

DSA and Ocasio-Cortez: No Kind of Socialists

Democrats, Republicans: Class Enemies of Workers and Oppressed

With her surprise victory over incumbent Joseph Crowley in the June Democratic Congressional primary, the Bronx's 28-year-old Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), became an overnight media sensation. She has since been a regular feature of late-night talk shows and the liberal press, which view her and her cothinkers as a shot in the arm of the so-called resistance to Trump. The aim of Ocasio-Cortez and other DSA-backed candidates is to refurbish the Democrats' image so as to better rope disaffected youth and workers back into the party, which, no less than the Republicans, represents the capitalist system of exploitation, racial oppression and imperialist war.

Ocasio-Cortez's upset victory is the centerpiece thus far of the various "progressive" challenges to the Democratic Party leadership following Trump's election. Pennsylvania DSA members Summer Lee and Sara Innamorato won their primaries for seats in the state assembly, while Julia Salazar is challenging a 16-year incumbent for the New York State Senate. Also in New York, Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo is fending off a challenge from *Sex and the City* star and recently self-identified "democratic socialist" Cynthia Nixon.

The bulk of the Democratic leadership has responded to these challengers with barely concealed contempt, with House leader Nancy Pelosi admonishing people to not get "carried away" by Ocasio-Cortez's victory: "They made a choice in one district." For their part, Trump's friends on Fox News have labeled Ocasio-Cortez "a communist" and "downright scary." In a Fox News interview, Florida Republican gubernatorial candidate Ron DeSantis launched into a racist diatribe against Andrew Gillum, the black Democratic candidate supported by Ocasio-Cortez and Bernie Sanders, warning voters not to "monkey this up" by electing Gillum.

Ocasio-Cortez, Nixon, et al. represent disgruntled elements in the Democratic Party who believe that victories in the midterm and the 2020 presidential elections require more than invented "Russiagate" scandals and the generic sales pitch of being less openly racist, anti-union and reactionary than Trump. The label "democratic socialist" has increasingly come to define liberal Democrats who still rally behind the party, but don't fancy its establishment leadership.

The DSA-allied candidates have as much to do with socialism as biology courses at Jerry Falwell's Liberty Uni-



Getty



Reuters

Above: Skid Row homeless (2013). Left: Black man arrested by LAPD (2012). Under Obama, workers, black people and the poor faced cop terror and capitalist misery. "Democratic socialists" seek to refurbish Democrats' image as "friend" of workers and oppressed.

versity have to do with evolution. It is an indication of the extreme rightward shift in the Democratic Party and society more broadly that a group like the DSA, which has always been committed to the Democratic Party and to upholding imperialism, can be seen as socialist. A London *Economist* (1 September) article, "Shivering the Chains," aptly remarked: "Perhaps the surest sign that American socialists are not revolutionaries is their willingness to work within the two-party system." As with Bernie Sanders's 2016 presidential campaign, the recent ascendance of these "democratic socialists" only serves to reinforce illusions in Democratic lesser-evilmism and is an *obstacle* to the necessary struggle to forge a revolutionary workers party.

Making clear her allegiance to U.S. imperialism, Ocasio-Cortez eulogized

the recently deceased Republican Senator John McCain, tweeting that his legacy represented "an unparalleled example of human decency and American service." While causing uproar among her supporters, her gushing over a war criminal whose "service" included the slaughter of numerous Vietnamese, who declared, "I hate the gooks," and who was fond of singing "bomb Iran" is not an aberration but consistent with her bourgeois program. On her campaign website, Ocasio-Cortez complains that U.S. intervention in the Near East and North Africa "damages America's legitimacy as a force for good." She calls to "repair our image"—i.e., to make U.S. imperialism more effective. Here, she is merely echoing her mentor, Sanders, who also called McCain an "American hero" and has a long history of

supporting U.S. imperialism's wars of conquest (see "Bernie Sanders: Imperialist Running Dog," WV No. 1083, 12 February 2016).

Latching on to the demands of youth and workers who crave some relief from capitalist misery and austerity, Ocasio-Cortez calls for Medicare for all, a federal jobs guarantee, tuition-free public colleges and trade school education and abolition of private prisons. Her demand to "abolish ICE" amounts to resurrecting a version of its predecessor, the INS. She was clear that "abolish ICE" does not mean "abolish deportation."

