

West Virginia School Strike: Militant Union Battle Ends

MARCH 6—The West Virginia state government has pushed through a bill to end a historic public school strike by some 20,000 teachers, overwhelmingly women, and 13,000 bus drivers, cafeteria workers and other support staff. Strikers won a 5 percent pay raise for themselves and all other state employees. Left unresolved is the state’s threat to cut health care benefits and hike premiums, the other major issue in the strike. As we go to press, it appears that the strike by the West Virginia Education Association (WVEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and West Virginia School Service Personnel Association (WVSSPA) is over and schools will reopen tomorrow.

The unions have declared victory with the passage of today’s bill, although some teachers know they will have to fight another day for health benefits. Even the pay package comes with a poison pill. The Republican-dominated legislature vows to fund the pay hike by a wide range of cuts, including to Medicaid, in a state where 30 percent of the population depends on that program. The unions should be in the forefront of a fight for quality medical care for all, free at the point of delivery, and today must demand: No cuts to Medicaid!

It is noteworthy that before the statewide strike began, teachers packed lunches for their students so that none would go hungry. This was no mere gesture. Nearly one in four children in West Virginia lives in

No to Medicaid Cuts!



Charleston, March 3: Teachers and school staff rally inside State Capitol during statewide strike for higher wages, against assault on health care.

poverty, and for many, school meal programs are a main source of nutrition. This action was an important counter to the state’s effort to pit the poor against the unions, which is what lawmakers are blatantly doing now by threatening Medicaid.

The strike unified the WVEA, AFT and WVSSPA in a popular, one-out-all-out

fight, in defiance of the state’s anti-labor laws. Teachers and other public employees in West Virginia have never had legal union recognition, with their unions designated “voluntary associations.” Furthermore, in 2016 the state legislature enacted a “right to work” law banning union shops, extending the assault on former labor strongholds like

Michigan and Wisconsin. But in a state defined by its long history of bloody labor struggle, the teachers and school workers showed determination to fight.

Strikers on the picket lines and at the statehouse blasted the state attorney general and Republican senators who declared their work stoppage illegal. “So what if it’s illegal,” one striker told *Workers Vanguard*. “What can they do, fire all of us?” Good point, especially given the fact that *before* the strike started over 700 teacher positions needed to be filled in the state.

Day after day, strikers massed inside the State Capitol in Charleston to demand better pay and health benefits. Teachers’ pay ranks 48th in the country, with starting teachers making poverty wages. After deducting for health care, many make less than \$15 an hour. Some teachers’ household incomes are so low that they qualify for government assistance like the WIC food program. With many teachers forced to work second and even third jobs to make ends meet, a number have fled to neighboring states, where salaries are much higher. Pay for school bus drivers is also near rock bottom.

Strikers were fuming over plans by the state Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA) to cut health benefits to school workers and saddle all public employees with hikes in premiums of hundreds of dollars per month. One striker, whose family monthly premiums would more

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For Quality Medical Care for All!

U.S. Capitalism Deadly for Black Mothers

The United States is a dangerous place for new mothers. Women here face the highest rate of dying from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth in the industrialized world. Maternal mortality is on the rise in the U.S., unlike in both West Europe and Canada. In the most expensive country in the world to give birth, each year up to 900 mothers die and another 60,000 suffer near-fatal complications. Poor and rural women, who suffer from no insurance, deficient hospitals with limited obstetrics care and over-

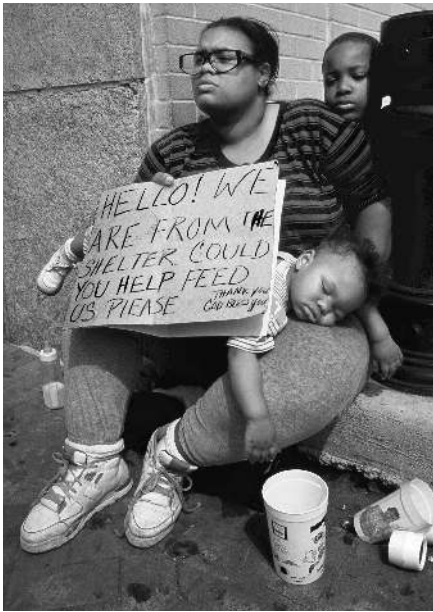
all shoddy medical services, are especially hard-hit. The crisis is most acute for black mothers, who are three to four times more likely to die than white mothers.

The racial oppression at the core of U.S. capitalism affects health profoundly and in manifold ways. Black people are disproportionately impacted by unemployment and poverty, and therefore at greater risk of diseases that afflict all the poor like asthma, high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes. Compounding the problem is the de facto segregation of black people: decaying ghettos with decrepit housing, wide exposure to environmental toxins and lack of access to adequate nutri-

tion; substandard public education and low-wage jobs; cop brutality and mass incarceration.

As a result, new black mothers face an increased threat of complications like hemorrhaging, preeclampsia, heart attack and stroke. Many of these medical complications are entirely preventable with simple measures like regular monitoring. But they become deadly when these high-risk patients run into unrelenting hurdles just to receive basic treatment.

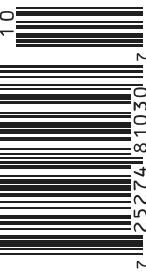
Recently, a growing number of reports have covered the maternal health crisis in America, including the extensive and award-winning “Lost Mothers” series



Homeless mother with son in lap begs on streets of Washington, D.C.

by ProPublica and NPR. This coverage paints a vivid picture of the nightmares that women, and particularly black and

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Black Mothers...

(continued from page 1)

poor women, endure. Another spotlight was shone on the issue following champion tennis player Serena Williams’s near-fatal experience last September. After giving birth, Williams suffered from blood clots in her lungs, which she luckily recognized and urged nurses to address. Williams herself noted that poor pregnant women especially have the cards stacked against them, acknowledging that as a celebrity, she had access to top-notch staff and facilities that saved her life.

The outcome was very different for Dachea Fleurimond, a 33-year-old home health aide who delivered twin boys through cesarean section at SUNY Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn last August and died of a blood clot in her lungs a day later. Fleurimond’s blood was predisposed to clotting, but doctors did not carry out preventative and life-saving measures followed at other hospitals. SUNY Downstate Medical Center, where over 90 percent of expectant mothers are black, has one of the highest maternal complication rates in New York State.

As is the norm in black neighborhoods, SUNY Downstate serves patients with high-risk conditions like obesity and cardiac disorders, but care is hindered by crumbling infrastructure, budget slashing and staff cuts. Meanwhile, the rich executives of this “struggling” hospital bask in comfy salaries, and a restructuring



University of Illinois at Chicago
Three Cuban health officials (center) in Chicago work to improve care for mothers and infants. Cuba has maternal and infant mortality rates far lower than those in the U.S.

consultant was paid a whopping \$34 million to help trim costs.

Racist Wealth Care, U.S.A.

In this wretchedly unequal society, the wealthy minority at the top gets the latest and best treatment, while the bulk of medical care is rationed by race, class and sex. Under capitalism, medicine and health care are beholden to the drive for profits by the pharmaceutical industry, hospitals and insurance companies, which do everything to ensure the sick get the least coverage while they rake in the most money. It is no coincidence that a mater-

nal mortality crisis occurs in a country with a health care system ranked 37th by the World Health Organization. It is also no coincidence that the U.S. is unique among other advanced countries for having no universal health care program.

For decades, the notion of a government-run health plan was dismissed as a communist plot at a time when the Soviet workers state assured access to health care for all, despite the usurpation of political power by the Stalinist bureaucracy. With black oppression the cornerstone of American capitalism, anything resembling government-provided health insurance has always triggered furious racist reaction. Right-wing rants against “big government” are racist code language to slash social programs like Medicaid, which is obscenely portrayed as a “redistribution” of income from hard-working folks to “undeserving” black people and other minorities. A case in point was the refusal of most of the Southern states to expand Medicaid coverage as part of the Affordable Care Act. If all states were to expand the program, nearly 3.5 million currently uninsured black adults would be eligible. While these attacks are directed against black people in the first instance, they will also redound against the millions of white working people who make up the majority of Medicaid recipients and who depend on what passes for a social safety net in this country.

