



For Class Struggle, Not Reliance on Democrats!

Janus Case: Assault on Labor



Metro DC Labor Council

The Supreme Court case of *Janus v. AFSCME* is aimed squarely at destroying public-sector unions, posing a direct threat to all of labor. A ruling against AFSCME—the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees—would ban the agency shop in public employment, whereby employees who refuse to join the union must pay “agency fees” to the union, which bargains on their behalf as well as that of its members. Such a ruling would overturn the 1977 *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education* decision upholding the agency shop, and thereby make “right to work” the law of the land for all public employees. With the decisive vote in the hands of conservative Justice Neil Gor-

Labor protest in Washington, D.C., February 24, part of “National Day of Action” against union-busting *Janus* case before Supreme Court.

such, a corporate lawyer appointed by Donald Trump, an anti-union decision is all but assured.

The *Janus* case has been bankrolled by a viciously union-busting cabal, including the billionaire Koch brothers and the far-right lobbyists of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). The original lawsuit was filed by Republican Illinois governor and venture capitalist Bruce Rauner on behalf of Mark Janus, a social worker who would not join AFSCME. The case is premised on the bogus argument that having to pay agency

fees is “coerced” speech and a violation of the First Amendment. This is just a cover for trying to bankrupt AFSCME and other public-sector unions and bleed them of members. The same red herring was at the center of an earlier case, *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, which tried to strike down mandatory union fees but ended in a deadlock.

Janus is the latest attack in a decades-long war waged by the capitalist rulers against organized labor, during which the percentage of unionized workers has fallen to just over 10 percent, about half of what

it was in the 1980s. Public workers are in the sights of the labor-haters because they make up the largest concentration of unionized workers in the country. Their unionization rate of 34 percent is five times greater than in the private sector.

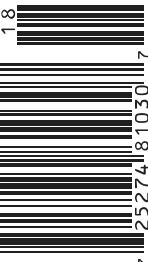
A ruling against AFSCME would strike especially hard at black workers, who are highly represented in these unions. Black people are 30 percent more likely than whites to have a public-sector job, and for many of them, getting a unionized job in transit, sanitation or the postal service provides one of the few ways out of all-sided destitution. In the 28 states with “right to work” laws, wages are lower

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Arizona Statewide Walkout

Victory to School Strike!

APRIL 30—A sea of red T-shirts filled the Arizona State Capitol Grounds in Phoenix on Thursday, April 26, the first day of a statewide walkout by teachers and school workers—including janitors, cafeteria workers and bus drivers—fed up with years of low pay and budget cuts. With Arizona’s ten largest school districts shut down, some 50,000 educators and their supporters turned out to demand of the state legislature a 20 percent pay hike and a restoration of education funding to pre-Great Recession levels. Inspired by the nine-day West Virginia school strike earlier this year, teachers in public schools starved of funds have been fighting back across the country, from Kentucky to Oklahoma and Colorado.



This statewide walkout is a first in viciously anti-union “right to work” Arizona. It is the culmination of a weeks-long



ZUMA

April 26: Over 50,000 striking teachers and supporters protest at State Capitol in Phoenix, Arizona. Demands include more funding for education.

campaign by Arizona Educators United (AEU)—a coalition of teachers and other school workers, administrators and community members—along with the two

teachers unions, the Arizona Education Association (AEA) and much smaller American Federation of Teachers Arizona. The teachers voted by 78 percent

to strike, rejecting an offer from Republican governor Doug Ducey to provide higher pay to them but not the rest of the school workforce. Nor was funding for the classrooms going to be increased. Teachers at the Phoenix rally told *Workers Vanguard*: “If it was just about our pay, we would have taken the governor’s deal.” This kind of unity between the teachers and other school workers is crucial to winning this battle.

Arizona classrooms are in an abysmal state. Teachers described old and tattered carpets; far too few computers, many of them held together with duct tape; novels assigned in the curriculum but not available to students; old or missing textbooks and more. The majority of Native American students go to decrepit schools on impoverished reservations; notably, one of the largest districts on the Navajo Reservation joined the strike.

Latinos, who make up nearly half the student enrollment and are heavily

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segregated, are consigned to some of the worst schools in the state system. In Arizona, which was seized from Mexico in the 19th century, nearly one-quarter of the Spanish-speaking population lives below the official poverty line, and Latinos are incarcerated at more than double the rate of whites. Several teachers and support staff spoke with anger and passion about the lack of bilingual education. One teacher told WV that following the passage of the racist “English only” Proposition 203 in 2000, teachers and instruction assistants were banned from speaking Spanish in the classroom to their students, who are now forced to learn a new language at the same time they are expected to learn the curriculum. The fight for bilingual education must be part of the struggle for free, quality, integrated education for the working class and Latino, black and Native American poor.

Teachers also spoke to the impact of Arizona’s racist pass law SB1070. Enacted in 2010, the bill allows the cops to stop and question anyone they think might be an “illegal” immigrant, making it open season on the Latino population. Those who fail to immediately produce documentation proving their “right” to be in the U.S. can be arrested and thrown behind bars (see WV No. 958, 7 May 2010). One Latina



April 2012: High school students demonstrate in Phoenix against Arizona’s racist SB1070 law, which allows cops to question anyone they deem to be an “illegal” immigrant.

teacher observed that after the passage of SB1070, half her class disappeared overnight, with students too afraid to come to school. Today, her students fear an end to the DACA program providing them a temporary reprieve from deportation. We say: Full citizenship rights for all immigrants! No deportations!

Republican legislators and other reactionaries have engaged in vitriolic red-

baiting against this highly popular strike. Foaming at the mouth, they have accused the strike leadership—especially the AEU’s Noah Karvelis and Derek Harris, who are charged with being “Bernie Sanders political operatives”—of using “teachers and our children to carry out their socialist movement.” The far-right loonies at Breitbart are accusing Karvelis of brainwashing Arizona students with Marxist propaganda, based on his tweet encouraging educators to discuss gender, race, feminism and gun violence with their students.

Such brazen efforts to sow division must be repulsed. And in the case of Bernie Sanders and his supporters in the Democratic Socialists of America, the labels “Marxist” and “socialist” are quite undeserved. Sanders made his rallying cry the populist appeal for a “political revolution against the billionaire class.” However, he has long served the interests of that class, particularly with his support for the bloody wars, occupations and other military adventures of U.S. imperialism that have devastated countries around the globe.

As a U.S. Senator, Sanders has voted in lockstep with the Democrats, who no less than the Republicans represent the

interests of the ruling capitalist class. Take the matter of the public schools. From the Great Recession on, the Obama administration mounted a massive assault on public education nationally under the guise of “school reform” that featured brass-knuckle attacks on teachers unions.

Some Arizona school superintendents claim to support the strike. The gutting of education funding has, of course, impacted their budgets. But make no mistake: superintendents and principals are no friends of educators and school staff. They have the authority to fire teachers, impose discipline and are the agents of the capitalist class in the schools, including by enforcing the Anglo-chauvinist ban on bilingual education.

Strong unions are necessary for the protection of teachers and school workers. The AEA, the larger union with a membership of about 20,000, represents only a fraction of instruction staff statewide. Many non-union teachers support the AEU and #RedForEd movement. The unions must seize this golden opportunity to organize them into their ranks.