The reforms proposed by Ocasio-Cortez and her cothinkers are little more than hot air. We support reforms that benefit the working class and oppressed. But they are not won by electing "progressive" bourgeois politicians nor are they gained by appealing to some (imaginary) benevolent ruling class. Any significant gains—from unionization to black and women's rights—have been wrested through hard-fought class and social struggle against the exploiters, their political parties and their state. What remains of these gains today continues to be ravaged in the bosses' one-sided class war enabled by the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy, including DSA labor misleaders, which has long abandoned the class-struggle means through which the unions were built and channels labor discontent into voting for Democrats. Facing little struggle, the bourgeoisie sees no reason to enact a series of beneficial reforms.

Socialism: What It Is and How to Fight for It

Recent victories by DSA-supported politicians have spawned numerous articles about what socialism is, mostly to express relief that what Ocasio-Cortez and her cohorts represent has nothing to do with the Bolshevik-led Russian Revolution of 1917. The Bolsheviks were genuine socialists who fought for and achieved a revolutionary transformation of society. As Karl Marx put it in his 1850 "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League," the purpose of socialists "cannot simply be to modify private property, but to abolish it, not to hush up class antagonisms but to abolish classes, not to improve the existing society but to found a new one."

Marxism is based on the understanding that society is fundamentally divided between classes: the working class, whose labor produces the wealth of society, and the tiny class of capitalist exploiters who own the means of production and finance.

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We Need a Revolutionary Workers Party!

In Memory of 平田素 (Hirata Motomu)

Dear comrades,

We recently learned that Hirata Motomu, a founding member of the Spartacist Group Japan, died in September 2016. Though we lost touch with him a few years after he resigned from the SGJ in 2005, we mourn his death and extend condolences to his wife, Toshie, and to his son, Ayumu.

Hirata became radicalized in the early 1970s as a college student, during a time of massive worker and student protest against the Japan-U.S. security treaty and U.S. imperialism's war against Vietnam. He joined the pseudo-Trotskyist Fourth International Japan (FIJ). Japanese Trotskyism was crippled from birth, rejecting Trotsky's characterization of the Soviet bureaucracy as a contradictory caste and refusing to militarily defend the USSR against imperialism and internal counter-revolution. Hirata was among those who formed a faction within the FIJ centrally based on defending Trotsky's position on the Russian question.

After splitting from the FIJ, the faction underwent further fights and splits. The comrades who would go on to be the founding members of the SGJ formed the study group Rekken (Historical Science Research Group), which began a serious, years-long study of Marxism. In the mid 1980s they discovered a pamphlet containing the Declaration of Principles of the Spartacist League/U.S. in a leftist bookstore in Tokyo and contacted the



international Spartacist tendency (soon to be the International Communist League). Written discussions and an exchange of visits culminated in an Interim Preliminary Agreement for Common Work in Japan (see *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 41-42, Winter 1987-88). In the summer of 1988, Rekken fused with the iSt to form the SGJ.

As Hirata stated at the fusion conference: "For us the question of the defense of the Soviet Union was the biggest stum-

bling block to our coming together with the iSt. I also come out of the FIJ, and so I at least had read the basic documents of Trotskyism, Trotsky's works, the works of the first conferences of the Comintern. And, so, I had thought that I had a familiarity with the basic tenets of Trotskyism....

"It was only after much frustration and hard work that we eventually came over to the present position of defense of the Russian workers state."

Hirata had a long political history. His parents were around the then-Stalinist Japanese Communist Party (JCP) during World War II; one of his brothers joined the JCP; and the other became a member of the left wing of the social-democratic Socialist Party. Unconventionally, his sister married into a family of Burakumin (Japan's caste of "untouchables"). Being a child of the American Occupation, Hirata became a blues and jazz aficionado, and, with his bottle of whiskey and pack of Hi Lite cigarettes, he frequented clubs where legendary jazz greats such as Yamashita Yosuke or Watanabe Sadao would make surprise appearances. His interest in blues had led him to study the American black question, and he became a strong defender of the oppressed. In the SGJ, he always motivated publishing propaganda in defense of the Ainu (indigenous people), the Korean minority and the Burakumin. The SGJ's first public event was a presentation to the Buraku Liberation League's Osaka branch, a meeting that Hirata arranged.