Historically, America’s rulers have successfully pushed anti-black racism and anti-immigrant nativism to divide and weaken the working class and its struggles, limiting the development of class consciousness. Racial and ethnic divisions stymied the emergence of even a reformist mass workers party here. In Germany, to check the growing influence of the Social Democratic Party, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck introduced national health insurance. The nationalized health systems elsewhere in West Europe—instituted following World War II to counter the authority of the victorious Soviet Union among combative workers—represent defensible gains but have been whittled away by the capitalist rulers. Though single-payer reform could be a rational advance over the current “free market” fraud in the U.S., a single-payer system would do nothing to take the profit motive out of health care.

Enormous advances are possible when private profit is removed from the equation. Thanks to its collectivized economy, albeit under Stalinist misrule, the Cuban bureaucratically deformed workers state has a health system that in many respects outperforms the one in the U.S. Despite a longtime imperialist embargo, economic isolation and limited resources, Cuba has three times as many doctors per person as the U.S., and it also dispatches doctors to scores of poor countries. In recent months, a health care delegation from Cuba has even teamed up with medical professionals in Chicago to help improve maternal health and lower infant mortality in the black neighborhood of Englewood on the city’s South Side. In Englewood, where most households are headed by single females, the rate of infant mor-

tality is over three times that in Cuba. Prenatal care is critical for a safe pregnancy and delivery, as is postpartum care for the mother. We Marxists fight for quality health care, free at the point of service, which is a burning need for everyone. The struggle must be for socialized medicine—the nationalization of the hospitals and expropriation of the parasitic insurance giants and drug companies as part of the struggle for a workers government. Only after the multiracial working class shatters the capitalist order can the wealth generated by those who labor be committed to providing the highest level of medical care for all. An egalitarian socialist society will have eradicated the conditions that today condemn countless millions to a life of misery, disease and early death.

Separate and Unequal Treatment of Black Women

Medical abuse against black women has a long history in this country. Under chattel slavery, female slaves were treated as “breeders” to produce the next generation of property for the racist masters and faced unrelenting barbarity. The pioneering “father of modern gynecology,” J. Marion Sims, was a Southern slaveowner who performed experimental operations on enslaved women without anesthesia. A century later, racist eugenics laws aimed to eliminate the “feeble-minded,” targeting impoverished black women for forced sterilization. The rulers then blamed black people for their oppression by alleging bad behavior or lifestyle choices. But there is no “choice” in working a low-wage, back-breaking job to feed a family, having a relative locked up by the criminal justice system and leaving a child alone because there is no maternity leave or affordable day care.

Black women workers face triple oppression: as part of a race-color caste, segregated at the bottom of society; as women, bearing the burden of caring for children as well as the sick and old; and as workers, part of the most exploited layer of wage slaves. Race, sex and class oppression generate chronic stress and wear and tear on the body, or what public health officials term “weathering,” which heightens the risk of illness and disease. The tragic case of Erica Garner demonstrates this vividly.

Garner became a prominent activist against racist cop killings after her father, Eric Garner, was choked to death in 2014 by Staten Island cops. The racist white cop who killed Eric Garner was never indicted and remains an NYPD officer. In an interview last December, she talked about the stress of struggling with the system that “beats you down to where you can’t win.”

Just weeks later, at only 27 years old, she was dead. It was a mere four months after giving birth to her second child, and Garner was put into a coma, having suffered brain damage from cardiac arrest. Her heart attack was brought on by chronic asthma, a condition she shared with her father and so many other black children and adults. She had already



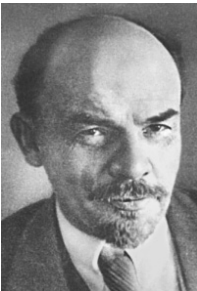
TROTSKY

congresses of the CI, is committed to the fight for the emancipation of women as a crucial part of the struggle for international proletarian revolution.

The most decisive efforts of the feminists—the extension of women’s suffrage under the rule of bourgeois parliamentarism—do not solve the problem of the actual equality of women, especially of the non-propertied classes. This can be seen in the experience of women workers in all capitalist countries where in recent years the bourgeoisie has granted the formal equality of the sexes. Suffrage does not eliminate the primary cause of women’s enslavement in the family and society. Given the economic dependence of the proletarian woman on her capitalist master and her breadwinner husband, and in the absence of broad protection in making provision for mother and child and socialized education and care of children, replacing indissoluble marriage with civil marriage in capitalist states does not make the woman equal in marital relations and does not provide a key to resolving the problem of the relation between the sexes.

Not formal, superficial, but actual equality of women can be realized only under communism when women, together with all members of the laboring class, become the co-owners of the means of production and distribution, participate in managing them and bear their work responsibilities on the same basis as all members of toiling society. In other words, it is possible only by overthrowing the system of the exploitation of man’s labor by man under capitalist production and by organizing the communist form of economy.

—“Theses on Methods and Forms of Work of the Communist Parties Among Women,” 1921 (ICL translation, published in the *Women and Revolution* pages of *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 62, Spring 2011)



LENIN

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survived a prior heart attack as a consequence of her pregnancy, which strained her enlarged heart. We will not forget Eric and Erica Garner!

Maternal mortality is especially dire in states of the former Confederacy. A black woman in Mississippi has a greater risk of dying after giving birth than a woman in Mexico or Egypt. In Georgia, black women make up 68 percent of pregnancy-related deaths, even though white and black women have the same rates of cardiovascular disorders and blood infections during pregnancy.

But treatment is separate and unequal for black women across the board, whether rural or urban, poverty-stricken or well-off. Facing numerous obstacles, including belittling attitudes from medical professionals, they consistently receive a lower quality of health care than white women, even when accounting for insurance status, income, age and severity of the diagnosis. Take the case of Shalon Irving, a black single woman from Atlanta and a highly educated epidemiologist. Despite a family history of cardiovascular disease, her repeated high blood pressure readings postpartum were not treated with anything resembling the aggressive and urgent action they needed. With her baby just weeks old, Irving collapsed and died of hypertension.

Women overall are less likely than men to get insurance through their employer, and given their lower average pay, more women than men are covered by Medicaid. The majority of adults on Medicaid are poor women in low-income or single-parent families, for the most part pregnant women or mothers of young children. Due to endless bureaucracy, the lack of doctors willing to accept Medicaid and the restrictions that limit coverage, expectant black and Latina mothers are frequently forced to delay prenatal care and are stuck without crucial postnatal services. Though Medicaid covers nearly half of all births in the U.S., this woeful coverage is unreliable, as it is left up to the states to determine the scope of services.



California prisoner, shackled to bed, shortly after giving birth.

Hospital administrators regard Medicaid patients, whether black, Latina or white, as a net drain on the balance sheet. Such contempt “trickles down” to the deficient and disrespectful treatment the patient receives. Many hospitals, especially in rural areas, cannot afford the costs of maintaining their obstetrics units due to low Medicaid reimbursement, leading to closures of those units or the hospital altogether. The Trump administration’s threatened cuts to Medicaid would be even more devastating.

“Pro-Life” Kills Women

The ruling class, represented by both the Democrats and Republicans, makes life hell for working-class and poor families, while upholding the sanctity of the family. The institution of the family, the main source of the oppression of women, plays a crucial role in buttressing class rule. Its function is to reproduce the working class

as well as to instill conservative morality and impose social control. Women are expected to embrace the role of mothers and to relish the raising of children. Restrictions on contraception and abortion are closely linked to maintaining women’s social subordination in the family.