Significantly, teachers at charter schools also joined the strike. Charter schools have become entrenched in Arizona, which has the highest number of these schools per capita in the country. It is vital for the labor movement to oppose the expansion of charter schools, which are set up to siphon funds from the public education system and to break teachers unions. At the same time, there must be a fight to unionize teachers and other workers in the existing charter school system.

What is starkly posed for the revitalization of the labor movement is forging a class-struggle leadership based on the understanding that the interests of labor are counterposed to those of the bosses, their parties and their state. The money and resources exist for massive construction of schools, hospitals and other infrastructure gutted by the profit-bloated capitalists. To seize that wealth, though, requires breaking the power of the bourgeoisie through socialist revolution. It is necessary to build a multiracial revolutionary workers party whose purpose is not only to defend the working class against the menace of its own devastation but also to rid the planet of the source of that devastation, capitalism itself. ■



TROTSKY

Labor and Capital Have No Common Interests

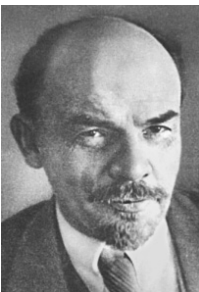
The trade unions are the mass defensive organizations of the working class. The trade-union bureaucracy undermines the power of the unions by its allegiance to the U.S. capitalist order, particularly expressed through support to the Democratic Party. In a 1942 lecture, James P. Cannon emphasized that the Trotskyists who led the successful 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters strikes fought against illusions in the politicians

and government agencies of the capitalist class enemy. The understanding that the interests of the workers and bosses are counterposed is vital to reviving the unions as battalions of class struggle and to the fight to forge a new leadership of labor.

All modern strikes require political direction. The strikes of that period brought the government, its agencies and its institutions into the very center of every situation. A strike leader without some conception of a political line was very much out of date already by 1934. The old fashioned trade union movement, which used to deal with the bosses without governmental interference, belongs in the museum. The modern labor movement must be politically directed because it is confronted by the government at every turn. Our people were prepared for that since they were political people, inspired by political conceptions. The policy of the class struggle guided our comrades; they couldn’t be deceived and outmaneuvered, as so many strike leaders of that period were, by this mechanism of sabotage and destruction known as the National Labor Board and all its auxiliary setups. They put no reliance whatever in Roosevelt’s Labor Board; they weren’t fooled by any idea that Roosevelt, the liberal “friend of labor” president, was going to help the truck drivers in Minneapolis win a few cents more an hour. They weren’t deluded even by the fact that there was at that time in Minnesota a Farmer-Labor Governor, presumed to be on the side of the workers.

Our people didn’t believe in anybody or anything but the policy of the class struggle and the ability of the workers to prevail by their mass strength and solidarity. Consequently, they expected from the start that the union would have to fight for its right to exist; that the bosses would not yield any recognition to the union, would not yield any increase of wages or reduction of the scandalous hours without some pressure being brought to bear. Therefore they prepared everything from the point of view of class war. They knew that power, not diplomacy, would decide the issue. Bluffs don’t work in fundamental things, only in incidental ones. In such things as the conflict of class interests one must be prepared to fight.

—James P. Cannon, *The History of American Trotskyism* (1944)



LENIN

Letter Jeff Sessions, Immigration, and “States’ Rights”

2 April 2018

To the Editor

In reading the fine article “Stop All Deportations” in WV No. 1130, I noted that it did not address the glaring hypocrisy of Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a staunch advocate of “states’ rights,” using the federal government to attack the sanctuary laws of the state of California. Granted, dealing with even a small portion of the hypocrisy of the Trump administration would require a substantial expansion of WV’s format. “States’ rights” was of course the rallying cry of the Confederacy. Using the plural was actually disingenuous since the only “right” they were interested in was the “right” to own slaves. Adding another level of hypocrisy, many of the “states’

rights” mob are Bible-thumpers. However, the Bible decrees that every fiftieth year all slaves are to be freed and all debt cancelled, known as the jubilee year. John Brown’s favorite hymn was “Blow Ye the Trumpet, Blow,” the chorus of which proclaimed “The year of jubilee is come!” Being a righteous Bible-thumper, Brown believed that chattel slavery was an abomination before his God, and took truly heroic action based on his belief. Sessions’ lawsuits make it clear that these latter-day Confederates are only for “states’ rights” for states which act to ramp up racial oppression, anti-immigrant hysteria and other forms of bigotry, and not for those that do so much as feign the opposite, like California.

Jeffrey Schanzer

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Waterfront Commission, NJ State Troopers: Hands Off the ILA!

On his final day in office on January 15, New Jersey's Republican governor Chris Christie signed a bill to end the state's support for the Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor, a government agency that polices union members of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) on the New York and New Jersey docks and controls hiring and job allocation. The law, which is being challenged in court by the Waterfront Commission (and will very likely not be put into effect), directs the governor to turn over responsibilities for policing New Jersey's docks—as well as the vast bulk of the commission's \$13 million annual funding—to the New Jersey State Police. Outrageously, the ILA tops joined the bosses' New York Shipping Association in endorsing Christie's measure. The ILA bureaucrats are promoting the lie that the racist New Jersey troopers will be more favorable to longshore workers than the Commission.

Government policing of the waterfront, whether done by the state police, the Waterfront Commission or directly by the Feds, is counter to the interests of longshore workers. Under federal law, all port workers, including longshoremen and port truckers, have to submit to extensive criminal background and immigration checks in order to receive a Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC card), which is mandatory for work. This process has been used by the government to deny tens of thousands of port workers their jobs. In a country where prisons are overflowing with young black and Latino men and women, many of them rounded up for drug offenses, this screening has a viciously racist thrust, while also being directed against immigrants.

While the federal government's TWIC screening is bad enough, workers in the New York/New Jersey harbor are subject to even more onerous targeting by the Waterfront Commission. All applicants are interrogated and then must be approved by the Commission before getting hired. If the Commission revokes a longshore worker's ID pass, he or she is banned from working on the docks. The Commission can pull a worker's ID pass if they fail to report any arrest, including a DUI *off the job*, and could still decide to take away the job even if the worker does report the arrest! Longshore workers can have their passes revoked if they are not available to work 15 days each month without an "acceptable" reason.

But the Waterfront Commission does not only threaten the livelihoods of long-

shore workers. A Commission investigation can lead—and has led—to criminal charges being brought against workers. Moreover, the Commission effectively has the power to decide who works, irrespective of the contract. For example, the ILA and shipping bosses negotiated a "second chance" program under which longshore workers who test positive for marijuana can reclaim their jobs after going through a rehabilitation program. However, the Commission can still stop the worker from returning to work.

1953: ILA Against Government Union-Busting

Regardless of the mechanism, the purpose of government policing of the ILA has nothing to do with fighting corruption or discrimination and everything to

dictatorial rule of ILA president "King Joe" Ryan, who worked directly with the bosses for years to suppress strikes, purge Communists and other militants from the union and ensure sweetheart deals for the shipping companies.

In 1945, longshoremen held a port-wide strike against a sellout contract agreed to by Ryan and the shipping bosses. Strikes broke out again in 1947, 1948 and 1951. According to historian Howard Kimeldorf, author of *Reds or Rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (1988), there were 18 recorded work stoppages between 1945 and 1951, accounting for more than a half million workdays lost on the New York/New Jersey docks.