Hirata was an artist. For many years, he made his living as a book and publication designer, and he was able to draw building blueprints by hand. He designed the "Hammer and 4" masthead for the SGJ newspaper and banners. Sadly, he never made the leap to computer design and

was condemned to working in low-paying, non-union jobs.

Comrade Hirata had an in-depth understanding of Japanese history. He made a significant contribution to the article in *Spartacist*, the ICL's quadrilingual theoretical journal, "The Meiji Restoration: A Bourgeois Non-Democratic Revolution" (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 58, Spring 2004). Leading comrades of our tendency, such as Jim Robertson and Joseph Seymour, had long been interested in the Meiji Restoration of 1867-68. But it required extensive research in both Japanese- and English-language sources as well as considerable discussion to produce the article, which also dealt with the origins of Japanese communism and the debate over "two-stage revolution," as well as World War II and the American Occupation. As part of preparing the article, Hirata was one of the comrades who gave an educational presentation for the SGJ. The article was published in *Spartacist Japan* Pamphlet No. 9.

Hirata was also crucial to circulating the Japanese translation of the 1997 *Spartacist* article, "The Origins of Chinese Trotskyism," looking for every opportunity to intersect the Chinese population in Japan and introduce them to a Trotskyist understanding of revolutionary struggle in China. One of the finest articles he wrote was an obituary of Ozaki Hotsuki, brother of heroic Soviet spy Ozaki Hotsumi, who was executed along with Richard Sorge by the WWII Japanese government. We had met Hotsuki, a writer, during our annual trips to Tama Cemetery to honor these heroes.

Hirata was extremely proud to be a member of a democratic-centralist international Trotskyist organization. On sales, he would introduce our newspaper as the publication of the SGJ but would always add: *We* are the Japanese section of the International Communist League. As a party member, he held many posts—from minutes secretary and composition chief to Tokyo associate of the Spartacist League's Prometheus Research Library. He was a wonderful educator.

Hirata was curious and observant, easygoing and cheerful. He said what he thought and let comrades fight with him to work through the political issues. In heavily male-chauvinist Japan, where a man typically expects his wife to look after him and the children, Hirata was made of a different fabric. In his own life, when his wife became chronically ill, he devoted himself to caring for her and their young son. We will miss him.

Comradely,
The Spartacist Group Japan



TROTSKY

Reforge the Fourth International!

Eighty years ago, on 3 September 1938, the Fourth International was established under the leadership of Leon Trotsky. In opposition to the reformism of the social-democratic Second International and the Stalinized Communist International (Comintern), its founding document, excerpted below, provided the framework for building a new world party of socialist revolution. It is the task of the International Communist League to reforge the Fourth International,

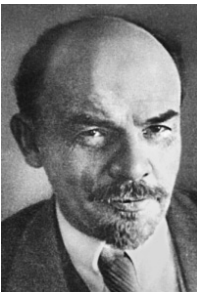
which was destroyed by a revisionist current under Michel Pablo in the early 1950s that renounced the need to build Trotskyist parties.

It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.

Classical Social Democracy, functioning in an epoch of progressive capitalism, divided its program into two parts independent of each other: the *minimum program*, which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society, and the *maximum program*, which promised substitution of socialism for capitalism in the indefinite future. Between the minimum and the maximum program no bridge existed. And indeed Social Democracy has no need of such a bridge, since the word *socialism* is used only for holiday speechifying. The Comintern has set out to follow the path of Social Democracy in an epoch of decaying capitalism: when, in general, there can be no discussion of systematic social reforms and the raising of the masses' living standards; when every serious demand of the proletariat and even every serious demand of the petty bourgeoisie inevitably reaches beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and of the bourgeois state.

The strategical task of the Fourth International lies not in reforming capitalism but in its overthrow. Its political aim is the conquest of power by the proletariat for the purpose of expropriating the bourgeoisie.