Hypocrisy, thy name is America. While this country trumpets the absurd notion of the rights of the “unborn,” more than 23,000 babies born each year die before their first birthday. The attacks on Planned Parenthood—where 97 percent of services are primary and preventative care like cancer screenings, annual exams and health counseling—directly harm the children that the anti-woman bigots claim to be saving. The closure of clinics cuts off preventative care for poor and working-class women, whose babies are then more likely to be born sick or die. Nearly half of pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned (the rate for black women is almost double that of white women), underscoring how vital contraception and abortion are for public health. In the U.S., 90 percent of counties have no abortion clinic, while 50 percent lack an obstetrician-gynecologist.

The impact of savage cuts to family planning can be seen in Texas, where the state legislature has passed a slew of anti-abortion measures in the last decade. From 2010 to 2014, maternal mortality there doubled, making it the deadliest state for new mothers. Across whole swaths of the state, particularly the rural south and west, women have no chance of getting to a real hospital when they need one. Meanwhile, under the state’s perverse TRAP laws, aimed at shutting down abortion providers, clinics were required to be equipped as surgical centers, even though abortion is a simple and safe procedure that doesn’t involve such equipment. In fact, the risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth are far greater than those of abortion.

Abortion poses the basic question of women’s control over whether or not to have children. So-called “pro-lifers” care little about the lives of mothers or their babies, instead promoting punitive

measures against women who engage in anything deemed unacceptable maternal behavior. For example, many hospitals test new mothers for drugs, resulting in scores of child neglect proceedings each year, almost exclusively against minority women. The capitalist state endangers children by frightening women away from prenatal care and treatment for addiction with threats of prison and separation from their children. Each year, 12,000 pregnant women are incarcerated, the majority charged with non-violent offenses like drug possession. This barbarism is compounded by the fact that most states permit the shackling of women during childbirth.

While many women, black people and workers cling to the Democrats as the lesser evil, the Democratic Party serves and protects the very capitalist system that consigns millions of women and children to lives of poverty. The Obama administration’s Affordable Care Act was premised on maintaining the profit motive in health care. The first black president did nothing to turn the tide on black maternal mortality, not to mention alleviate the general plight of black people.

The assault on abortion rights and health benefits must be defeated. To turn the tide for workers and the oppressed requires unleashing a class-struggle fight for decent jobs, housing and education, which is linked to the fight to uproot the capitalist system of exploitation. We need a multi-racial revolutionary workers party that stands as the tribune of all the oppressed to lead the working class to power through socialist revolution. Black women will play a central role in the leadership of that party. A workers America will replace the social functions of the family by collectivizing childcare and housework, bringing women fully into social and political life. Racial prejudice and oppression will become relics of the past along with the social system that produced and nourished them. Once the working class takes power, the emancipation of women and black people can begin. ■

Israel...

(continued from page 8)

away. In 2013, following a public exposé, the government admitted that it had been deceptively injecting Ethiopian women with Depo-Provera—a potent and long-lasting contraceptive—causing a dramatic fall in the community’s birth rate.

Accounting for less than 2 percent of Israel’s population, Jewish youth of Ethiopian descent make up more than 30 percent of those held in juvenile detention. Some 40 percent of Ethiopian Jews who serve in the military have at one time or another been thrown into a military prison. In 2015, Ethiopian Jews, many inspired by Black Lives Matter protests in the U.S., held mass demonstrations after two cops were filmed viciously beating an Israeli-Ethiopian soldier. At the same time, for the Palestinian masses in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, an encounter with an Israeli-Ethiopian soldier is an encounter with an enforcer of Zionist occupation and rule.

Israel’s European-derived Ashkenazi elite also dominates the Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewish population—i.e., Jews who left or were expelled from North African and Near Eastern countries. Many of these Jews live in poverty, with the average income gap between them and Ashkenazi Jews exceeding 33 percent. At the same time, Sephardic/Mizrahi Jews, who make up a substantial part of Israel’s proletariat, are generally under the sway of the most racist and right-wing forces in the country. This is often the product of conscious policy. The government, for example, settled many African migrants in the impoverished, working-class neighborhood of south Tel Aviv. They then incited the local population against the refugees, though some residents have come out in defense of the African refugees. Using Sephardic/Mizrahi Jews as a bulwark for his government’s racist ex-

pulsion of Africans, Netanyahu declared to a howling mob last August, “We are here on a mission to give back south Tel Aviv to the Israeli residents.”

The Ashkenazi rulers’ policy toward Near Eastern Jews has always been one of racism since the founding of Israel. Those who arrived in the 1950s were sprayed with DDT and held in squalid settlement camps. As part of their assimilation into Israel, they were forced to renounce cultural and linguistic ties to the countries from which they came. In Israel, where nearly half of the Jewish population came from Arab and Near Eastern countries, less than 2 percent of Jews today can read and write Arabic. Between 1948 and the mid 1950s, Israeli authorities told thousands of displaced Near Eastern Jews, chiefly from Yemen, that their newborn children had died. In what came to be known as the “Yemenite Affair,” many of these children were kidnapped and given to Ashkenazi Jews to raise. At the time, Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion denounced Arab Jews as “without a trace of Jewish or human education.”

For a Socialist Federation of the Near East!

This January, celebrated Israeli author Amos Oz joined 34 other prominent writers in issuing a letter to Netanyahu calling on the prime minister “to stop the deportation of asylum-seekers from Eritrea and Sudan” and of their “children born in Israel who are asking of us only one thing: to live.” Years earlier, Oz supported the launching of Israeli military attacks against Gaza in 2008-09 (which killed well over 1,000 Palestinians) and in 2014 (which killed 2,300 more). For liberal Zionists like Oz, defending 40,000 desperate African refugees seeking nothing more than to be accepted into Israeli society is cheap and helps to embellish the image of Israel internationally. The Palestinian question is something else alto-

African migrant construction worker in Tel Aviv.



gether. When Oz calls for a Palestinian state within the Occupied Territories, it is in the service of maintaining the ethnocratic nature of Israel as a Jewish state.

Indeed, the large influx of non-Jewish immigrants took off under the liberal Zionist government of the late Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres. After subduing the first Palestinian *Intifada* in the early 1990s, Israel’s rulers moved to replace Palestinian labor from the Occupied Territories with that of foreign migrants, many from East Europe and Asia. Today, at least 300,000 migrants toil in construction, agriculture and other low-wage industries. Denied any and all rights, these migrant laborers live in constant fear of police breaking into their homes in the dead of night to arrest and deport them. Many children born in Israel to immigrant parents have been deported along with their families to countries that are totally foreign to them.

The many fissures in Israeli society should underline that it is a capitalist society replete with contradictions. The fact that the Israeli Jewish proletariat is in

thrall to Zionist ideology underscores the necessity of forging a Leninist vanguard party. Committed to the struggle to shatter the Zionist state from within through proletarian revolution, such a party would fight to win the Israeli proletariat to the understanding that it shares the same class enemy as the Palestinian people: the Israeli capitalist rulers. For the Israeli working class, liberation from capitalist exploitation cannot be realized without the fight for Palestinian national liberation.

What is necessary is to consolidate the cadre that can lay the foundation for revolutionary workers parties—in Israel and throughout the rest of the Near East. As sections of a reforged Fourth International, these Marxist workers parties will fight to unite the proletariat of the region—Arab, Persian, Kurdish and Israeli; Muslim, Christian and Jewish; native-born and immigrant—in struggle on the basis of a program of world revolution. The International Communist League devotes itself to the task of building such parties as the indispensable agencies for proletarian rule. ■

German Trotskyists Say No to SPD Coalition with Merkel

The following article was issued on February 21 as a supplement to *Spartakist*, newspaper of our comrades of the *Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*. On March 4, a referendum of German Social Democratic Party (SPD) members sanctioned a grand coalition federal government known as *GroKo*, renewing the SPD's current partnership with Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) and their CSU Bavarian affiliate.

