



Speak Out Now

Revolutionary Workers Group

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Voting for the Democrats is a Dead End

The first year of the Trump administration was one outrage after another. We've seen the deportation of immigrant workers, the assault on a woman's right to control her body, the repeal of basic environmental protections, a tax cut for billionaires, a budget that further slashes social services, and threats of nuclear war with North Korea. In all of this, the Trump administration and the Republican Party could not have made its agenda any clearer. When it comes to anything that matters to working people, the Trump administration is only concerned about how to serve the billionaires, banks, and corporations.

The Democratic Party, meanwhile, has tried to position itself as a real alternative to Trump. Any chance they get, they pose as if they are fighting on our behalf, branding themselves the "#Resistance." They oppose Trump's policies in speeches, with promises to fight for workers, women, immigrants, and the environment. Some Democratic politicians have joined people at various protests against the Trump administration – some went to the protests at the airports against the travel ban, and many Democrats were on stage at Women's Marches around the country. The Democrats have also mobilized people in cities across the country to participate in town hall protests against the Republicans' policies.

The Democrats are ready to embrace opposition to the Trump administration but the only goal of the Democrats' support for this opposition is the ballot box – to vote for the Democrats in 2018 and again in 2020. This couldn't have been any clearer than the Democrats' message at the recent Women's March: now that we have marched in the streets it's time to "march to the polls." Some politicians like Bernie Sanders, who ran as a Democrat in 2016, take a stand against the positions of the Democratic Party leadership represented by Hillary Clinton, and seem to offer a real alternative. However, at the end of the day, Sanders only serves to focus people's hopes on the elections and to reinforce the Democratic Party at the voting booth – just as he did in 2016 when he called for support for Hillary Clinton.

The Democrats say that if we vote for them, they really will fight on our behalf. But why should we believe them? When the Democrats controlled the White House and Congress they could have passed legislation that would have given permanent status to the undocumented immigrants who came here as children, known as "Dreamers." But during this past year, after repeated promises that the Democrats would not compromise on citizenship for the Dreamers, they have caved in and agreed to keep pushing the final decision down the road.



During the Obama administration, deportations of immigrants skyrocketed to more than 2.6 million people, ripping families apart and throwing children into detention facilities, with higher yearly totals than the first year of the Trump administration. As right-wing politicians carried out the greatest roll-back of women's reproductive rights in decades, the Democrats opposed this in speeches and little else. While the Obama administration increased funding to produce new nuclear weapons, now the Trump administration wants to produce even more. Trump's climate policies have been a catastrophe, but under the Democrats, fracking, coal mining, and offshore drilling expanded, and a 40-year ban on oil exports was lifted. Trump has increased military spending and continued to wage war around the world, but under the Democrats, the U.S. military was used in dozens of countries, killing tens of thousands of people, dropping over 26,000 bombs in 2016 alone. And even though Trump likes to brag about his tax cut for corporations and billionaires, it doesn't come close to the trillions of dollars handed out to banks during the bailouts in 2008 under Obama.

People are right to want to see Trump and his administration out. But the Democrats will not fight for us. It's

not that there aren't some differences between the Democratic and Republican parties or between politicians. They have their different characters, their different personalities, and the different ways they try to win votes from the population. But there is no difference when it comes to whose interests they represent – they both serve the wealthiest people in this country and the companies they own. And that is why they have carried out the same sort of policies.

Trump will be gone eventually. He might stay for another term. He might be voted out, or he might even be impeached. But all of the problems facing working people will remain. And to stand up to these problems, to resist their attacks, to fight for immigrants, for women, for housing, for healthcare, for jobs and more – is to do more than choose which political party will be in charge of keeping those problems in place. As working people, we have tremendous power, collectively doing the work of the entire society. And if organized, we can use that power to fight for our own interests. But simply marching to the polls for the Democrats will be marching to a dead end.

Supreme Court: Ready to Undermine Unions

On February 26, the U.S. Supreme Court began hearing the case Janus v. AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Workers). The case is about whether public sector unions should be able to collect money from all the workers they represent, not just those who have joined the union. Unions represent everyone in a workplace. However, the bosses' lawyers argue that any worker should have the right to not pay union dues, regardless of whether that union represents them in a conflict with management or negotiates their wages and benefits.

The bosses call this idea "the right to work." In 28 states in the U.S. with "right to work" laws, the average worker earns 15.8% less than in the rest of the country. So "right to work" really means the "right to work for less." The Supreme Court is expected to rule against the union, weakening public sector unions and preparing more legal attacks on unions in the future.

The employers will follow up a decision favorable to them with propaganda urging workers to stop paying dues while still getting the advantages of being in a unionized workplace. In the short term, some workers may agree with this idea – especially those who think the unions don't do much. But in the long run, all workers will suffer from a decline in union membership and power. Dropping out of the union is not a solution.