—Leon Trotsky, "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International," commonly known as the Transitional Program (1938)



LENIN

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Spike Lee Says Racist Cops Can “Do the Right Thing”

Spike Lee’s movie *BlackKkKlansman* opens with powerful images of racist terror and violence in the United States, from the Confederate slavocracy to Klan lynchings, as well as white-supremacist nostalgia depicted in *Gone with the Wind*. Timed for release on the anniversary of the 2017 fascist rampage in Charlottesville, the film ends with chilling footage of the murder of Heather Heyer and the beating of black hip-hop artist DeAndre Harris by a gang of club-wielding fascist thugs. Yet the truth of these searing scenes is used to promote the grotesque lie that the racist police are allies in the fight against fascist terror.

Loosely based on the story of Ron Stallworth, a black cop who initiated the infiltration of the Klan in Colorado Springs in the 1970s, *BlackKkKlansman* presents the cops as heroes. Needless to say, this requires not a little fabrication. To invent the supposed risks taken by the police, the white cop who in real life stood in for Stallworth at KKK meetings is portrayed as a Jewish cop who narrowly escapes being exposed (circumcision and all) by a Klansman. A similarly concocted scene toward the end of the movie shows Stallworth and his fictitious black radical girlfriend teaming up with the chief of police and other “good” cops to set up and bust a white racist “bad” cop. That never happened and never would. But it serves to excuse cop terror as simply that of a few hardcore racists. In fact, the cops, as a core component of the capitalist state, are the main perpetrators of daily racist violence in this country. The victims of cop terror—Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland and countless others—are blatantly disappeared in Lee’s film.

Hip-hop artist Boots Riley, whose recent semi-surrealist movie *Sorry to Bother You* is an explicit commentary on race and class oppression in capitalist America, issued a scathing rebuke of *BlackKkKlansman*. Immediately summing up his critique of Lee’s film in a #quickfilmreview tweet which read, “Fuck the police,” Riley later wrote a more extensive exposé, commenting: “It’s a made up story in which the false parts of it try to make a cop the protagonist in the fight against racist oppression. It’s being put while Black Lives Matter is a discussion, and this is not coincidental.” Pointing to the fact that Spike Lee was paid \$200,000 by the New York Police Department to collaborate in an ad campaign to supposedly “improve” police relations with minorities, Riley remarked that *BlackKkKlansman* “feels like an extension of that ad campaign.”

Of course there is an element of revenge fantasy in the idea that Stallworth, a black man, was in real life able to dupe the Klan and that one of the chumps was none other than former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke. But that is only one piece of the story. Lee’s cop hero served as a police operative who spied on leftist organizations. In his memoir, Stallworth recounts his investigation of the ostensibly communist Progressive Labor Party (PLP), which he describes as “extremely radical, organized, and dedicated to their conviction of ultimately ‘smashing’ the Ku Klux Klan.” Stallworth would alternate between going undercover in PLP meetings to gather information about anti-Klan actions and acting as a security detail for David Duke himself. He informed both the Klan and the police about PLP counterdemonstrations against Duke, protecting the Klan from those who intended to stop its race-terror provocations.

The only hint of Stallworth’s infiltration of left-radical organizations in *BlackKkKlansman* is when he spies on a Colorado Springs meeting featuring Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael). Lee uses this scene to portray Stallworth as both a cop doing his job and a black man drawn into Ture’s “black power” message. The scene also serves to develop a fictional romantic relationship between Stallworth and a radical young Black Student Union leader. Unbelievably, she sticks with Stallworth even after learning that he is a cop, something no self-respecting leftist would do. Toward the end of the movie, Stallworth and his girlfriend are propelled



Focus Features

Left: Black cop unites with black radical in *BlackKkKlansman*. Lee’s film pushes deadly illusion that police can be allies in the fight against racist terror. Right: Chicago cops smile after gunning down Black Panther leader Fred Hampton in his bed, 4 December 1969.



AP

together down a hallway, guns drawn in unison pointed at a white-supremacist cross-burning. The purpose is to peddle the lie that black cops and black radicals have a common interest.

It is not a secret that police agents have a sordid history of derailing, disrupting and “neutralizing” left and black radical organizations. Stallworth’s real-life surveillance of PLP was consistent with the FBI’s Counter-Intelligence Program, COINTELPRO, which in its official form ended in the early 1970s. Launched in 1956 against the Communist Party, COINTELPRO later unleashed a savage campaign of racist sabotage and murder against others deemed subversive. Its deadliest fire was aimed at the Black Panther Party, which defiantly organized armed self-defense against the racist cops. Panther leader Fred Hampton and 37 others were killed, and hundreds imprisoned. Today the FBI continues to target left groups and activists around Black Lives Matter, branding them “Black Identity Extremists.”