SPARTAKIST

After many years of selling out the interests of the working class in coalition governments with the Greens and the CDU/CSU, the SPD has plunged into a deep crisis. The SPD leadership's swing back toward again forming a grand coalition with the CDU/CSU led to open opposition within the SPD. There had been tremendous enthusiasm in the SPD base when, in the wake of the SPD's major election setback last September, its leadership announced that it would no longer participate in a *GroKo*. A rude awakening soon followed, and the SPD leadership is now trying to make a new *GroKo* palatable to its base.

At the SPD party conference on January 21, the leadership barely managed to obtain a narrow majority for entering negotiations with the CDU/CSU for a new *GroKo*. Following the conclusion of these negotiations, SPD leaders now aim for a "yes" vote for *GroKo* with its anti-worker policies, an aim that is supported by the DGB trade-union tops. There is strong opposition to *GroKo* in the SPD, and we Marxists also say: "No to *GroKo*!" Rejection of the *GroKo* would destabilize German imperialism and the EU [European Union], thereby making international class struggles easier.

While the Jusos [SPD youth group] are leading the campaign in the SPD, they are giving voice to a much broader dissatisfaction, especially among the SPD's working-class base. For 20 years the SPD has, virtually without interruption, helped administer German capitalism in coalitions with bourgeois parties, with catastrophic results for the working class and immigrants. Particularly hated are Agenda 2010 and the Hartz Laws adopted [early last decade] by the SPD/Green government led by [former SPD Chancellor] Gerhard Schröder, which have led to systematic wage-slashing, two-tier wage scales and an ever-greater redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top. The Left Party, wherever it is in state government, has carried out policies identical to those of the SPD. The working class is bled dry so German capitalists and bankers can fill their pockets. The low-wage sector of the workforce has become the largest in all of Europe.

The SPD [Schröder] government proclaimed the "war against terror" that has fanned racist witchhunting of Muslims and massively expanded the means of state repression, all of which is ultimately aimed at the entire workers movement. With their treacherous policies, the SPD and Left Party paved the way for the rightists and the [racist/nationalist] AfD [Alternative for Germany]. Successfully combating the consequences of these policies requires hard class struggle against the capitalists.

The opposition in the SPD remains wholly within the bounds of reformism,

believing it possible to achieve a "social" capitalism through elections and parliaments. No, socialism cannot be achieved through administering the bourgeois state in a parliamentary democracy. Rather, the bourgeois state must be smashed and the dictatorship of the proletariat established under the rule of workers councils.

The *GroKo* and Popular Fronts

The Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands, section of the International Communist League, opposes not only *GroKo* but all coalitions (popular fronts) of bourgeois workers parties (the SPD and Left

public workers and salaried employees and ripping up their collective bargaining agreements. This coalition came into being only in order to attack the workers and guarantee the profits of the capitalists.

In cases where a mass reformist workers party claims to represent the interests of the working class and runs independently of and against the parties of the bourgeoisie, it can be appropriate for revolutionists to employ the tactic of critical electoral support (in Lenin's words, "the way a rope supports a hanged man"). Critical electoral support serves as a means for revolutionaries to deepen the



Alamy



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Top: SPD youth protest against grand coalition outside party convention, January 21. Left: CSU, CDU and SPD leaders Horst Seehofer, Angela Merkel and Martin Schulz (left to right), at end of coalition negotiations, February 7.

Party) with bourgeois parties. Bourgeois workers parties are, as Lenin said, parties with a working-class base but a leadership that pursues pro-capitalist politics. Similarly, we opposed on principle the SPD/Green coalition of Schröder and [Joschka] Fischer and are also against a possible coalition of the SPD, Left Party and Greens. The capitalist class is not averse to such governments when the task is one of pushing through unpopular measures directed against the working class. The interests of the working class are *always* subordinated to the bourgeois component in such alliances.

Even if a bourgeois workers party [like the SPD] forms a government by itself or in coalition with another bourgeois workers party (like the Left Party), such governments do not constitute "workers governments" (as some leftists claim) but capitalist governments. Between 2002 and 2011, the coalition of the SPD and the Left Party/PDS [Party of Democratic Socialism] in the Berlin Senate had as its central task imposing an austerity program against

contradiction between that party's proletarian base and its pro-capitalist leadership. However, the inclusion of even very small capitalist formations (like the Greens or other liberal formations) acts as a guarantor of the bourgeois program, suppressing this contradiction.

Support to the EU Is Anti-Working-Class

In contrast to the SPD and the Jusos, we Trotskyists, i.e., proletarian-internationalist Marxists, stand in fundamental opposition to the EU, which is dominated by German imperialism. The EU is a consortium of capitalist states. Its goal is to both maximize the exploitation of the working class and enforce the economic domination over and subjugation of the poorer countries such as Greece, Portugal and Spain by the imperialist powers, centrally Germany. The common currency, the euro, is the EU's financial instrument to this end. The purpose of the EU is to increase the competitiveness of the European imperialists vis-à-vis their rivals in the U.S. and Japan.

Despite left social democrats' fantasies about a "supranational," "social" Europe, the EU is an unstable formation exposed to the continual tensions arising from the different national interests of the European imperialists, which repeatedly threaten to rip the EU apart.

In the July 2015 referendum held in Greece by the bourgeois party Syriza to determine "yes" or "no" to additional EU-dictated austerity measures, over 60 percent of voters delivered a stinging rebuke to the imperialists and voted "OXI" (no). Preceding the referendum, our comrades of the Trotskyist Group of Greece (TOE) called for "OXI," pointing out: "Anything but a clear 'no' in this referendum is a betrayal of the interests of workers here and internationally." The TOE advocates the exit of Greece from the EU and the euro. Similarly, our British section, the Spartacist League/Britain, voted for Brexit. Lenin wrote in "On the Slogan for a United States of Europe" (August 1915):

"From the standpoint of the economic conditions of imperialism—i.e., the export of capital and the division of the world by the 'advanced' and 'civilised' colonial powers—a United States of Europe, under capitalism, is either impossible or reactionary...."

"Of course, *temporary* agreements are possible between capitalists and between states. In this sense a United States of Europe is possible as an agreement between the *European* capitalists...but to what end? Only for the purpose of jointly suppressing socialism in Europe, of jointly protecting colonial booty *against* Japan and America."

"Freedom for German Capital!" is at the core of what the EU is all about: the deregulations and privatizations, which apply to hospitals, the service sector, public transportation and utility companies, are mandated by the EU and carried out by successive governments. EU policies are massively directed against the working class in Germany, which means that it is in the workers' own interest to be against the EU.

But the SPD and the Jusos hail the selfsame EU as the best thing that ever happened to Europe, and the Left Party provides the rent-a-crowd for this lie. Many workers share the SPD's position, with the trade-union tops preaching that Germany's leading role in the EU is in the interest of the workers since Germany's export-oriented industry profits massively from the euro. Behind this is the false notion that workers have joint interests with their bosses, a view also promoted by the lie that it is in the workers' interest to defend "Standort Deutschland" [Germany: the place for investment and industry]. Using the threat that otherwise plants will be moved [to other countries], the Social Democratic trade-union bureaucracy opened the way to a deep split in the working class by establishing a two- or three-tier wage system, with increasing parts of the working class losing ever more of their rights through precarious employment conditions. By increasing profits, these anti-worker measures have led directly to German imperialism assuming a greater leadership role in the EU.

The trade-union bureaucrats have further strengthened this system of precarious employment by failing to organize these workers and striking rotten deals with the bosses. Take IG Metall [the metal workers union], which agreed in its union

For a Revolutionary Workers Party!

contract to a clause extending the period from 18 to 48 months before temporary workers are to be hired permanently (a farce in either case, since they're transferred or fired beforehand). Such precariously employed workers feel less and less represented by the SPD, which is, after all, centrally responsible for their plight. And they are also not represented by the trade unions, which leads to depoliticization. Even worse, due to their precarious status, or the fear of it, workers are driven to the AfD, which is itself deeply anti-working-class. What is necessary is for the unions to organize all workers and take up the fight against precarious employment. The still well-organized skilled workers must grasp that this system will in the long run destroy the unions and with them their still relatively good working conditions.

