-21 contract.

Always starved for school funding, Oakland, with a large Black and Latino student population, stands at or near the bottom of the Alameda County list regarding teacher salaries and overall per pupil school expenditures. Indeed, as I walked the picket lines, several teachers explained that they lived "paycheck to paycheck" in this high-rent city.

Oakland teachers won modest class-size reductions of one student in high-need schools and an additional one-student reduction across all schools, but the latter is to be implemented only at the third and final year of the contract, in 2021-2022. Their original contract proposal demanded an immediate class reduction of two students in all schools. Prior to the strike, secondary school class-size maximums were 35, and elementary school sizes were capped at 25.

The agreement included the hiring of additional counselors and school psychologists, but little or no progress was made in regard to adding more nurses and special-education teachers to the district's roster. Worse still, because OEA negotiators acceded to a district budget cut, 150 non-teaching classified workers represented by SEIU 1021, which respected OEA picket lines, will lose their jobs to pay for the settlement—a disaster for future union solidarity.

Powerful teacher-parent mobilizations

An estimated 97 percent of the city's 34,000 students and 95 percent of its teachers respected union picket lines, an expression of teacher-community power that bolstered the unfulfilled expectations of a breakthrough victory.

Oakland teachers are no newcomers to militant strikes to advance teacher rights and public education. Since the mid-1970s they've taken strike action seven times, the most teacher strikes in the nation.

So massive was a teacher-community protest at the scheduled Feb. 27 OUSD school board meeting that district officials were compelled to cancel the meeting, where additional school cuts were scheduled for the chopping block. The new contract included a

school board commitment to a five-month moratorium on school closures and consolidations, to which the OEA leaders stated, "The power of our strike will help us organize against future closures!" But five months hence, many dissident teachers pointed out, would arrive in mid-summer, when schools are not in session and teachers are scattered to the four winds.

Some 30 percent of Oakland schools have been privatized. As is the norm with all for-profit schools, they are relatively free from state regulation and are free to "cherry pick" students, essentially returning them to a more racially segregated status—that is, with fewer Black and Latino students.

Oakland charters are non-union and impose arbitrary salaries on teachers as compared to the specific salary schedules that are standard in public schools. These inequities, among others, gave rise to charter schoolteachers' at 10 schools joining OEA teachers with a one-day wildcat strike action. The tentative agreement vaguely commits the school board to commit to lobbying the state legislature for a cap of charter schools, a "contract provision" considered token or useless by many.

Example of West Virginia teachers

West Virginia teachers dramatically demonstrated last year, when their strike shut down the entire state school system, that major gains could be won. In late February, they closed down the state's school system once again to demand that pending pro-charter school legislation be shelved. After two days on the picket lines, the proposed legislation was withdrawn—a militant and inspiring lesson to teachers, parents, and working people everywhere.

It is more than noteworthy that the proposed West Virginia charter expanding legislation included a major salary increase for the state's teachers, estimated at \$2000 to \$3000 per teacher. West Virginia lawmakers were taken aback when their gambit that teachers would "take the money and run," while turning a blind eye to increased charters, was rejected.

West Virginia teachers' statewide mass action

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