BlackKkKlansman buries the deadly history of collusion between the cops, government and the Klan. State agents who infiltrated the Klan were often active participants in racist terror and murder. One infamous FBI informant, Gary Rowe, was involved in the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, which killed four young black girls. Two years later, Rowe was in the car and may have been the actual triggerman who shot civil rights worker Viola Liuzzo on the highway outside Selma, Alabama.

Federal as well as state and local police agencies took part in the 1979 KKK/Nazi murder of five union organizers and anti-racist activists associated with the Communist Workers Party in Greensboro, North Carolina. A Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agent helped train the fascist killers and a police/FBI informer rode shotgun in the lead car while a local police car followed behind. The ensuing massacre was carried out in broad daylight and in full view of TV cameras. Nonetheless, the fascists were acquitted by all-white juries. In 2014, one of the Greensboro killers, Frazier Glenn Miller, gunned down three people outside Jewish community facilities in Kansas.

At least Spike Lee’s earlier movie *Do the Right Thing* showed the NYPD in true form, e.g., getting away with murder. Now he uses his filmmaking talents to push the myth that the racist police can “do the right thing.” Responding to Riley’s criticisms of *BlackKkKlansman*, Lee retorted: “Look at my films: they’ve been very critical of the police, but on the other hand I’m never going to say all police are cor-

rupt, that all police hate people of color.... I mean, we need police.”

And, it’s not just the police that Lee thinks “we need.” Lee opined in a CNN interview that he hoped the movie would inspire people “to register to vote” (Democrat), arguing that Trump’s presidency is evidence of “what happens when you don’t vote.” At various points, *BlackKkKlansman* draws a connection between the fascist Duke and Duke’s hero president. That Trump is a raving racist who has coddled and encouraged the fascists is hardly news. But the Democrats no less than the Republicans represent the interests of racist American capitalism. The only difference is that the Democrats serve it up with a hefty dose of hypocrisy aimed at obscuring the racial oppression and brutal exploitation of the working class that are inherent to this system.

While *BlackKkKlansman* is movingly dedicated to Charlottesville victim Heather Heyer, one need only fast-forward one year to last month’s anti-fascist protests to puncture the lie that the cops are anything but the enemies of black people, the working class and oppressed. An open letter to Spike Lee from “The Young People of the Charlottesville Attack” (21 August) contrasts Lee’s rosy depiction of the cops with the reality

of Charlottesville this year and last year, where police escorted and protected the fascist killers while repressing anti-racist activists. The letter writers noted: “We were met by a force who sought to control, suppress and attack us. And it wasn’t just the ones who showed up with hoods and torches. Most of them wore badges.”

As we said in the aftermath of Charlottesville last year (WV No. 1116, 25 August 2017):

“The outrage against the fascists needs an organized expression: a disciplined, militant and military mobilization of the social power of the multiracial working class. It is this power that is feared and hated by the bosses, their kept labor lieutenants in the trade-union bureaucracy and capitalist politicians of all colors and genders. The working class has the power and the objective interest not only to stop the fascists but also to overturn the whole capitalist system that spawns these vermin.”

Rather than the shell game of voting for the capitalist Democratic Party, what is needed is to build a revolutionary party that will wield workers’ social power in the fight for black freedom and the emancipation of all the oppressed. It will take nothing less than a socialist revolution to break the chains of racist capitalist rule and bury the fascist gangs for good. ■



Spartacist League Forums

DSA and Ocasio-Cortez: No Kind of Socialists

Democrats, Republicans: Class Enemies of Workers and Oppressed

We Need a Revolutionary Workers Party!

BAY AREA

Saturday, October 13, 2 p.m.

2619 Broadway, Oakland
(First Presbyterian Church of Oakland.
Entrance on 27th St.)

For information: (510) 839-0851
slbayarea@fastmail.net

NEW YORK CITY

Saturday, October 6, 3 p.m.