Opposition to the EU and to German imperialism at home is central to this struggle. Internationalist class struggle is necessary to defend workers against assaults from the EU and the capitalists! Germany is still the industrial powerhouse of Europe, and its powerful working class, when set in motion, can play a decisive role in this desperately needed struggle.

What's necessary is a class-struggle leadership of the trade unions, one that will not play by the bosses' rules and those of their government. It will then become clear that the state and government stand on the side of the bosses. *Police out of the DGB! For mass pickets that no one crosses! Programs of public works at full union wages to reintegrate the long-term unemployed! A 30-hour workweek at full pay for all! Down with labor-broker hiring, temporary jobs and contract work! Down with the Hartz Laws! For medical treatment and care at the highest level, free at the point of service! For class-struggle solidarity with the Greek and South and East European workers!* Ultimately, only unity on a *socialist* basis, achieved through proletarian revolutions and the expropriation of the bourgeoisies, can bring about rational worldwide economic development without exploitation. *For the Socialist United States of Europe!*

SPD: Trojan Horse of Counterrevolution

Since the [1990] capitalist counter-revolution in the DDR [the East German deformed workers state] and shortly afterward in the Soviet Union, the German bourgeoisie has regarded the “welfare state” as superfluous and has increasingly undermined it. The necessity of competing with the social gains in the DDR and giving capitalism a more humanitarian face has vanished. The destruction of the DDR made it possible for the European imperialists to carry out their plans to privatize large parts of the postal service, railways and airports. The *Treuhand* [privatizing agency], which smashed the East German *Kombinate* [industrial conglomerates], was the model years later for the austerity measures forced on Greece by the Troika [EU, IMF and European Central Bank].

We Trotskyists always stood for unconditional military defense of the DDR, the other deformed workers states of East Europe and the Soviet degenerated workers state against internal counterrevolution and the imperialist threat. And we do so today with the remaining deformed



Mannheim, January 11: IG Metall union members stage brief warning strike as part of contract negotiations.

workers states of China, Cuba, Vietnam, Laos and North Korea. The SPD under Oskar Lafontaine, its candidate for chancellor [in 1990], was a driving force behind counterrevolution in the DDR. Lafontaine preferred a slower capitalist reunification, in order to make *Anschluss* [annexation] to imperialist West Germany more palatable to the working class of the DDR. The SPD was the Trojan horse of counterrevolution and central to its purpose was selling the notion that bourgeois parliamentary democracy is the best of all systems. The SED-PDS [the Stalinist ruling party in the DDR], which sold out the DDR when Mikhail Gorbachev gave the green light for capitalist reunification, also bears responsibility.

We Spartacists, on the contrary, in 1989-90 fought for revolutionary reunification of Germany through a political revolution [in the East] to sweep away the Stalinist bureaucracy and a socialist revolution in the West to overthrow the capitalist class. In the elections to the Volkskammer [DDR national assembly] in 1990, we were the only organization that fought for “No to capitalist reunification!” and “For a workers soviet Germany!” We are proud of our struggle, which we lost to overwhelming forces. It was a litmus test for revolutionaries, for anyone who does not defend already achieved gains cannot win new ones.

Full Citizenship Rights for All Who Live Here

In a *FAZ* article (20 November 2017), Nils Heisterhagen, policy adviser of the SPD parliamentary fraction in the [state of] Rhineland-Palatinate, demands: “‘Merkel must go,’ this has to come from the SPD soon.” He insists that “the SPD must sound the call for an attack on neoliberal-style capitalism. It is not the right-wing populists that are the SPD’s main enemy but the neoliberal, global, self-righteous elite I initially referred to.” Not a word from Heisterhagen about class struggle or mobilizing the working class against the bosses.

Instead, he argues that to fight the AfD the SPD must make the question of “internal security” its own cause, writing: “Internal security is important for everybody—from the little man to the company

boss, but above all for many people in the 'middle.'... For what is needed for more security is a strong state." Heisterhagen advocates heightened repressive measures against immigrants and refugees. At present, increased state repression is directed particularly against the PKK [Kurdistan



Spartakist

Hamburg demonstration in defense of refugees from Libya, 2013. Spartakist placard demands: "Stop Deportations Through Union Action! Down With the EU! For a Workers Europe!"

Workers Party], with Kurdish demonstrations in effect banned. Down with the ban on the PKK and all Kurdish associations! Down with the state-promoted anti-Muslim witchhunt!

The bourgeois state and its institutions cannot be used to advance the interests of the working class. On the contrary, the working class must recognize that the bourgeois state is fundamentally hostile to it. A fight for *full citizenship rights for everyone who has made it here* is necessary to sweep away the divisions in the working class along national, ethnic and religious lines.

People flee their countries primarily because of imperialist wars and trade pol-

icies—like those of the EU—that destroy the economies of oppressed neocolonial countries. In 1999, under the pretext of preventing a new “genocide,” the SPD/Green government seized the chance to finally send the Bundeswehr [German army] into battle by joining NATO’s war against Serbia. Since then, the Bundeswehr has been playing an ever-larger role in all sorts of imperialist slaughter. The solution is destruction of the system of imperialist exploitation, oppression and war, for which socialist revolutions in the imperialist centers will be decisive. That is what the ICL is fighting for.

Opportunism in the Left

The fake-Trotskyist SAV [German section of Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers' International], which works inside the Left Party, sees "both advocates and opponents of a GroKo as driven not by fundamental differences of content but by fear." While there does exist a great deal of political agreement between the Jusos and the SPD leadership, the "no" to GroKo in fact reflects great dissatisfaction in the SPD's proletarian base. For its part, the SAV concentrates on building the social-democratic Left Party and refers to the SPD as a "former workers party." As late as 1990, these reformists were in the SPD and called for the openly counterrev-

olutionary SPD to go “on the offensive” in the DDR. Now they share responsibility for the class-collaborationist politics of the Left Party and in principle have nothing against its popular-frontist alliances and betrayal of the working class.

The pseudo-Trotskyist Gruppe ArbeiterInnenmacht (GAM) [Workers Power Group] has grasped that there is a polarization in the SPD. However, if you look at the practice of this organization, it is shaped by tailing after the Social Democracy. They share the SPD's pro-EU line and oppose the result of the Brexit referendum: "Leaving the Union or the Euro zone...constitutes a

continued on page 6

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Verrat von SPD und Linkspartei bahnt Rechten den Weg

Für Klassenkampf gegen EU und deutsche Kapitalisten!




Links: Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und Martin Schulz (SPD) in trauriger Einigkeit beim Bundestagswahlkampf. Rechts: Demonstrant mit DDR-Logo bei Kampagne für Mindestlohn.