These strikes prompted New York governor Thomas E. Dewey to establish a



Bettmann

New York, 1954: Police attack ILA longshoremen during 29-day strike, after which workers won back recognition of their union despite Taft-Hartley injunction and heavy state intervention.

do with trying to undermine a powerful union with considerable social weight. This is proved by the entire history of the Waterfront Commission.

When announcing their support to the law to effectively eliminate the Waterfront Commission, the ILA tops recycled the myth that the Commission once served a useful purpose but then became "outdated and counterproductive" (ILA statement, January 15). In truth, the Commission was established in 1953 in order to cripple the union in the wake of militant longshore strikes, many of them wildcats. As World War II drew to a close, New York's longshoremen began to rebel against the

waterfront Crime Commission, memorialized in the 1954 anti-union film *On the Waterfront*, starring Marlon Brando. For decades, the employers and politicians hadn't raised a peep of protest about the mob corruption, the racial discrimination or the degrading "shape-up" system that required longshoremen to pay bribes to get work. After all, the employers were the main beneficiaries of the miserable working conditions. But when Ryan could no longer control his membership, the government suddenly viewed him as a crook who needed to be driven from office. Ryan was accused of siphoning off money, which the shipping bosses

had paid for "fighting communism," for his personal use. In November 1953, after Ryan's indictment for "misusing" union funds, a special ILA convention forced him to resign from office.

Longshore workers fought back when the government and the leadership of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) under George Meany tried to replace the ILA, which had been expelled from the AFL, with an AFL affiliate on the docks. They understood that this was an attack on their union and refused to believe the lie that the government just wanted to stop corruption. In 1954, ILA members in New York staged a massive 29-day strike. Despite the imposition of a Taft-Hartley injunction and heavy state intervention, the workers prevailed and won back recognition of the ILA (see "How Longshoremen Stopped the Finks," WV No. 414, 24 October 1986).

The Crime Commission directed at the ILA became the model for a major campaign by the federal government to use "corruption" and "racketeering" to spearhead attacks on the unions. These attacks were principally directed at the Teamsters and ILA, which have the power to shut down economically vital areas like trade and transportation. A Senate select committee was set up on a resolution by anti-Communist witchhunter Joe McCarthy. Under chairman John McClellan and staff counsel Robert F. Kennedy, this committee set up the conviction of Teamsters leader Jimmy Hoffa, whose first-ever master freight contract raised the specter of a nationwide truckers strike.

The Crime Commission hearings also led to establishing the Waterfront Commission. One of its first acts in the 1950s was to **purge 5,000 union longshoremen** from the docks. William J. Mello's book *New York Longshoremen: Class and Power on the Docks* (2010) describes the Commission's long, dirty history of blacklisting communists and other trade-union militants.

Anti-Union Policing Today

Today, the Waterfront Commission spearheads investigations and prosecutions against elected ILA officials as well as members of the union. Insofar as there is corruption in the ILA, this is a matter to be dealt with by the union membership, not the capitalist government. ***Labor must clean its own house!***

In 2005, ILA officials Harold Daggett and Arthur Coffey were hauled into court on fraud and conspiracy charges based on testimony by known mob informants. They were acquitted by a federal jury. As noted by reporter Tom Robbins, "Part of the government's problem was that the defendants were not accused of violent crimes, while its own witnesses had murder and mayhem on their résumés" (*Village Voice*, 15 November 2005).

On 29 January 2016, thousands of ILA members walked off the job for several

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Janus Case...

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and workers are less likely to have health insurance or retirement benefits. It was the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, passed with overwhelming support from racist Dixiecrats (Democrats) in the open shop South, that contained a “right to work” provision allowing states to pass legislation prohibiting compulsory union membership. Taft-Hartley also banned militant strike tactics and opened up a red purge of the unions.

It is the labor misleaders themselves who have paved the way for the *Janus* attack. Abandoning the class-struggle methods that built the unions, the labor bureaucracy has simply lain down in the face of relentless attacks on unions while resorting to reliance on the capitalist government, the courts and the Democratic Party. In Wisconsin in 2011, tens of thousands of unionists—both public employees and others—rallied day after day at the State Capitol to beat back Republican governor Scott Walker’s attack on public unions’ collective bargaining rights. Workers were ready to strike to defend their unions. But the AFL-CIO bureaucrats demobilized the workers in favor of a campaign to recall Walker (and install a Democrat in his place). This sealed the unions’ defeat, opening the floodgates for “right to work” in former union bastions in the Midwest and elsewhere.

Today, in opposing *Janus*, the “labor statesmen” who run the unions present themselves as an essential force for keeping a lid on working-class struggle. Peddling the dominant argument of the labor tops against *Janus*, Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), warned that an anti-union decision would disrupt “labor peace”! Making clear the role of the current union tops as the docile servants of the capitalist bosses, Weingarten declared in a January 19 *amicus* brief to the Supreme Court, “The current law [*Aboud* decision] has preserved labor peace for four decades by balancing the interests of workers and employers.”

So beholden to the bosses’ laws, the union tops are begging Democratic politicians to prepare new laws that would mitigate a bad *Janus* decision. With an eye on his bid for re-election in November, New York’s Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo has enacted measures supposedly staving off the most devastating aspects of *Janus*, winning hearty praise from the state’s union officials. Cuomo did this by ratifying amendments to the state’s Taylor Law, which bans public employee strikes. Far from preparing the unions for some hard battles to smash the Taylor Law, the labor tops tinker with the very mechanism that keeps their members in chains.

At every turn, the union misleaders showcase their support to the capitalist system while enjoying the perks and privileges of union office, including posts inside the Democratic Party. Every election cycle, millions of union dollars and millions of union members are mobilized for voter turnout for the bourgeois “lesser evil.” This is evident as the anti-Trump “resistance” builds toward the midterm elections. The labor tops stake the fate of unions on getting Democrats into office and in the



NYPD brutalizes protester at march for Kimani Gray, black teenager killed by cops in Brooklyn, March 2013. Cops, prison guards out of the unions!

courts. A Democrat-dominated Supreme Court would likely turn down *Janus*, for the simple reason that Democrats recognize the key role the labor bureaucracy plays in keeping the wage slaves in line.

But when the workers get out of line and engage in class struggle, the Democrats, as much as the Republicans, bring down the hammer. In 1947, Harry S. Truman made a show of vetoing Taft-Hartley, knowing that Congress would override him, and then enforced it the following year against striking miners and other workers. In 1978, Jimmy Carter invoked Taft-Hartley against coal miners engaged in a bitter strike that lasted 110 days. Bill Clinton used the Railway Labor Act (RLA) 14 times in order to ban potential rail and airline strikes. For his part, Barack Obama effectively gutted the United Auto Workers while bailing out the auto bosses and banks. Even the smashing of the 1981 PATCO air traffic controllers strike by Ronald Reagan, a watershed defeat for labor, was carried out under a plan drawn up by his predecessor, Carter.

For a Class-Struggle Leadership of Labor!

The labor bureaucracy’s many decades of subservience to the capitalists and their government have served to erode elementary union consciousness and demoralize workers. The reactionary forces behind the *Janus* case are banking on frustrated workers opting to quit their union in order to deny the bureaucrats dues money. This could only lead to a disastrous weakening of the labor movement. The unions remain the basic defense organizations of the working class and should not be equated with the sellout policies of their leaders. The effectiveness of unions lies in their ability to carry out actions through their *collective* power; workers who abandon their union become a potential reserve of scabs.