322 West 48th Street, First Floor
Manhattan

(Between 8th and 9th Avenues—
Take A, C or E to 42nd Street)

For information: (212) 267-1025
nysl@tiac.net

CHICAGO

Saturday, October 27, 3 p.m.

Quaker House, 5615 S. Woodlawn Ave.
For information: (312) 563-0441
chicagospartacist@sbcglobal.net

LOS ANGELES

Sunday, October 14, 4 p.m.

Immanuel Presbyterian Church*
3300 Wilshire Blvd.

(At Berendo St. and Wilshire Blvd.,
2 blocks west of Wilshire/Vermont stop on
Red/Purple Line. Entrance on Berendo.)

For information: (213) 380-8239
slsycla@sbcglobal.net

*The views expressed by the participants are not necessarily those of the Immanuel Presbyterian Church.

In Honor of John Brown

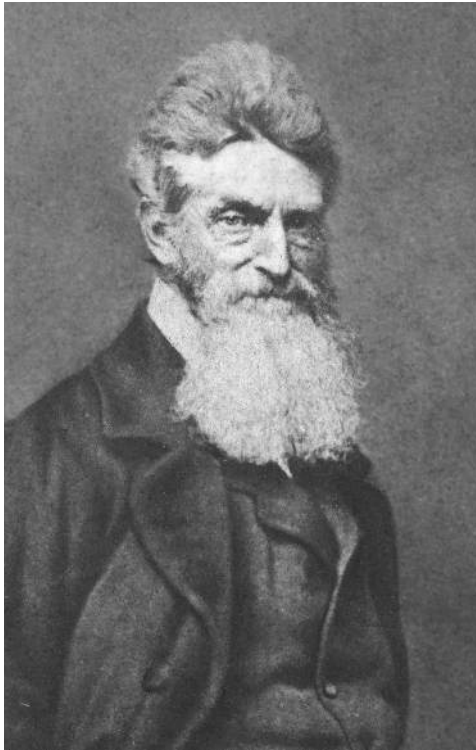
We print below the first part of a presentation, edited for publication, given by Spartacist League Central Committee member Don Alexander at a February 24 Black History Month forum in New York City.

PART ONE

I was just handed a piece of paper with a quote by James P. Cannon, founder of American Trotskyism, that I want to start with. It's from his speech on the way to prison in 1943, when 18 Trotskyist and Minneapolis Teamsters union leaders were jailed for opposing imperialist World War II. Cannon said, "The grandest figure in the whole history of America was John Brown" (printed in *Speeches for Socialism* [1971]). Over the years, a number of comrades have paid tribute to John Brown in North Elba, New York, where he is buried, and have given talks on different aspects of the Civil War and Reconstruction. We raise the slogans "Finish the Civil War!" and "For black liberation through socialist revolution!" to express the historic tasks that fall to the revolutionary party. Acting as the tribune of the people, a revolutionary workers party will fight for the interests of all the oppressed—black people, Latinos, women, Asians, immigrants and others. It will lead the working class to carry out a third American revolution, a proletarian revolution, the only road to the full integration of black people into an egalitarian socialist society.

The existence of black chattel slavery in the United States had a peculiar character. "Chattel" means personal property; it meant to own people like cattle to trade or kill. Comrades and friends will recall that veteran Trotskyist Richard S. Fraser underscored in his writings some 60 years ago how the concept of race was central to the development of American capitalism. He outlined how the material basis of black oppression drew upon a precapitalist system of production. Slavery played an important role in the development of British industrial capitalism and U.S. capitalism. British textile owners received Southern cotton, which was shipped by powerful New York merchants. New York merchants used some of this money to send manufactured goods to the South. Although slavery and capitalism were intertwined, they were different economic systems. There is an excellent presentation by comrade Jacob Zorn called "Slavery and the Origins of American Capitalism" (printed in WV Nos. 942, 943 and 944, 11 and 25 September and 9 October 2009).