Die Bundestagswahl am 24. September 2017 hat die SPD eine historische Niederlage eingebracht. Diese Niederlage ist verräterisch, da die SPD seit Bundeskanzler Gerhard Schröders SPD-Spende 2010 und des Hartz-Gesetzes – und an Bundeskanzlerin Merkel Seite als Janusgesicht – lange ausschließlich die Interessen der deutschen Kapitalisten gegen die Arbeiterklasse gehandelt hat. Die Linkspartei wird nicht als eine Alternative zur SPD gesehen, weil sie auch keine ist, wie die Landtagswahlen beweisen, in denen sie die gleiche, als verräterisch Angesehene, Partei wurde. SPD und Linkspartei stellen Scheinalternativen dar, die die Arbeiterklasse von der realpolitischen Alternative für Deutschland (AFD) ablenken. Die deutsche Demokratie ist ein EU mit einer der erfolgreichsten Verträge der Kapitalisten auf der Arbeiterklasse. Die SPD und Linkspartei, ihre unverbundenen Geschwätz, sind nur andere des Resultats der Angewandtheit auf den

form, der immer stärker von deutschen Imperialisten dominiert wird, durch Klassenkampf in revolutionäre. In den Worten des marxistischen Revolutionärs Wilhelm II. (auch Lenin) in die SPD (ebenso wie die Linkspartei) eine „bürgerliche Arbeiterpartei“, eine Partei mit einer Basis in der Arbeiterklasse, aber ohne Führung, die durch ein durchgängiges Fühler vertritt. Die Führung der SPD wird revolutionäre Klassenkampf gegen die Kapitalisten kindlich gegenüber. Sie proklamiert 1914 den „Burgfrieden“ mit der eigenen Bourgeoisie und hat sich seitdem in der neuen Phase der imperialistischen Weltwirtschaft als die Partei der imperialistischen Abwehr der Partei an was zu Wiedereinstieg führt, was nur durch die revolutionäre Arbeit des Klassenkampfes der SPD-Arbeiterklasse Martin Schulz kindig, gefährlich an, dass die SPD nicht mehr für eine große Revolution zur Verfügung stehen würde, und Andrea Nahles verspricht wenig

SPARTACIST 4

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WV Photo

Left: Miners march in 1975 in Charleston against injunction banning wildcat strikes. Right: West Virginia state police arrest member of United Mine Workers in 1989, as some 400 union miners and allies blockade bridge to the non-union Elk Run Coal Company.



AP

School Strike...

(continued from page 1)

than double, held a sign reading: “I’d take a bullet for YOUR child but PEIA WON’T cover it.” Strikers were particularly outraged by the PEIA’s “Go365” initiative, the centerpiece of which is a health assessment app. If workers don’t measure up, they could be penalized with higher premiums and deductibles!

A Solid Statewide Strike

The tradition of bitter labor struggle in this historic coal mining district was on display every day of the school strike. Strikers proudly wore red bandanas, harking back to the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain, when armed striking miners, 10,000-strong, wore them in order to identify themselves as they fought strikebreaking thugs. In one of the largest labor upris-

ings in U.S. history, many miners died and some 1,000 were arrested on bogus murder, conspiracy and treason charges. A striking teacher from Boone County, son of a once-jailed miner, told us in Charleston: “If we’re too cowardly to stand up, then we don’t deserve to call ourselves the sons and daughters of coal miners.”

Trade unionists across the country closely followed this labor battle, with Oklahoma teachers gearing up to strike next month. The strike resonated strongly throughout West Virginia itself. On March 4, some 1,400 members of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) struck against Frontier Communications, the state’s largest internet service provider, over job cuts, health care costs and outsourcing. “Working people like us are fed up,” said Fairmont CWA Local 2004 president Jeff Anderson on February 27. “We saw it last week when the teachers went on strike.” The Frontier

bosses’ plans to keep operations going with scabs should be met with solidarity action by the entire union movement. *Victory to the CWA strike!*

The school strike was provoked by Governor Jim Justice, who in January tried to push through a bill with an insulting *1 percent* pay raise for teachers and other state employees, with no fix to the underfunded PEIA. Union activists and AFT and WVEA officials in southwestern West Virginia, the heart of coal country, began discussing strike action and urging on their counterparts in other sections of the state.

On February 2, one-day walkouts closed schools in southwestern Logan, Mingo and Wyoming counties, and hundreds of teachers and school support workers from this region converged on Charleston. A walkout in Cabell County followed. From the get-go, each of these one-day strikes included members of the WVEA, AFT and WVSSPA, as well as

education workers who were not members of any union. A grassroots Facebook page started by teachers that had been building for a rally at the statehouse on Martin Luther King Day helped stoke the fires for strike action.

Momentum for the statewide strike grew out of the “illegal” one-day walkouts. Strike votes were held in each county school district, and the results were overwhelmingly in favor. Outside the statehouse on February 17, with 10,000 teachers and school staff belting out the Twisted Sister anthem, “We’re Not Gonna Take It,” union officials called for a two-day strike, which began on February 22, a Thursday.

By the weekend, despite thousands of strikers surging in and out of the statehouse, state officials had still not talked with the unions. Schools in all 55 counties remained closed the following Monday, with picket lines up at major intersections throughout the state. On February 27, Jus-

SPD...

(continued from page 5)

reactionary response to the crisis.” In Moscow in 1991, these “revolutionaries” stood on the barricades of Boris Yeltsin, who was leading the counterrevolution in the Soviet Union. Their tradition is one of *always* calling for voting for the SPD and/or the Left Party, even when these organizations are campaigning for coalitions with bourgeois parties. The GAM claims to be exploiting a contradiction [within a bourgeois workers party], one that is no longer there when it runs as part of popular-front alliances. For the GAM, the political independence of the working class is a matter of indifference.

The Lessons of October

In voting for war credits in August 1914, the SPD openly passed over to the side of its own capitalist class. When the workers of Russia under the leadership of Lenin’s and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks carried out the



Willy Römer

Armed workers on their way to occupy newspaper district in Berlin during January 1919 uprising.

first successful socialist revolution, the SPD leadership opposed this revolution. Fundamental to the Bolshevik victory was that Lenin’s party had early on split from

the reformist Mensheviks; the Bolsheviks were built as a conscious vanguard party. When the defeat of German imperialism in World War I could no longer be concealed and German workers and soldiers in November 1918 began to set up councils on the Russian model, the SPD leadership sprang to the aid of rotting capitalism in order to save the capitalist class from a socialist revolution in Germany.

The SPD leaders Ebert, Noske and Scheidemann even called their capitalist government the “Council of People’s Deputies,” obviously so as to mislead the workers and soldiers in revolt as to its character. The SPD was aided by the centrist (revolutionary in words, reformist in deeds) USPD [Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany] led by Hugo Haase and Karl Kautsky, who had been expelled from the SPD. In November/December 1918, the SPD and USPD formed a coalition government. At the turn of the year, having the USPD in the government was no longer necessary. The SPD heading the capitalist state power used the arch-reactionary Reichswehr and Freikorps to go after and defeat the revolutionaries. At the behest of the SPD, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered by the Freikorps, beheading the leadership of the newly founded KPD [German Communist Party].

By arguing that the National Assembly

(parliament) and workers councils could and should exist side by side, Kautsky’s USPD aided the SPD in re-establishing bourgeois order. This is fundamentally wrong: a government resting on parliament is a capitalist government (the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie) and irreconcilable with a government of workers councils (the dictatorship of the proletariat). When the situation had stabilized, the SPD set about dissolving the workers councils.

Up to the end of 1918, the Spartakusbund [predecessor to the KPD] had belonged to the USPD. The Spartakusbund around Luxemburg and Liebknecht should have split much earlier from the SPD and USPD, as Lenin had done in Russia. This could have given the working class the necessary leadership in the class struggles against the imperialist war and in the 1918 revolution.

The young KPD was still dragging too much social-democratic baggage with it when once again a revolutionary crisis erupted in Germany in 1923. French occupation of the Ruhr and the countermeasures of the German government set off a deep crisis marked by a disintegrating economy and hyperinflation. The workers were fleeing the SPD and the trade unions linked to it in droves. Instead of orienting the working class toward the seizure of power, the KPD pursued the illusion that the left wing of the Social Democracy could be a “revolutionary” partner and joined the SPD in capitalist state governments in Saxony and Thuringia, as the supposed springboard to revolution. Instead, entry into these governments served to put a halt to revolution. The 1923 defeat of the German Revolution was extremely demoralizing for the working class of the Soviet Union, which had been urgently hoping for international extension of its revolution. This defeat laid the basis for the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union.