The *Janus* case poses defense of the unions pointblank. As we wrote after the 2014 *Harris v. Quinn* ruling, which excluded home health care workers from having to pay agency fees but upheld the agency shop for other public-sector workers: “Marxists defend the agency shop against the bosses’ attacks. But what we are for is the closed shop, where workers must be members of the union before being hired” (“Supreme Court Clobbers Home Health Care Workers Unions,” WV No. 1049, 11 July 2014). Our article continued: “What is needed are fighting unions that encompass all workers in

a company or industry, uniting them in struggle against the bosses for improved pay, benefits and work conditions.”

The capitalists’ attacks on unions go hand in hand with the relentless ravaging of social programs like health care, education and anything else that smacks of helping working people and the oppressed. Public workers would find plenty of allies among the unemployed, black people, Latinos, immigrants and all those who have been thrown under the bus by the capitalist rulers if they take up the fight for quality health care for all, for free education, free public transit and other such demands.

This perspective requires a political fight to forge a new, class-struggle lead-



Minnesota Historical Society

Trotskyists led victorious 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters strike, mobilized labor power independently of capitalist rulers.

ership of the unions—a leadership that understands that the interests of labor and capital cannot be reconciled. Such a leadership would fight to organize the unorganized. Waging this battle means fighting against the race-color caste oppression of black people, which is the bedrock of capitalist rule in this country. A class-struggle leadership of the unions would be rooted in the understanding that the fight for black freedom is inextricably tied to labor’s cause and would take up the defense of foreign-born workers, demanding an end to deportations and full citizenship rights for all immigrants.

A fighting workers leadership in the unions would be committed to waging battle on the picket lines armed with a program dedicated to the liberation of humanity from a social system based on production for profit rather than for human need. The struggle to revitalize the labor movement must be understood as part of a fight to build a multiracial workers party whose aim is to sweep away the capitalist order of wage slavery through a workers revolution that establishes workers rule.

No Illusions in the Capitalist State!

A grotesque measure of the labor bureaucrats’ allegiance to U.S. capitalism and its state is the lie sold by leaders of AFSCME and the SEIU service workers union that cops and prison guards are fellow “workers,” organizing them into the unions. This is also the case with the bureaucrats atop the Teamsters and

International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), whose Local 65 organizes Los Angeles port police—the very cops who would be used to break a longshore strike. The cops are the hired thugs of the capitalist rulers, charged with repressing labor and terrorizing the ghettos and barrios. Among the victims of these so-called “union brothers” are the black and minority members of the same unions, as well as their families. ***Cops and prison guards out of the unions!***

Fearing that *Janus* threatens a further drop in membership and a decline in their economic and political clout, union officials have been scrambling to re-register members through “educational campaigns.” Amalgamated Transit Union locals have combined this effort with distributing dues checkoff authorization forms, hoping to minimize disruption to the dues income stream post-*Janus*.

We oppose the capitalist state abolishing dues checkoff or intervening in any other way into union affairs. But the whole checkoff system, where dues are automatically deducted from paychecks, hands the bosses control over the unions’ purse strings, giving them an instrument for financial blackmail. It originated during World War II, when, in exchange for their “no-strike” pledge to bolster war production, the CIO industrial union leaders negotiated with the National War Labor Board for “union security.” Under this formula, union members were bound to pay dues, usually under a checkoff

arrangement. This deal was premised on subordination of the unions to the capitalist state. Under a class-struggle leadership, union reps would collect dues, which would help to make the leadership accountable to the ranks.

Every major labor battle shows the need for unions to rely on their own independent power, including control over finances. In the heat of an eleven-day New York City transit strike in 1980, Transport Workers Union Local 100 saw its dues check-off taken away, and restored six months later after union leaders sold out work and safety standards. After a three-day Local 100 strike in 2005, dues checkoff was revoked in an attempt to bankrupt the union; it was restored three years later in return for a no-strike pledge.

A direct contrast was the effort made by the British National Union of Mineworkers to keep hold of its financial war chest during its historic 1984-85 strike. First, the union dispersed funds to banks and trusted workers leaders throughout Europe as a precautionary measure against seizure by the courts. After Margaret Thatcher’s government tracked down those funds, the union conducted its transactions in cash.

The industrial unions in this country were built through hard-fought class battles in defiance of anti-labor laws. Liberals and labor reformists claim that those unions were established by the grace of Democratic president Franklin D. Roosevelt and New Deal legislation such as the 1935 Wagner Act. In fact, while the

A Spartacist Pamphlet

1934 Strikes
Class-Struggle Leadership
Made a Key Difference

Then and Now

Minneapolis, May 1934: At the Battle of Dupes Run, thousands of strikers and supporters routed cops and overwhelming special deputies.

AUSTRALIA...01 BRITAIN...100 CANADA...0001 EUROPE...01 SOUTH AFRICA...02 USA...0001

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ILA...

(continued from page 3)

hours in what ILA spokesman Jim McNamara reported was a wildcat strike against the Waterfront Commission’s interference in the hiring process and induction of new union members. Immediately afterward, the Commission subpoenaed ILA members and officials in retaliation for what it called “an illegal walkout.”

Then in September 2016, the Waterfront Commission stripped ILA member Mario Gutierrez of his Waterfront registration (i.e., his job) because he refused to be a rat when called to testify about the January 29 walkout. (See “Special Craft Longshoreman Revoked for Refusing to Cooperate with the Commission’s Investigation of the January 29, 2016 Illegal Walkout,” 13 September 2016, wcnyh.org/newspage232.html.) *Reinstate Mario Gutierrez!*

For Trade-Union Independence from the Capitalist State!

That the shipping bosses favor government policing of the ILA is hardly surprising given that this benefits their attempts to curb and ultimately break the union. That the ILA misleaders have joined with the shipping association in trying to impose oversight by the NJ state cops speaks volumes about their own commitment to collaboration with the racist capitalist order. In addition to breaking strikes, New Jersey state troopers are notorious for their vicious racism, which gave birth to the term “Driving While Black.” In one infamous example, state cops in 1998 pulled over a van with four black and Latino men, shooting and wounding three of them. The state eventually agreed to pay the men nearly \$13 million to settle a lawsuit.

The fundamental division in society is between the capitalist class, which owns the means of production, and the working class, which is forced to sell its labor power to the



Getty

January 2016 walkout by ILA union members against Waterfront Commission’s interference in hiring process and induction of new union members.

capitalists in order to survive. The capitalist class uses its state—i.e., the police, courts, military and prisons—to maintain its rule over the working class. It is necessary to fight for the class independence of the trade unions from the capitalist state.

The pro-capitalist misleaders of the ILA and other unions act to subordinate the labor movement to the employers and their government, courts and police. This is politically expressed in their allegiance to the Democratic Party. Accepting the capitalist profit system, they promote the illusion that the government acts—or can be pressured to act—in the interests of the working class. But history proves the opposite. The federal government, under Democratic and Republican presidents alike, has imposed strikebreaking Taft-Hartley injunctions on this powerful and hard-nosed union numerous times. A wide array of laws continues to treat the ILA and other unions as though they were, in effect, “criminal conspiracies.”

