



Speak Out Now

October 2018

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25¢

Mexico, 1968: Hunger and Misery are the Agitators, Not Us

Fifty years ago, at the beginning of October, events took place at the Olympic Games that shook the sports world and beyond. Some U.S. athletes on the team staged a protest, but unlike today, they didn't take a knee. The first and third place winners of the 200-meter race appeared shoeless on the winners' podium and raised their fists in the air during the playing of the U.S. national anthem. All three winners of the event wore the Olympic Project for Human Rights badge. The taboo of mixing sports and politics was broken again. Other athletes wore black berets and raised their fists on the podium. But the protest during the national anthem created the greatest response.

The protest by John Carlos and Tommie Smith at the '68 Olympics was not an isolated event; it came during a major period of political upheaval around the world including in the hosting country of the Olympics, Mexico. In early summer of 1968, Mexico was in the midst of a movement against exploitation and oppression. At that time, the country was headed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that had governed Mexico since 1929 with an authoritarian, corrupt, and repressive rule. For most Mexicans, life meant living in slums or poor villages with little access to social services including education, healthcare, and housing. Angered by the fact that the government was spending massive amounts of money to host the Olympics while failing to address the needs of the population, the oppressed of Mexico, especially its student youth, revolted, and a new movement emerged.

The movement began on July 22 when riot police violently suppressed a brawl of high school students in Mexico City. In response, students from various high schools and universities in the city initiated hunger strikes and occupied several buildings on their campuses. On July 30, army and police units were directed to crush the protest. Several students were killed when the army used a bazooka to force its way into the occupied buildings.

The government's brutal response created more discontent among students. A growing number of them began speaking out and mobilizing. On August 1, faculty and students from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) led a march of 100,000 people through the city. On August 27, one of the largest protests in Mexico's history was organized at the Zócalo, Mexico City's main square, which drew an estimated half a million



Protest in Mexico – October 1968

people, including students, teachers, nurses, railway workers, and other workers. Strikes and protests quickly spread to other universities and cities across the country.

As the movement continued to grow, people's demands expanded to include social equality, government accountability, and a more open democracy. They wanted the state to stop investing its resources on Mexico's elites and start addressing the needs of ordinary people. The movement encouraged all people to participate, and many became convinced it was time for serious social change.

As protests continued, so too did the government's violence to suppress them. The government viewed the demonstrations not only as a direct threat to its authority, but as a possible hindrance to the Olympics. The Mexican Army was ordered to occupy the campuses, which had become the organizing centers of the movement. In response, a rally and march was called on October 2 to protest the military occupation of the campuses.

That day, about 15,000 people were gathered in the center of Mexico City when military units suddenly moved in with tanks. Snipers in nearby buildings began firing indiscriminately into the crowd. Soldiers started firing back, and people began fleeing for their lives. When

the shooting stopped, more than 300 people were dead, including students, military personnel, and civilians.

The massacre was a planned government attack, with military forces ordered to end the movement permanently and arrest all student leaders. Snipers were instructed to fire into the crowd to provoke an armed response from the soldiers and lead to a massacre. Following the carnage, the government covered up the incident and conducted no formal investigation. After the massacre, the students continued to denounce the violence. But the brutal crackdown by the government had been a deep blow, and on December 4, they decided to officially end the strike.

The student protests didn't lead to immediate political or social change, but they did expose the repressive and corrupt nature of the Mexican state. This transformed the mindset of both the students and the general population. Many ordinary people were now more willing to criticize the system and demand change, making it difficult for the PRI to continue to rule unchallenged. Eventually, the government conceded some token reforms, and decades later the PRI was voted out of power. The events of 1968 in Mexico should serve as a reminder of the power of ordinary people to fight for the kind of world we deserve.

Struggles Make History — Don't Wait For the Politicians

The elections are approaching and people are asking, what can we get from these elections? Some people are turning their hopes towards the politicians who are running, especially those from the Democratic Party. It's not surprising because we are told this is how change is made in history — by important politicians. The Democrats pretend, for example, that they are the party that stands on the side of working people or minorities. The facts of history are quite different. Almost all the rights we have today were won by people struggling and forcing those politicians, Republican and Democrat, to act.

The Democratic Party is a strange place to look for the fight against racism. The Democratic Party was the party of slavery. Before the Civil War, the Democrats were led by Southern plantation owners who fought against any legal limitation of their right to own slaves. In 1860, when the anti-slavery Republican Party was elected, the Democratic Party led the South to secede and fought the Civil War to preserve slavery. It was the hundreds of thousands of slaves who stopped working, fled the plantations, and joined the North in the Civil War who freed themselves.

Until the 1960s, the Democratic Party only took measures against racism when it had to, and only on the federal level. The first major blow to segregation in schools, under pressure from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was the 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. the Board of Education*. Following this decision, in 1957, federal troops were sent to the South to enforce the desegregation of schools — the president who sent the troops was Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower. But as the Civil Rights movement grew and took direct action against segregation, more politicians were forced to react, and in 1964, Democratic Party President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act. This legislation came only after years of intense mobilization by

thousands of Black people and other anti-racist activists, the biggest social movement in recent U.S. history.