Thus, the basic question is the stance leftists take toward the bourgeois state, the bourgeoisie’s instrument of repression to maintain its class rule. To overthrow this state, what is required is a revolutionary workers party based on the example of Lenin’s Bolsheviks and anchored in the working masses. Building such a party that will intervene in and lead class struggles is an urgent historical necessity. ■

SPARTACIST LEAGUE/U.S. Local Directory and Public Offices

Website: www.icl-fi.org • Email address: vanguard@tiac.net

National Office: Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116, (212) 732-7860

Chicago.....Box 6441, Main PO, Chicago, IL 60680
chicagospartacist@sbcglobal.net
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Oakland.....Box 29497, Oakland, CA 94604
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Montréal.....CP 83 Succ. Place-d’Armes, Montréal, QC H2Y 3E9, (514) 728-7578
trotskyte.montreal@gmail.com

Toronto.....Box 7198, Station A, Toronto, ON M5W 1X8, (416) 593-4138
spartcan@on.aibn.com

Vancouver.....Box 2717, Main P.O., Vancouver, BC V6B 3X2, (604) 687-0353
tl.vancouver.bc@gmail.com

tice suddenly announced that he had found money for a 5 percent raise for everybody on strike and 3 percent for the other state employees. As for health benefits, he offered a stopgap, one-year freeze in premiums and promised to appoint a task force, which the heads of the unions had asked for, to supposedly study the problem. That freeze remains in effect.

WVEA, AFT and WVSSPA officials accepted Justice’s offer, despite having no guarantee that the legislature would agree, and announced that schools would reopen two days later. But rank-and-file teachers and school workers smelled a rat and said, “No way!” In fact, the Senate refused to vote on the pay bill. Distrusting the governor and a legislature that had floated bills, since tabled, attacking public employee seniority rights and pushing charter schools, strikers used the February 28 “cooling off” day to rally support for keeping schools closed. Above all, they were angry that skyrocketing out-of-pocket health care costs were being ignored. Under massive pressure from the membership and local leaders, the unions continued the strike.

Labor’s Enemies, and False Friends

Every major labor battle raises the question of who the workers’ friends and enemies are. Many strikers considered the cops as fellow public workers and allies, citing the fact that state troopers’ salaries and health benefits are also determined by the state legislature. This is a deadly illusion. If Governor Justice had issued injunctions to break the school strike, those very police would have been called on to arrest unionists, as they did in the 1990 teachers strike. Or take the case of Bob Buck, a West Virginia steel worker railroaded to prison for defending his union during a 1991-92 strike. Together with the military, courts and prisons, the cops are at the core of the capitalist state that defends the rule and profits of the exploiting class. The cops’ “job” is to repress workers and rain terror on the oppressed black, Latino and poor masses of this country. The whole history of the West Virginia mine wars is one of police forces working with company goons to bloody workers and bust the United Mine Workers.

County and state school superintendents kept schools closed during the strike, often voicing support for union demands. Strikers generally embraced the superintendents as allies, thinking that they have common cause in battling the austerity-minded legislators. But make no mistake: the superintendents are not fellow workers but state officials who answer to the governor. Whatever sympathy they expressed toward their employees was above all a sign of the power and unity of the strike, which generated broad public support. Their real program was expressed by state superintendent Steven Paine, who warned teachers on February 20 about “the economic realities of our state” and declared: “Work stoppages by public employees are not lawful in West Virginia.”

Strikers have directed much of their anger at Republicans in the state government, like the union-hating Senate head Mitch Carmichael. Carmichael & Co.

“World Socialist Web Site”: Anti-Union, Not Socialist

West Virginia teachers and school staff: beware! In the middle of the crucial statewide strike, supporters of the “World Socialist Web Site” (WSWS) distributed a “Teacher Newsletter” dated March 1 that counseled strikers to form “rank-and-file committees to take conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the AFT-VW [sic] and the WVEA.” It grotesquely claimed that “the basic purpose of these organizations” is “to suppress the uprising of teachers and get them back to work.” This agitation could only undermine a strike that was organized and carried out by *the unions*. Opposition to the unions is nothing

new for these political bandits who also go by the name Socialist Equality Party (previously the Workers League). Over two decades ago, WSWS honcho David North declared in a speech that “to define the AFL-CIO as a working class organization is to blind the working class” (*Bulletin*, 10 January 1992). Shortly after the brief United Auto Workers (UAW) strike against General Motors in 2007, the WSWS announced that they “would advise workers, should the UAW come to their plant, to vote to keep it out” and declared that “joining the UAW would not advance workers’ interests one iota.” The WSWS puts an equal sign be-

tween the trade unions—the basic defense organizations of the working class—and their pro-capitalist misleaders. Unlike the fake socialists of WSWS, the Spartacist League supports the unions in every battle against the bosses. At the same time, we denounce the union bureaucrats for their reliance on the Democratic Party and other forms of class collaboration, which have deeply eroded labor’s power. Our purpose is to facilitate struggle that will *strengthen* the unions. By contrast, the sinister WSWS finds common cause with Don Blankenship and his fellow capitalists who want to destroy unions.

make it easy for state senator Richard Ojeda and other Democrats to pretend to champion labor and the poor when they see fit to do so. But the Democrats are, no less than the Republicans, a party of capitalist rule, from Wall Street darling Hillary Clinton to “socialist” Bernie Sanders and down to the local level. As union officials tell workers angry at the Republicans to “make ‘em pay in May,” when election primaries will be held, it is useful to recall the last teachers strike in 1990, when 47 of 55 counties went out for eleven days. The issues then were similar, but the governor, Gaston Caperton, was a

Blankenship, the Massey Energy CEO who spent a year in a country-club prison after 29 miners were killed in an explosion at Massey’s Upper Big Branch mine. Today, while Blankenship aims to win the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate in the May primary, the once “friend of labor” Justice has been instrumental in the state’s efforts to squeeze the school unions.

Break with the Democrats and Republicans!

The austerity faced by those who work in West Virginia schools is by no means limited to the Mountain State. For decades,

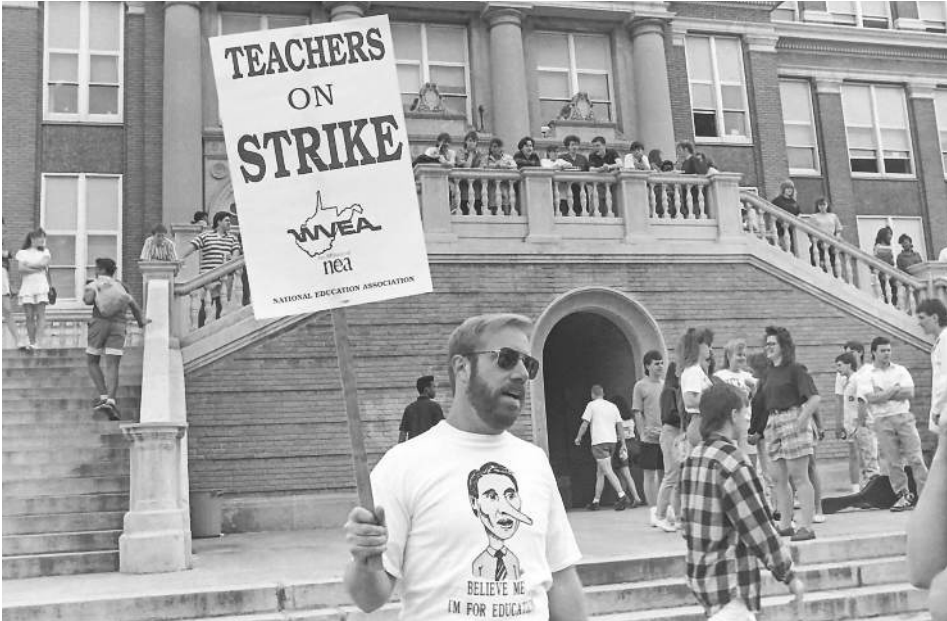
Party labor chiefs. The attacks on public education show the common interest linking the overwhelmingly white working class in rural West Virginia with struggling families in America’s black ghettos and Latino barrios.