As part of defending itself and its mem-

bers, the union—not the Waterfront Commission—must control hiring. Job allocation should be done through one union hiring hall. On the West Coast, longshore workers won the hiring hall through the 1934 strike, which smashed the old “shape-up” system. West Coast longshore workers, who were then organized in the ILA, repeatedly defied the attempts of Joe Ryan to throttle the strike. Key to this strike’s success was that it was led by reds—i.e., militants who at the time were committed to a program of class struggle. They did not buy into illusions in “labor friendly” government bodies and understood that the only possible road to victory lay in the workers mobilizing their power as a class against all the parties and agencies of the capitalist class enemy. (For more, see our pamphlet *Then and Now*.)

But over the years, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) hiring hall has been increasingly eroded by concessions made by the West Coast union bureaucrats. These include the divi-

sion of ILWU members into “A men,” who have first choice of available work, and lower tiers (who are not union members). The introduction of “steady men,” consisting of higher paid skilled longshore workers who are not dispatched by the union but work directly for individual stevedoring companies, further undermined the hiring hall. However, despite its erosion, the ILWU hiring hall remains a thorn in the side of the bosses.

We are for a union hiring hall in the New York/New Jersey ports that would dispatch all jobs equitably on a rotating basis. Access to skills training and job promotion should be based on seniority. We are for the elimination of company lists, under which individual employers generate a roster of workers who get first preference at jobs. The aim of these lists, which tie longshoremens to the bosses, is to create a more docile workforce.

A union hiring hall makes it more difficult for employers to victimize or blackball workers for refusing to work under unsafe conditions. It would also help undercut the ability of the boss to discriminate against workers on the basis of political views or union activity. There is a long history of racist discrimination on the New York/New Jersey docks that the ILA bureaucrats have accommodated over the years, thereby playing into the bosses’ schemes to divide and rule their wage slaves. A hiring hall would help undercut discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic origin.

Workers need a union leadership that understands that the interests of the workers and the employers are directly counterposed, and will mobilize the power of the unions accordingly, on the basis that the government and police forces exist only to serve the interests of the bosses. There will be no end to attacks on labor so long as the capitalist system exists. It is necessary to build a workers party to fight for workers revolution to end the whole system of wage slavery. ■

Wagner Act secured some legal rights for unions in private industry, it specifically excluded public employees. Creating mechanisms for state supervision of union elections and other activities, the Wagner Act’s central purpose was to undercut class struggle. It came into effect as a response to the historic 1934 citywide strikes in Minneapolis, San Francisco and Toledo.

Those labor battles, which helped spur the growth of the CIO industrial unions later in the decade, were led by reds—supporters of the Trotskyist Communist League of America in Minneapolis, A.J. Muste’s American Workers Party in Toledo and the Communist Party in San Francisco. The strikes were virtual civil wars that pitted the mass of workers against the strikebreakers and their cop protectors. Strike leaders had to take on the conservative AFL union bureaucrats, who did the government’s bidding and had enforced the craft, ethnic and racial divisions that undermine workers’ struggles. As we wrote in a series of WV articles, reprinted in our 2015 pamphlet *Then and Now*: “What made the difference was that the workers were politically and organizationally armed by leaders who understood that the only possible road to victory lay in mobilizing their power as a class against the capitalist class enemy.”

“Rank-and-File” Reformism

A few leftists have made the argument, perverse as it is, that a *Janus* ruling against AFSCME could actually revitalize the unions by removing bureaucratic impediments to militancy. This is the line of “Do-It-Yourself Class Struggle” by United Federation of Teachers representative Kevin Prosen in *Jacobin* (2 March), a project of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Prosen writes that “by gutting the institutions of the union movement,” the right wing may also be “removing the brakes on much more explosive forms of worker activity.”

Gutting the unions has not led to “renewed volatility” among workers, as Prosen projects from the expected *Janus*

decision. Rather, the implementation of union-busting legislation has meant the decimation of public-sector unions. After collective bargaining was abolished for state workers in Wisconsin in 2011, the rate of public-sector unionization plummeted by half, from over 50 percent to under 23 percent in 2016.

Janus was a major focus of the Labor Notes Conference held in Chicago in early April that drew some 3,000 trade unionists and leftists. Supporters of the social-democratic publication *Labor Notes*, as well as the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and other reformist groups, talked a lot about rank-and-file (or “bottom up”) activism as the answer to the business unionism of the top labor bureaucrats. To be sure, we could use a lot more militant labor action in this country. But the key to mobilizing workers in their own class interests is to break the political chains binding them to the exploiting class. Supporters of *Workers Vanguard* were the only ones at the conference who raised the call to break with the Democrats and build a class-struggle workers party.

From the opening session of the conference to its close, the same groups who cheered “bottom up” organizing—the DSA, Socialist Alternative, et al.—also cheered Bernie Sanders, a capitalist politician whose “socialist” garb has helped corral disaffected youth and workers into the Democratic fold (see “Bernie Sanders: Imperialist Running Dog,” WV No. 1083, 12 February 2016). And the DSA is itself a component of the Democratic Party. For all their talk of workers “rebellion,” these outfits share the same framework as the business unionists, seeking at most a better deal under this decrepit system of exploitation. Politically, this boils down to hitching the unions’ fate to “friend of labor” Democrats and relying on the courts and other arms of the state.

Recent teachers strikes in West Virginia and other Republican-run states had Labor Notes participants touting the “red state revolts.” WV supporters were

applauded when they pointed out that workers are also under the gun in the very blue city where the gathering was being held, and that the Obama administration had spearheaded attacks on teachers unions and public education, with the complicity of the labor fakers. And the ISO, despite occasional complaints about the unions relying too heavily on the Democrats, is itself complicit. They blab on about “a revival of rank and file activity” to counter *Janus*, but when such activity hits close to home, it’s a different story. In 2016, ISO supporter Jesse Sharkey, who is currently running the Chicago Teachers Union, called off a much-anticipated strike by the membership and rammed through a concessionary contract, selling out the very rank and file he represents.

Militant union struggle can strike important blows against exploitation and austerity. But the key lies in making the

working class conscious of its historic role as the gravedigger of the capitalist system and of class society as a whole. Such consciousness does not emerge spontaneously from the day-to-day struggles of the working class, which do not in themselves challenge the capitalist mode of production, but must be brought into the proletariat from the outside through the instrumentality of a revolutionary workers party. One militant trade-unionist and WV supporter speaking from the floor at a transit workers panel put it plainly: “What we need is a break with class collaborationism. We need to rebuild the type of radical unionism that understood that workers and bosses have nothing in common whatsoever. And on the way to that, we need to build a workers party, our own party, multiracial, that will fight for black rights, for immigrant rights and for a workers government.” ■

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Britain: Propaganda Offensive Targets Russia

Cloak, Dagger and Poison Pen

The following article is reprinted from *Workers Hammer* No. 241 (Spring 2018), published by our comrades of the *Spartacist League/Britain*.

WORKERS HAMMER

6 APRIL—Theresa May’s discredited Tory government seized on the alleged poisoning of ex-MI6 spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury on 4 March to launch a new anti-Russia propaganda offensive. While providing zero evidence of Russian involvement, Westminster has been demanding that its NATO and EU [European Union] cronies take action against Moscow, insisting that Russia is responsible for “an assault on British sovereignty” and an “unlawful use of force.” In fact, on 3 April the head of Britain’s chemical weapons research unit at Porton Down admitted that its technical analysis could not establish that the substance originated in Russia.