Workers haven't been given anything without struggling either. Until the 1930s, under both Democratic and Republican Party presidents, unions were effectively illegal and companies like General Motors and Ford stocked their factories with tear gas and firearms, hiring private security to intimidate, beat up, and even kill workers who dared to organize. Nevertheless workers fought enormous battles, from the mines and logging camps of the West to the mills and factories in the East. In the early 1900s, Democratic Party politicians in the Northeast started to appeal to workers, calling themselves "Progressives." These politicians advocated some reforms to improve workers conditions, like sanitation, workplace safety, and legal rights in court — but all of this was done as a way to demobilize workers.

In 1932, a little over two years after the Great Depression, when 50% of workers had lost their jobs, the most famous of the progressives was elected — Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt, a wealthy Democrat from New York. He ran for president promising a "New Deal" for U.S. workers. Roosevelt's New Deal initially meant bailing out businesses and banks, and looking to the bosses to regulate the economic crisis, much like the Obama administration did after the 2008 crisis. At first, the New Deal meant nothing for workers, and in 1934 1.5 million workers from various industries went on strike, the biggest being city-wide general strikes in Toledo, Minneapolis and San Francisco. In 1936, General Motors workers locked themselves in the plant, sitting in for 44 days. This inspired a wave of these "sit-down strikes" in 477 major factories across the U.S. By 1939, nine million workers were organized in a new union confederation, the Congress of Industrial Organizations or CIO. This was a power to contend with. Only when challenged by the



DEMOCRATIC PARTY
OF ALABAMA

The official Alabama Democratic Party symbol until 1966

workers movement, did Roosevelt's administration create public works programs, grant unions the right to organize, establish social security and unemployment programs, and a host of other measures. These measures too were done as a way to encourage workers to stop fighting and trust that the government would represent them.

These are only two examples, but many other struggles and reforms can be pointed to. The same goes for struggles to defend the environment, extend and defend women's rights, defend immigrants, and LGBTQ people. The politicians step in only once the struggle has proven unstoppable. The joke is on us if we expect anything substantial, even from politicians who promise us everything in return for our votes. And the secret is that no matter when, no matter what is happening in the circus of politics, the power to struggle for what we need is in our hands, any time we choose to use it alongside the millions of others who suffer the same problems. It is regular working people who make history — not the politicians.

Ten Years Later: Still a Crisis for the Working Class

It has been ten years since the 2008 economic crisis – when tens of millions of workers in the U.S. lost their jobs and millions of families were kicked out of their homes. The government’s response to this crash is well known – they gave an estimated \$12.8 trillion to bail out corporations and the very financial institutions that helped cause this crisis while giving nothing to the millions of working families that suffered from it. And their strategy, of supporting the banks and corporations at the expense of the workers, has set the tone for the so-called recovery that has followed.

Democrats and Republicans alike continue to claim that the U.S. economy has fully recovered from the 2008 crisis. And if we only look at official statistics, we can find a bit of truth in their claims. It is true that banks and corporations, and the richest of the rich are doing very well. In 2008, the richest 400 people in the U.S. had a total wealth of \$1.5

trillion. Over the last ten years their wealth has doubled to about \$3 trillion. Ten years ago, Amazon CEO, Jeff Bezos, was worth \$8.7 billion but today his wealth has skyrocketed to \$160 billion, making him the richest man in the world. Today the average CEO in the U.S. makes 312 times what most workers make – that means a typical CEO collects in one day about as much as the average worker makes in a whole year. In 2017, the richest eight people in the world owned more wealth than the poorest half of the world’s population.

But this so-called recovery hasn’t been anything more than a massive transfer of wealth to banks, corporations and their CEOs, paid for by the working class. Since 2008, as the wealth of the super rich doubled, the wealth of the average working-class household declined by about 20%. By the time a worker is thirty years old, they will have spent \$93,000 on housing, about half of their entire income earned. It’s no surprise that today a record 50.8 million households, about 43%, can’t afford basic living expenses, including housing, food, transportation, child care, health care and a monthly cell phone bill. Since 1973, average worker productivity (the amount of goods and services produced per hour) has increased by 77 percent. But hourly pay has barely gone up. If the federal minimum wage increased to account for the rise in productivity, today it would be more than \$20 an hour, not the poverty wage of \$7.25.

Currently the official unemployment rate is at 3.9%. But these numbers don’t tell the real story. First, only 63% of the working-age population has a job today – the lowest

it has been since 1990. The 3.9% figure excludes about 50 million part-time, temporary, and on call workers who are looking for full-time work but can’t find any. The majority of the jobs added since the 2008 crisis have been part-time jobs that don’t pay very much. Today, about 42 million workers – about 33% of the work force – earn less than \$12 an hour, with no medical benefits offered. More than 40 percent of all workers know their work schedules just a week or less in advance.