Not a few union members reeling from declining wages and other hardships overseen by a Democratic Party White House looked to Donald Trump in 2016. While Trump postured as an anti-establishment champion of the “little man,” he is in fact a billionaire capitalist whose racist, anti-woman and anti-immigrant bigotry is poison to the working class. The fight against the capitalist rulers’ ceaseless attacks on working people sharply poses the need for labor’s political independence from both the Democratic and Republican parties.

A case in point is the U.S. Supreme Court hearings in *Janus v. American Federation of State, Municipal, and County Employees*, a case that directly threatens the agency shop in public employment nationwide. Trump’s appointment of Neil Gorsuch to the Court, breaking a four-to-four deadlock in the case, all but assures an anti-union ruling. The lesson drawn by labor officialdom is, as always, to mobilize union resources on behalf of the Democrats, with their eyes now focused on the midterm Congressional elections. That class-collaborationist strategy has long undermined organized labor in this country.

The West Virginia school strike gave a glimpse of what it takes to defend and revive the unions. Teachers and staff went out together, and stayed strong and united throughout the strike. This battle shows the need for a new, class-struggle leadership based on opposition to the capitalists, their political parties and their state.

What we need is a multiracial workers party—a party that would mobilize the power of labor at the head of all the oppressed and impoverished in the fight for a workers government. When those who labor rule, the vast riches that are today pocketed by the capitalists will be used to begin rebuilding this society for the benefit of all, including quality, integrated schools from coast to coast. ■



Union member pickets during 1990 West Virginia teachers strike outside high school in Cabell County, where schools remained open. Teacher’s T-shirt mocks Democratic governor Gaston Caperton who tried to break strike.

Democrat. The state declared the strike illegal, and teachers were arrested on the picket lines.

Governor Justice, a longtime Republican, was elected as a Democrat in 2016 with the support of the labor bureaucrats before switching back to the GOP after Trump’s election. The mine owner Justice was, in the eyes of the union tops, a “good” coal baron compared to his buddy Don

this country’s capitalist rulers, under both Democrats and Republicans, have waged war on public education and the teachers unions. The Obama administration, with its anti-labor education secretary Arne Duncan running point, escalated this war nationally, from vilifying the unions to promoting charter schools. And it did so with the complicity of AFT head Randi Weingarten and other pro-Democratic

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Israel: African Migrants Face Mass Expulsion

Carrying signs declaring, “No to Deportation,” “We’re All Humans” and “Refugees and Residents Refuse to be Enemies,” 20,000 Israelis and African migrants rallied in south Tel Aviv on February 24 against the first phase of the government’s plans to expel some 40,000 African asylum-seekers, including more than 5,000 children born in Israel. Under a January edict announced by the right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the migrants, most of whom are from Eritrea or Sudan, must agree to “voluntary departure” (i.e., expulsion) to Uganda or Rwanda. Otherwise, they face indefinite imprisonment. Already, about 3,000 are crammed in brutal conditions in Holot, a concentration camp in the Negev Desert surrounded by razor-wire fences. Notably, a group of pilots from Israel’s national carrier, El Al, have announced that they will refuse to participate in the government’s deportation scheme.

Migrants fleeing repression and war in sub-Saharan Africa began to arrive in Israel in large numbers in 2005. In December that year, Egyptian police attacked an encampment of 2,000 refugees from Sudan, including what is now South Sudan, slaughtering dozens, including children. Facing such brutal repression, as well as daily discrimination, tens of thousands of African refugees left Egypt to make the harrowing trip across the Sinai Desert—where they faced rape and torture at the hands of traffickers and a shoot-to-kill policy by Egyptian authorities—in the hopes of reaching Israel.

Once in Israel, they endure all-sided racism. Most are denied work permits, though many have managed to eke out an existence in unofficial jobs such as dish-washing and cleaning hotel bathrooms. They are subjected to beatings, stabbings and outright murders by racist mobs. Government officials vilify the Africans as “criminals” and label them “infiltrators.” In 2012, Eli Yishai, then Netanyahu’s interior minister, blatantly stated that Israel “belongs to us, to the white man.”

The following year, Israel completed the main part of a steel barrier along its 150-mile border with Egypt’s Sinai Desert, effectively putting an end to African migration to the country. For those in Israel, government policy has been, in the words of Yishai, “to make their lives miserable.” In June 2012, the Knesset (parliament) adopted an amendment to its Prevention of Infiltration Law allowing authorities to detain refugees and their children and jail them indefinitely. Enacted in 1954, the law targeted Palestinians who sought to return to their homes after the mass expulsions of 1947-48. This is but one example of how the measures directed against African refugees were prepared by decades of dispossession and repression against the Palestinian people, which is the defining feature of the Zionist state.

Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!

Many African migrants came to Israel believing they would find relief in a country that has long touted itself as a land of refuge for Jewish masses fleeing the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust and Nazi terror. But the reality is that exercise of Israeli national self-determination was



SIPA

February 22: Detained African migrants outside Holot march toward another detention center in Negev Desert to protest plans by Zionist state to deport or imprison tens of thousands of asylum-seekers.

No Deportations!

carved out of the living body of the Palestinian nation. To this day, Israel maintains itself through the national oppression of the Palestinian people.

For more than 50 years, Israel, backed to the hilt by U.S. imperialism, has subjected Palestinians in the Occupied Territories to life under military rule with no rights. Palestinians are imprisoned behind concrete walls, electrified fences, trenches, razor wire and military checkpoints. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, they are terrorized by hundreds of thousands of Zionist settlers who act as auxiliaries to the Israeli occupation and rob Palestinians of their land and homes. In Gaza, Palestinians endure a starvation blockade, raids and assassinations. Meanwhile, Palestinian citizens of Israel—some 20 percent of that country’s popu-

lation—suffer widespread discrimination in housing, jobs, social services and virtually all aspects of life. Accorded far fewer rights than Jews under Israeli law, they live under constant threat of having even these rights stripped away.

What is posed in Israel today is a fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants, including the African refugees and everyone else who has made it into the country. But this basic democratic demand raises far deeper issues in a country like Israel. The Zionist rulers rail against “infiltrators” because the influx of non-Jewish immigrants runs up against the very foundations of the “Jewish state.” Key to the maintenance of a Jewish majority in Israel is the “Law of Return,” which grants citizenship purely on the basis of Jewish ancestry at the expense of non-

Jewish immigrants and the native Palestinian population.

Israel/Palestine is a case of two interpenetrated peoples laying claim to the same piece of land. Under capitalism, the exercise of national self-determination for Israeli Jews necessarily comes at the expense of the Palestinians. Racist measures like the “Law of Return” and the denial of the right of return for the millions of displaced Palestinian refugees and their descendants are at the heart of Zionist Israel. Only within the context of a socialist federation of the Near East can the conflicting national claims of Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs be equitably resolved and the right of return for Palestinians be realized.

The deep-seated chauvinism against the Palestinian people is woven into the very social fabric of Israeli society. The same racist mobs that rally on Israel’s streets chanting “Death to the Arabs!” also mobilize in mob violence against African migrants and demand their expulsion. It is hardly a surprise that dark-skinned Ethiopian Jews have also been targeted by racist thugs. For decades, Israel, a supposed haven for oppressed Jews, refused entry to the Jewish population of Ethiopia. Beginning in the late 1970s, thousands of Ethiopian Jews sought to make the trek to Israel. But as Canadian journalist David Sheen pointed out, Israeli authorities refused to accept them unless they provided the government genealogical “charts to prove their Jewish lineage” (venturesafrica.com, 30 October 2015). Languishing in Sudanese refugee camps, 4,000 of these refugees died.

It was only in the 1980s and ’90s that Ethiopian Jews were brought into Israel, where they were used to fill some of the lowest-paid jobs in the country. And from the time of their arrival, Ethiopian Jews have faced rampant racism in housing, education and work. They are often forced to abandon long-held cultural practices in order to assimilate into what Israel claims to be “proper” Judaism. When they donate blood, it is regularly thrown

continued on page 3



Reuters

Palestinians queue at West Bank checkpoint on way to work in Israel, 2016.