Private sector union membership has been declining for decades, but in some industries like construction, unionized

workers still make as much as 28% more in wages and benefits than non-union workers. Unionized local government workers make 18% more in wages than non-unionized local government workers, and the difference is even greater when benefits are taken into account. As union membership falls, wages and benefits drop to the level of unorganized workplaces.

But cutting down the bargaining power of public sector workers – in order to impose greater cuts in pensions and health benefits – is only one reason the employers are pushing



the Janus lawsuit. In addition, the employers want to weaken the unions politically. By cutting down a union's ability to collect dues, the employers expect to reduce the ability of unions to make campaign contributions and to turn out members to vote for politicians.

U.S. workers have been under attack for at least 30 years, during which time we have been forced to accept concessions on wages and benefits. Full time jobs have been turned into part time jobs with no security and lousy working conditions. The employers' attacks were successful because many union officials refused to lead a fightback. As a consequence, today many union workers have lost confidence in unions that have refused to fight and may well fall for the bosses' lie that workers don't need unions.

It's true that we don't need unions with officials who suck up to the employers and agree to all their takeaways. The strong worker organizations we need – including unions – will have to be built (or rebuilt) by workers who have learned how to organize their coworkers to stick together and stand up to the boss. For this to happen, a new generation of militant worker-organizers will have to push aside the leaders who won't fight. Only when workers organize and turn unions into fighting organizations will they begin to grow again in membership and power. A union which has won the confidence of the membership through struggle will have little trouble collecting dues – no matter what the Supreme Court rules in the Janus case.

Baltimore Schools: Unfit for Our Children!

Public schools across Baltimore City had to close in early January because their heating systems couldn't deal with the winter weather. Despite Maryland's chronic underfunding of Baltimore schools according to the state's own formula, the governor suddenly found \$2.5 million to address the problem and hundreds of workers labored over the weekend to fix the problems in about 60 schools. Even then, some schools needed more work and remained closed!

If the winter cold wasn't bad enough, every year in June and September Baltimore schools face the opposite problem—it's hot and there's not enough air conditioning. You would think that in the richest country in the history of the world, the government would provide safe and comfortable conditions for our children and youth to study.

That's not all. In 2007, the water in Baltimore schools' fountains was declared hazardous because of lead in the water. Officials said that the city couldn't afford the \$3.3 million to fix the fountains, so they've been bringing in bottled water to the schools for over ten years at a cost of about half a million a year. So they have already spent way more bringing in water than it would have cost to fix the problem.

And if you think they are not spending enough on basic health and safety, do you really think they are spending enough on teachers, computers, books, and supplies? The

city is heavily dependent on state funding for its schools. The state funds over 70 percent of the city school budget, the highest percentage of all school districts in Maryland. And that funding is far from enough. By the state's own standards, Maryland underfunds Baltimore City's education by \$290 million per year and nearly \$3 billion over the past decade.

Baltimore City can't fund its schools by itself because it is poor, especially compared to the suburban districts around it. Two-thirds of the city's population is African American. Our society's racism is a big factor contributing to Baltimore's



Baltimore elementary school students without heat

poverty. Median household income for African Americans in Baltimore is about half that of whites, \$33,801 compared to \$62,751, while for the state of Maryland as a whole the figure is \$73,538. Eighty-three percent of public school students in Baltimore are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Eighty percent are African American; ten percent are Latino; nine percent are non-Latino white.

With Democratic Party control of the state legislature, the city council, and the mayor's office, students of color are not getting the schooling they deserve. The politicians find money for what they want, like giving nearly \$700 million of city taxpayers' money to Under Armour to develop a wealthy district in an old industrial area – a playground for the rich that will include kayak landings for their leisure!

And the politicians found the money to heat the schools in January, only when it had become a public relations disaster. But for Baltimore students, teachers, and school staff, every day is a disaster of one sort or another because of inadequate funding.

We see this all across the U.S. – the children of working people and people of color are not a priority in this society. The wealthy capitalists who control the politicians have other concerns – keeping their wallets fat.

NY/NJ Transit: A Real Trainwreck!

For the past decade, transit riders in the New York-New Jersey area have become increasingly frustrated on their daily rides to and from work. Under severe cuts, transit services have declined while prices have increased across the board.

For decades, the New York City subway system (MTA) and the New Jersey PATH interstate train used to work well enough to get people to work and back. But now just getting to work is a job. While these systems were never as good as they could have been, their precipitous decline in the past decade is still stunning for those who have lived through it. For example, today, there are over 67,000 delays per month, more mechanical breakdowns, more crowded trains, and higher fares. And the causes are all clear.