The British imperialists certainly know a thing or two about assaults on sovereignty and use of force, “lawful” or not! As the Chartist Ernest Jones noted of the British empire in 1851, “On its colonies the sun never sets, but the blood never dries.” And the loss of most of its colonies hasn’t stopped the imperialist slaughter. Britain maintains hundreds of troops in Afghanistan, and since 2014 British aircraft and drones have carried out over 1,600 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. London has also been fully backing the horrific Saudi war in Yemen, in which over 10,000 people have been killed. This past 6 March marked the 30th anniversary of the cold-blooded assassination by the SAS [Britain’s special forces] of Mairéad Farrell, Daniel McCann and Seán Savage, unarmed IRA militants, in Gibraltar.

The government has so far evinced more bark than bite towards Russia: the expulsion of 23 Russian diplomats, increased inspections of Russian imports and flights and threats to freeze Russian state assets. (The announcement that no member of

Britain’s Saxe-Coburg dynasty will be attending the World Cup [in Russia] means there will be at least one place on earth to escape the spectacle of inbred class privilege that is the royal wedding.)

In co-ordination with Britain, the U.S. expelled 60 Russian diplomats and closed the Russian consulate in Seattle. The EU has stated that it “takes extremely seriously the UK Government’s assessment that it is highly likely that the Russian Federation is responsible” for the Salisbury poisonings. This statement was less forceful than the May government

of the EU. While screaming bloody murder over Russian “aggression,” the imperialist NATO alliance has been expanding into Eastern Europe. NATO has established four “Enhanced Forward Presence” battle groups on Russia’s border, including the largest deployment of U.S. tanks since the fall of the Soviet Union. Britain is in command of the operation in Estonia, which comprises some 800 British and 300 French troops.

This belligerence towards Putin’s regime is rooted in the imperialist powers’ determination to keep Russia out of their club.



UK Ministry of Defence
British troops board U.S. Chinook helicopters in Estonia, September 2017. As part of U.S.-led imperialist NATO alliance, Britain has been staging provocations on Russia’s border.

wanted, reflecting differences within and between the European ruling classes over how forcefully to pursue the anti-Russia agenda. Nonetheless, the EU voted to extend economic sanctions against Russia until September of this year, and most EU countries expelled Russian diplomats.

The British imperialists, under the wing of their senior U.S. partners, have been stepping up provocations against Russia since February 2014, when a fascist-spearheaded coup in Ukraine was engineered by Washington with the assistance

Arising out of the capitalist counterrevolution which destroyed the Soviet Union in 1991-92, capitalist Russia inherited a large nuclear arsenal and significant (though less advanced) industrial base in a country with vast natural resources. Where imperialist countries are characterised by the export of capital, Russia mainly exports oil and other natural resources, as well as weapons. Russia is today essentially a regional capitalist power, albeit with imperialist ambitions.

The imperialists intervene throughout the world in their drive to control markets, raw materials and cheap labour. Russia does not play a role in the carve-up of the world on a global scale. Its main military campaigns, with the recent exception of Syria, have been within the borders of the former Soviet Union. These included two brutal wars to prevent the oppressed nation of Chechnya from exercising its right to self-determination by seceding.

In contrast, Russia’s reclaiming of Crimea, following the 2014 coup in Ukraine, was overwhelmingly welcomed by Crimea’s majority Russian population. The imperialists nonetheless branded Russia’s move an act of totalitarian military aggression. (See “Crimea Is Russian,” *Workers Hammer* No. 226, Spring 2014.) Likewise the vote in the ethnically mixed but predominantly Russian-speaking provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk to separate from Ukraine was an elementary expression of national self-determination that the international working class should defend.

Jeremy Corbyn got a lot of flak for the 14 March statement by his spokesman Seumas Milne that the government’s confidential briefings did not in fact contain convincing evidence of Russian involvement in poisoning the Skripals. Corbyn and Milne aptly compared the claims about Russian chemical weapons to the bogus “evidence” of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction that the [Tony] Blair government used as a pretext for joining the U.S. in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Not that the lack of any evidence prevented “her majesty’s loyal opposition” supporting the Tories’ anti-Russia measures. In

fact, Corbyn went even further, demanding that “Russian money be excluded from our political system.”

This was echoed by the Socialist Party, who grotesquely lined up behind the government’s anti-Russia offensive by calling for the working class to impose sanctions not just against “the Russian super-rich but also against the Chinese, Asian and other oligarchs who control great chunks of London and other European capitals” (socialistparty.org.uk, 16 March). The Socialist Party have really outdone themselves! While alibiing the British bourgeoisie, who control London and (along with remnants of the British aristocracy) are the main beneficiaries of rent-gouging and property speculation, the Socialist Party endorses not only the campaign against Russia but also the drive for capitalist counterrevolution in the Chinese deformed workers state.

The British government insists it is acting in the interests of humanity in denouncing Russia’s alleged use of a chemical weapon. The reality is that the imperialists are fully prepared to use any means, including poison gas and other weapons of mass destruction, in pursuit of their interests. When imperialist forces intervened in Soviet Russia in 1919 in a failed attempt to crush the October Revolution, British warplanes bombarded Red Army troops with a chemical agent. That same year, when Kurds in Mesopotamia rose in revolt against British occupation, Winston Churchill declared: “I do not understand the squeamishness about the use of gas.... I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes.”

Porton Down, less than ten miles from Salisbury, was the site of 30,000 chemical weapons experiments on British soldiers between 1945 and 1989. It is possible the Skripals were poisoned by a chemical weapon produced in Russia or at a former Soviet chemical weapons lab in Uzbekistan or at Porton Down. But the fact remains that the imperialist powers are the most deadly danger facing humanity. Having cut social services like the National Health Service (NHS) to the bone, slashed wages and unleashed massive spying on the population, the British ruling class is now banging the war drums against Moscow. It is in the interests of the working people of Britain and the world to oppose this imperialist war-mongering, as part of the struggle to oust the imperialist butchers and to bring the working class to power across the globe. ■

Columbia Grad Student Workers Strike



WV Photo

Spartacist supporters join picket line of graduate student workers at Columbia University during one-week strike, April 25. For over three years, the administration has refused to recognize the strikers’ union, Graduate Workers of Columbia University-United Auto Workers Local 2110, and negotiate a contract. While they ended their strike on April 30, strike action could erupt again in the fall semester.

WORKERS HAMMER

NO. 241 • SPRING 2018
Newspaper of the Spartacist League

**No Brexit reversal!
Down with racist anti-worker EU!**

**Corbyn puts
lipstick on EU pig**

Designed to mislead the leadership of the working class, the EU is a tool of imperialist domination. It is a tool of the ruling class to divide the working class and to maintain its domination over the world. The EU is a tool of the ruling class to divide the working class and to maintain its domination over the world. The EU is a tool of the ruling class to divide the working class and to maintain its domination over the world.

EU: enemy of immigrants, refugees

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Starbucks...

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the middle of the restaurant, exposing her breasts. One cop threatened to break her arm while throttling her.