I will add that the conflation of slaves with skin color didn't exist in ancient slavery. But with regard to the U.S., the great black abolitionist Frederick Douglass put it well: "We are then a persecuted people



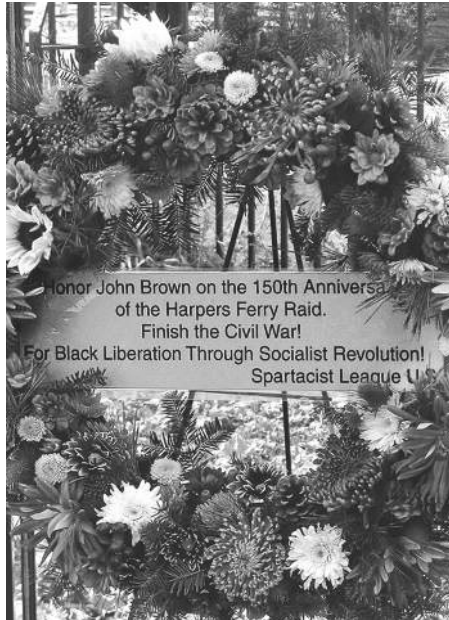
Library of Congress

not because we are *colored*, but simply because this color has for a series of years been coupled in the public mind with the degradation of slavery and servitude." Black people constitute a race-color caste, with their color defining their so-called inferior status. In the majority, black people are forcibly segregated at the bottom of this racist, capitalist system, deemed pariahs and outcasts. Anti-black racism is ruthlessly promoted by the ruling class to keep the working class divided and to conceal the common class interests of working people against their exploiters.

Today, the filthy rich capitalists' huge profits rest upon the backs of working people—black, immigrant and white. The rulers' system of "checks and balances" has been and always will be that they get the checks while they balance their bone-crushing, anti-worker, anti-poor budgets on our backs! The multiracial working class, with a strategic black component, has the social power and the interest to champion the fight not only for black freedom, but of all the oppressed and to break the chains of wage slavery. Whether or not this is understood at the moment, the fight for black freedom is an inseparable part of the struggle for the emancipation of the entire working class from capitalist exploitation. The working class cannot take power without confronting and defeating centuries of black oppression. We say that those who labor must rule!

The Road to Harpers Ferry

In reflecting on John Brown, fellow abolitionist Harriet Tubman once said: We didn't call him John Brown, we called him our "savior" because he died for our



WV Photo

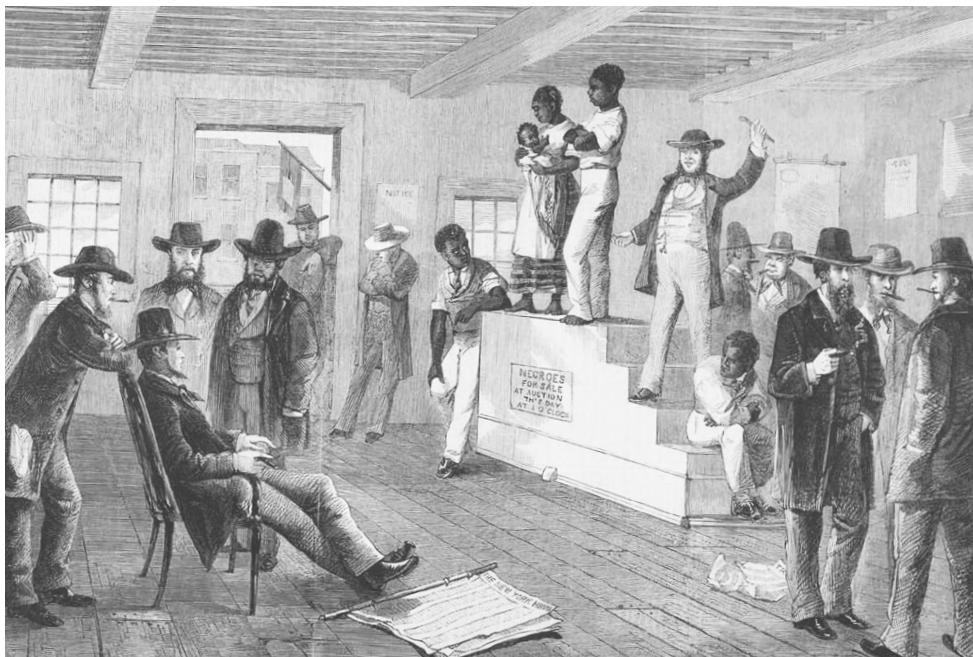
John Brown in 1859. Spartacists laid wreath at his grave in North Elba, New York, on anniversary of Harpers Ferry raid, 2009.

people. In the late 1950s and early '60s, military veteran Robert F. Williams, who organized armed self-defense against the Klan and was driven out of the country on trumped-up kidnapping charges, carried around with him a copy of *A Plea for Captain John Brown*, an 1859 speech in defense of Brown by Henry David Thoreau. Malcolm X also praised John Brown.