In the New York City subways, most equipment is from the 1930's. Nearly six million people use the system daily, up from only four million in the early 1990s. Recent Mayors Giuliani and Bloomberg and Governor Cuomo have diverted funding away from transportation, or they just spend it on superficial improvements, not actual repairs, upgrades, and infrastructure. In 1994, Giuliani cut New York City's contribution to the system by \$400 million, even while encouraging tourism as well as luxury residential and corporate development that increased the burdens on the system. In total, Giuliani and Bloomberg reduced the maintenance budget by more than twenty percent. Cuomo's administration forced the MTA to spend five million dollars to bail out three state-run ski resorts that were struggling after a warm winter. Thanks to these shameful decisions, in 2017,

18% of the MTA operating budget was spent on paying interest on debt. Just imagine how that money could be spent on working people instead of going to the banks.

Similarly, in 2009 funding for NJ Transit stood at \$348 million annually. After seven years of Governor Chris Christie, it was only \$33 million. Accidents and delays have increased while fares have gone up dramatically – a 22% increase in 2010, and a 9% increase in 2015. These problems came to a head last year when the system was forced to do emergency repairs to New York Penn Station and a commuter

train slammed into Hoboken Station killing one and injuring dozens.

The same trend has happened with New Jersey PATH trains – in 2010 it cost \$2.00 to go from New Jersey to New York, in 2012 it cost \$2.25, and in 2015 that increased to \$2.75, raising the cost of a round trip to \$5.50. Simultaneously, as more apartments are built along the PATH lines in Jersey City, Harrison, and Newark – for those who can no longer afford the insane prices in New York and Hoboken – the trains have become increasingly more crowded. Even on weekends, commuters deal with packed trains, long waits, and inconsistent service. Meanwhile, PATH (which owns the World Trade Center site) spent about \$3.9 billion to construct 1 World Trade Center, the tallest building in the U.S.

These frustrations demonstrate the priorities of the billionaire class and their banks as they redevelop cities to their liking, making life harder for workers. This isn't how things are supposed to be. When will hard working people get what we need?



Nabi Saleh, Palestine – An Example of Defiance

On December 15, a 16 year old girl, Ahed Tamimi, confronted Israeli soldiers who stormed into Nabi Saleh, her village in Palestine. Ahed's cousin Mohammed had been shot in the head, a nearly fatal wound. Ahed slapped one of the



Ahed Tamimi after her arrest

soldiers, for which she has been arrested and remains in jail, already having spent her 17th birthday behind bars. Outside the prison, Ahed has become a symbol of defiance worldwide.

Ahed was born in Nabi Saleh, a village under constant threat. Illegal Israeli settlers have taken over village land just hundreds of feet away. Israeli soldiers sweep the streets in jeeps and shoot teargas and live ammo. Out of 600 villagers, 350 have been wounded with 50 being permanently disabled.

The villagers of Nabi Saleh have lived under direct military occupation for over 50 years, since the state of Israel was established on Palestinian land. In the Occupied Territories, illegal Israeli settlers carry out a campaign of harassment, uprooting farms, destroying houses, and disrupting water supplies – all protected by the guns of Israeli soldiers. All of this is supported by American politicians who sign off on

more than two billion dollars in military aid to Israel every year. Israel is an essential ally for the U.S. government, a loaded gun pointed at the rest of the Middle East.

Palestinians from Nabi Saleh and elsewhere have demonstrated against the theft of their land. Every Friday since 2009, men, women and children have gathered in peaceful protest. Through their efforts, the question of Palestine and the experience of Nabi Saleh has become much better known. Ahed's defiance has inspired and sustained hope in a seemingly hopeless situation. If the villagers of Nabi Saleh can defy the enormous forces against them so can we. They aren't waiting for our support. They are waiting for us to dismantle the system of capitalism and war that sustains and enables a brutal colonization like the one carried out by the state of Israel.

Where We Stand

The world we live in today is increasingly ruled by prejudice and fear, under a system of widespread violence and war, where exploitation and oppression are the rule, with the many dominated by the few. The name of this system is capitalism.

The Force For Change Exists Today

Everywhere, working people's labor makes society run. Working people have the power to bring this system to a halt and bring about the changes needed. Like slavery, feudalism and other systems that enriched the minority at the expense of the majority, capitalism's removal is long over due. The time for socialism has come.

We Stand For Socialism

- A world based on peaceful collaboration and international cooperation of working class people -- not the exploiters who rule today.
- The common ownership and sharing of the world's resources and productive capacity.
- An egalitarian and democratic government, organized and controlled from the bottom up.

- Protection of the world's ecological systems, putting science to work to sustain life, not destroy it.
- A society where human relations are based on respect, equality and dignity of all peoples, not racism, sexism or homophobia.

Who We Are

We believe the international working class is the social force that can transform society and create a new world. But to do so, revolutionary organizations must be built in the working class. For this reason our group aims its activity primarily at workplaces, where struggles have the most potential to transform the world. Our newsletters are a tool to begin this work. What a handful of people decide today can determine our future. Join us to work for a better future – one that is both necessary and possible.

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