Twenty-five years ago, the Spartacist League and Labor Black Leagues, with support from integrated labor unions, initiated demonstrations around the country to protest outrageous racist policies at Denny’s restaurants against black and Latino diners. Recalling the Woolworth lunch counter sit-ins of the civil rights movement, the integrated groups of protesters, after picketing outside, went into Denny’s and demanded that the diner deliver equal services. Denny’s discrimination against black customers was so systematic that in 1994 the company was forced to pay millions after a class-action suit was filed.

While the South Carolina-based Denny’s made no effort to conceal its racism, the Seattle-based Starbucks hides behind a mask of liberalism, hypocritically selling itself as an urban oasis and a “progressive,” “socially responsible” enterprise. In a cheap publicity stunt to head off a backlash against their business and loss of profits, Starbucks announced plans to briefly close their stores on May 29 to carry out “unconscious bias” training of their employees.

Anti-bias training is the ubiquitous trendy policy of American liberals and a means by which the capitalist rulers wash their hands of endemic racist abuse by blaming it on the population. They posit that if people weren’t prejudiced, then there would be no racist incidents. This is fundamentally false. Prejudice is not the cause of discrimination but the product of American capitalism’s subjugation of



AFSCME Local 444 endorsed and joined in 1993 Emeryville, California, protest, one of several demonstrations nationwide initiated by Spartacist League and Labor Black League against Jim Crow discrimination at Denny’s restaurants.

black people as a race-color caste. Anti-black racism is the prime means used by the white ruling class to keep the multi-racial working class divided. Rooted in chattel slavery, black oppression forms the bedrock of American capitalism and is maintained through force and violence by the capitalist state’s cops and prison system. As veteran Trotskyist Richard S. Fraser noted in a 1953 lecture, “Only the destruction of the economic and social foundation upon which prejudice is built will eliminate it” (“In Memoriam—Richard S. Fraser,” *Prometheus Research Series* No. 3, August 1990).

Among those whom Starbucks is commissioning to help in its “unconscious bias” training workshop is former top

cop for the Obama administration, Eric Holder, who protected cops as they gunned down black people and led the assault on whistle-blowers like Chelsea Manning. Starbucks sparked further outrage when it also engaged the notoriously racist Anti-Defamation League (ADL) for “anti-bias” training. For more than 50 years, the ADL has violence-baited anti-fascist protesters and spied on black activists, Palestinian rights activists, labor unions, leftists and others for the FBI, CIA, the Israeli Mossad, apartheid South Africa and Latin American death squad regimes. It might as well have hired Steve Bannon. In response to the backlash, Starbucks now claims that it will only “consult” the ADL. While it accrues profits to the tune of

Texas...

(continued from page 8)

The 1965 Voting Rights Act was passed under the pressure of the mass civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. Black youth and working people, along with white activists, displayed enormous courage and succeeded in getting the racist rulers to grant some formal democratic rights, such as the right to vote and an end to official legal segregation in the South. The Act was expanded in 1975 to address racist discrimination against Mexican Americans, not least in Texas.

In 2013, the Supreme Court took a knife to the Voting Rights Act, using the absurd rationale that racism in the U.S. had been largely overcome. In an article at that time, we called this decision “nothing but a punch in the face to black people” (“Supreme Court Spits on Black Rights,” WV No. 1027, 12 July 2013). The Fifteenth Amendment granting voting rights regardless of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude” was ratified in 1870. But following the defeat of Reconstruction, it became a dead letter in the states of the old Confederacy, which employed poll taxes, literacy tests and other dirty tricks—backed up by the lynch rope terror of the Ku Klux Klan and local police (often intertwined)—to keep black people



Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Rosa Maria Ortega, a permanent U.S. resident sentenced to eight years in 2017 for voting in Texas. Currently free on bond pending appeal, she still faces the threat of prison and deportation to Mexico.

from casting ballots. The assaults on black voting rights today are the latest incarnation of this old song. Since the 2013 Supreme Court ruling, Texas, along with other former Confederate states, has been spearheading a campaign to restrict voting rights. The state’s early attempts at crafting a voter photo ID law were so blatantly discriminatory against black people and Latinos that a 2016 federal appellate court ruling required the state to soften it. A similar law in North Carolina was struck down in 2016 because it targeted black voters with “almost surgical precision,” in the words of the judge’s decision. In 2017, the Supreme Court refused to reinstate the North Carolina law. Texas, however,

kept on tweaking its restrictions and was finally rewarded on April 27, when a Fifth Circuit panel upheld the newest version. In this era of mass incarceration, the disenfranchisement of convicted felons is a transparent device for blocking large numbers of black people and Latinos from exercising basic democratic rights. Some 6 million Americans have lost the right to vote due to felony convictions. A 2015 study reported that 2.2 million black adult U.S. citizens were prohibited from voting; nationally, more than *one in eight* voting-aged black men were ineligible to cast a ballot in the 2014 elections.

The assault on the right to vote has mainly been carried out by Republican governors and legislators in the name of preventing “voter fraud” and safeguarding election “integrity.” For their part, Democratic politicians went along with laws restricting voting rights for felons, though in recent months a few Democrats have called for easing them—in mainly Republican states. As for voter ID laws, the Democratic Party’s opposition to these measures is centered on swing states, whose importance is highlighted by the upcoming midterm elections. The in-your-face racist bigotry of the Republicans allows the Democrats to take support from black people for granted, without having to actually do anything for them. There is, of course, real voter fraud. On April 23, Tarrant County justice of the peace Russ Casey, a Texas Republican, pleaded guilty to rigging his own election by turning in fake signatures to secure a place on a March 6 primary ballot. While Mason is looking at five years behind bars and Ortega has been sentenced to eight,

millions on the backs of an overworked workforce, Starbucks pays poverty-level wages that average nine to ten dollars an hour. The company claims it offers workers decent health insurance, but in fact fewer than 42 percent of Starbucks baristas are insured by the company. In 2008, the National Labor Relations Board ruled that Starbucks had broken the law by firing union organizers and prohibiting employees from even talking union. The Industrial Workers of the World have fought Starbucks’ nationally coordinated anti-union operation and organized a handful of shops. But the majority remain unorganized and many workers endure the torment of “clopensing”—i.e., closing down the store late at night, commuting home and returning back just a few hours later to open for the morning shift. What’s needed is a hard class-struggle fight to organize Starbucks and other companies in the service industry. This perspective requires a political struggle against the current union tops, who shackle the labor movement to the capitalist Democratic Party.