In order to even get by workers have to take on massive amounts of debt. Today consumer debt is the highest amount ever recorded: \$3.9 trillion, with \$1.5 trillion as student loan debt. On average most workers owe more than 26 percent of their yearly income to debt. And if home mortgages are included, the total amount of household debt is about \$13.3 trillion – the highest it has ever been. In other words, the amount of current household debt is about \$618 billion higher than it was at its previous peak in 2008, just as the economy came crashing down.

Over the last ten years, in the U.S. and around the world, the working class has continued to pay for the 2008 crisis, and has increasingly produced wealth for an elite few who own the banks and corporations. And today the capitalists’ own economists warn us that another massive crisis is just around the corner. If it does break out, we will again see the capitalists try to pay for their recovery by squeezing more from us. The question is whether we will let them get away with it again. The working class does all the work of society and has no interest in suffering the consequences of a system of exploitation that survives on our labor.



Prisons of Poverty

In the play *A Christmas Carol* (1843) by Charles Dickens, the greedy capitalist Ebenezer Scrooge explains the purpose of prison: a dumping ground for the poor and unemployed. When he is asked about what should be done to the poor, he answers: “Are there no prisons? ...Those who are badly off must go there.” Then the questioner replies, “Many can’t go there; and many would rather die.” To this, Scrooge, who might as well be speaking for any multi-billionaire capitalist today, says: “If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.”

In capitalist society, if people are not creating wealth, they are considered useless. This surplus population is made up of all the people who have no place in society – the permanently impoverished and long-term unemployed. This is who makes up the majority of the prison population – not because they made bad choices, but because society has pushed them into desperate situations. Many of these people are mentally ill – about 25 percent of prisoners have severe mental illness. And because of the racism of this society, the surplus population, and thereby the prison population, is disproportionately made up of Black people and other minorities. Even though Black people make up 13% of the population, 40% of prisoners are Black.

A 2018 study by the Brookings Institute, found that most incarcerated people had been either unemployed or low-income workers. In the three years before going to prison, 49 percent earned \$6,250 per year or less. In the

first year after leaving prison, only 55 percent reported any income, and most were \$10,000 or less because most jobs disqualify anyone with a felony conviction. About 65% of prisoners return to prison after getting out. As far as capitalism is concerned they were part of the surplus population when they were imprisoned and they remain a part of the surplus population after leaving prison.

One purpose of mass incarceration is to put some of the surplus population to work to keep the prisons functioning, but also as a means of profit for different corporations.

Private corporations use prisoner labor in at least 40 states. In most cases these workers earn next to nothing, with of course no health benefits, no Social Security deposits, and with few laws regulating working conditions. If these workers complain or are insubordinate in anyway, they are placed in solitary confinement, often for months. Prison labor is used in nearly every industry, by most of the biggest companies in the country, including AT&T, Bank of America, Chevron, Microsoft and hundreds of others.

The State of California saves over \$100 million per year by relying on prison firefighters. This summer about 3,900 state prison inmates fought the California wildfires, getting paid \$1.00 per hour, and \$2.00 per day, ten times less than the starting wage of a certified Cal Fire firefighter. These men and women are trained fire fighters battling the most dangerous fires, and if they ever get out of prison, they will never be able to get hired as firefighters because California



Incarcerated Women Firefighters in California from Camp Malibu

bans felons from receiving the necessary certification.

Since 1970 the U.S. prison population has grown by 700% to 2.2 million people. The prison industry makes tens of billions of dollars per year between maintenance and operation, and the contracting of prison labor.

Only in a sick society would we even consider people as disposable, unnecessary, or useless. This is capitalism. It squeezes the people who work to the limit, makes people scramble for a place, and for those who don’t make it, they are thrown away. These are features of capitalism, not the faults of the people living in it, and a change in the entire system is long overdue.

Fighting Capitalism is Back in China

China’s claim to be a socialist country – where the poor and working class are in power – is a joke. The People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949 by the Chinese Communist Party, paying lip-service to socialist ideas and goals, but really laying the foundations for a powerful capitalist economy. With more billionaires than the U.S., China is one of the world’s most important capitalist countries. Workers in China face 12-hour work days, six day work weeks, and unpaid overtime. Unions are actually arms of the government, controlled from above, and used to discipline rather than defend workers.

Young people from China’s Peking University have made a choice not to follow their parents into the elite at the expense of the workers. They read the classic socialist thinkers like Karl Marx, who analyzed capitalism and exploitation, and they decided they would take the side

of workers. This year, a group of forty students traveled to the manufacturing hub of Huizhao in support of workers who were trying to form an independent trade union. The government has arrested these and other student activists for supporting workers’ struggles.

These students, and more importantly, the workers, are taking up the fight against capitalism in China. China has seen thousands of strikes in recent years, reaching a high point in 2015 with 2,700 strikes and protests. This has prompted crackdowns on workers and their supporters like the one this year in Huizhou. These crackdowns have slowed, but not stopped the revolt of workers. If the youth side with the workers, and once again bring socialist ideas to the working class, China could see more than just strikes. The workers of China could make a real revolution and take power themselves.



Student and worker activists protesting in support of workers’ rights. Their banners call for the punishment of corrupt police officials and the release of detained factory workers.

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 overdue. 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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