As Marxists fighting to build a workers party that will act as the tribune of the people, we oppose every manifestation of oppression. Our strategy is to mobilize the social power of the multiracial labor movement. We underline that full equality for black people requires a revolution where the working class rips the economy out of the hands of the capitalist rulers and reorganizes it on a socialist basis. Only then will it be possible to lay the basis for eliminating the material roots of black oppression through the integration of black people into an egalitarian socialist society based on a collectivized economy with jobs and quality housing, health care and education for all. ■

Casey’s penalty was five years of probation. And it’s not just Republicans—Texas Democrat Lyndon B. Johnson was just as good at rounding up dead people to cast ballots and stealing elections as the notorious Chicago machine of former mayor Richard J. Daley. The ballot is a fundamental democratic right that we tenaciously defend, but fundamental change will not come through voting. It was not by the ballot that slavery met its demise. Union rights did not come from Congress. All the gains working and black people have made came through their seizing them from the racist rulers by mass struggles on the battlefields, in the factories and on the streets. When black people are declared to have no rights that others are bound to respect, it paints a target on the back of every black man, woman and child in this country. A serious defense of those rights demands resolute struggle against the capitalist system and opposition to the political parties that uphold its rule. The fight for the rights of the oppressed contributes to the struggle of the working class for its own liberation from capitalist exploitation through socialist revolution. ■

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— Starbucks — Arrested for Sitting While Black

The online video of two black men in handcuffs being hauled out by police from a Starbucks in Philadelphia's ritzy Rittenhouse Square neighborhood on April 12 has sparked widespread outrage. The video, taken by a white customer, illustrates what happens all the time to black people: shopping while black, sitting while black, driving while black—just being black puts you at risk in capitalist America. The Jim Crow laws mandating segregation have been overturned, but the normal workings of the capitalist system still keep the mass of black people forcibly suppressed and segregated.

The two men, Rashon Nelson and Donte Robinson, sat at a table in Starbucks to meet a business associate. When Nelson asked the manager to use the restroom, he was told that restrooms are for paying

customers only. Within two minutes of their arrival, a manager called the cops. Charged with trespassing, Nelson and Robinson were thrown into a squad car, not read their rights and detained for nine hours before they were released. Afterward, Nelson said that he “wondered if he would make it home alive,” conscious of the fact that any encounter with the cops can turn deadly.

What happened at Starbucks is an atrocity but not an aberration. Black people are denied access to bathrooms while whites are given the entry code. Black people are told to get a move on after shelling out money for overpriced coffee while whites are allowed to linger at tables as long as they like. An appalled white customer present at the Philadelphia Starbucks said she had been there for hours; another stated that he had used the bathroom

without purchasing anything. But in racist America, what is innocently “waiting” for whites is criminally “loitering” or “trespassing” for blacks. The charges of trespassing leveled against Nelson and Robinson echo the “Black Codes” and vagrancy laws implemented to oppress freed black people after the Civil War had smashed chattel slavery.

Philadelphia's Democratic mayor Jim Kenney declared his town “a diverse city that is welcoming to all.” Really? Two-thirds of the stop-and-frisks by his cops in the posh Rittenhouse Square neighborhood are hits on black people, despite the fact that they constitute only 3 percent of the population. The “city of brotherly love” has always been a racist nightmare. A white mayor, Frank Rizzo, waged bloody war on the Black Panther Party. The 1982 frame-up conviction of Mumia Abu-Jamal,

America's foremost black political prisoner, was presided over by District Attorney Ed Rendell, who would later become mayor (and then Pennsylvania governor and a leading national figure in the Democratic Party). In 1985, black mayor Wilson Goode ordered that a bomb be dropped on the Philadelphia MOVE commune, killing eleven people, including five children, and burning a black neighborhood to the ground.

Just ten days after the assault on Nelson and Robinson at the Philadelphia Starbucks, another video went viral of cops viciously brutalizing Chikesia Clemons, a black woman, in an Alabama Waffle House. She had the audacity to object to paying extra for plastic utensils to eat her meal and asked to speak with the manager. The cops threw her to the ground in

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Griffin/Philadelphia Inquirer

April 16: Protest in front of Philadelphia Starbucks where two black men were arrested.

Black Woman Jailed...for Voting

— Texas —

The right to vote is said to be sacred in the “land of the free,” a cure-all for every injustice visited upon working people and the downtrodden. Every time a rotten contract is crammed down the throats of a unionized workforce by the bosses; every time a black youth is shot dead in the streets by racist police; every time an immigrant child is torn from his mother's arms by Homeland Security, working people are peddled the lie that they can change things at the ballot box. But the entire history of this country proves that, for the bourgeoisie, the franchise was never meant for everyone, and that goes double for black people. Nowhere is this more evident than in the “Great State of Texas.” To this day, the political fabric of Texas is shaped by the 19th-century conspiracy whose purpose was to expand black chattel slavery into the Southwest by robbing Mexico of millions of acres of its territory.

On March 28, a vindictive Texas state judge sentenced 43-year-old Crystal Mason, a black woman, to five years behind bars for casting a provisional ballot in the 2016 presidential elections. That November, after her mother insisted that she drive in the rain to the polls, Mason voted in southern Tarrant County near Fort Worth. Mason had already been on federal supervised release for a year following the completion of a five-year prison term for

a minor tax fraud conviction. According to Texas law, convicted felons are barred from voting until they have completed their sentences, including probation or parole. But Mason had never been told by anyone that she could not vote. She is out on bail and has filed a motion for a new trial. ***Drop all charges against Crystal Mason!***

Mason's provisional ballot was rejected and her vote never counted in the first place. In her appeal, her lawyer asserts that the state election statute is ambiguous with regard to federal supervised release, which differs substantially from parole. Mason says she may never vote again. Indeed, that is the point and the intended effect of her outrageous sentence, meant as a message to all black people and everyone else the rulers want to exclude from the “political process.”

In February 2017, another Texas woman, 37-year-old Rosa Maria Ortega, was sentenced to eight years in prison for voting in the 2012 and 2014 elections. Ortega is a permanent U.S. resident of Mexican descent who grew up in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. A working-class mother of four teenagers, all U.S. citizens, Ortega did not realize that green card holders are not allowed to vote. “I thought I was doing something right for my country,” Ortega told the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (13 February 2017). Having voted Republican, she is now the poster child for Trumpian claims of rampant ballot fraud. She is currently out on bond pending an appeal of her sentence. After Ortega's conviction,



Crystal Mason

Crystal Mason, U.S. citizen, sentenced to five years for exercising her democratic right to vote.

tion, the vicious Texas attorney general Ken Paxton gloated: “This case shows how serious Texas is about keeping its elections secure, and the outcome sends a message that violators of the state's election law will be prosecuted to the fullest.”

It is a bitter irony that Ortega faces prison and deportation from Texas, a state formed on land that the U.S. stole from Mexico. Between 1848 and 1928, at least 232 people of Mexican descent were lynched in Texas. Under a system known

as “Juan Crow,” Mexican Americans were banned from restaurants and deprived of basic democratic rights. In addition to targeting black voters, the attacks on voting rights in Texas today are also aimed at disenfranchising Mexican Americans and other Latinos, who make up 40 percent of the state's population.

Everyone who lives in this country should have full and equal democratic rights. We oppose any restrictions on the rights of prisoners and released felons to vote. As part of our fight for ***full citizenship rights for all immigrants***, we call for full voting rights for all immigrants, whether legal or “illegal.” These non-citizens who live under the class dictatorship of America's rulers and their laws make up 7 percent of the total population—i.e., millions of people are denied full political rights.

The U.S. was built on the notion that “the people who own the country ought to govern it,” as the first Chief Justice, John Jay, put it. Originally, the franchise was restricted to property-owning white men. The bloody system of chattel slavery was enshrined in the Constitution. The deal that specified that slaves would be counted as three-fifths of a person when it came to determining representation gave the Southern slaveowners control of Washington. It took decades of struggle to expand the vote to poor white men, the Civil War to smash slavery and extend the franchise to black men, and it wasn't until 1920 that women got the vote.

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