The notion that John Brown was crazy, an insane mass murderer and a fanatic, is still peddled in bourgeois academia and cinema. The truth is that John Brown was a revolutionary who saw deeper than any other abolitionist that it would take a revolution, a bloody war to uproot slavery. John Brown did not dread that war. He did not deprecate it. He did not seek to avert it. And that is one reason why the bourgeoisie still looks at him with disdain and hatred.

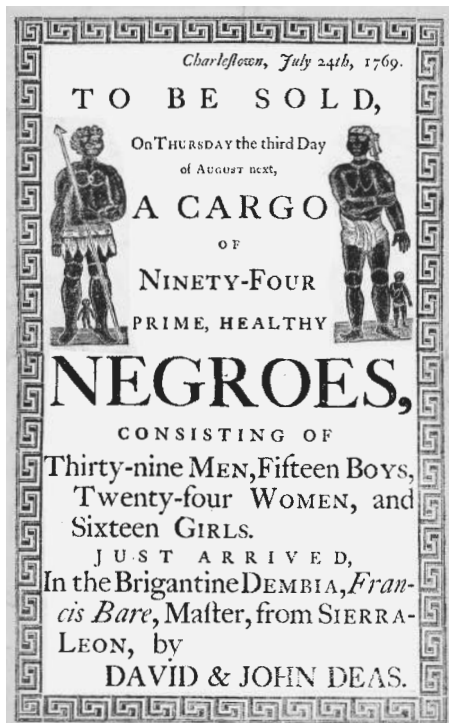
Along with Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, John Brown was part of the revolutionary wing of the abolitionist movement who saw the outlines of what was coming in the struggle to destroy chattel slavery. Abraham Lincoln was a good leader during the Civil War who, under pressure, did eventually make it an official war against slavery. John Brown's final push against slavery had been to lead a raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. For this, he and several of his followers were publicly executed by the State of Virginia in December 1859.

Summing up for the world his last thoughts before his hanging, John Brown hurled a bolt of lightning toward his captors and executioners, proclaiming that this land must be purged with blood—



American Antiquarian Society (right); Illustrated London News

Illustration shows family for sale at slave auction in Virginia, 1861. Right: Poster advertising cargo of slaves to be sold in South Carolina, 1769.



there needed to be revolution. He was almost 60 years old, which is quite amazing. How did John Brown become a revolutionary abolitionist dedicated to the destruction of slavery through *force*? From where did he think he would get the forces to accomplish his goals? What is the significance today of his struggle for black freedom?

John Brown was born in 1800. He was a generation removed from the first American Revolution which, while getting rid of British colonial oppression, left slavery intact and in most states gave suffrage only to propertied white males. He was deeply religious and raised by parents who hated slavery. His father Owen Brown, who had a significant influence on John, was a pacifist and a Calvinist as well as an active abolitionist, a stationmaster and conductor on the Underground Railroad. Fueled by Protestant beliefs, his family was tough and resourceful.

Owen subscribed to abolitionist papers like *The Liberator*, which John grew up reading. John Brown worked with his father on the Underground Railroad, gaining valuable experience for his future revolutionary activities. While herding cattle when he was 12 years old, John witnessed a young slave boy being pummeled mercilessly by a slaveholder with an iron shovel. This incident shook him to the core. John picked up on the fact that in contrast to the slave boy, he himself was treated very well by the slaveowner. This only infuriated John more. He knew that the slave boy was horribly oppressed and had nothing, not a mother and not a father. From that point on, John Brown declared eternal war on slavery.

Brown fervently believed in the "divine authenticity of the Bible." His prayers were combined with a call to deliver the slaves from bondage. But he was not sitting back and waiting for his pie in the sky. As black historian Benjamin Quarles put it in *Allies for Freedom: Blacks and John Brown* (1974): "Prayer to Brown was a prelude to action, not a release from further involvement." In his last days, he cursed hypocritical preachers and their offers of consolation, saying they should be praying for themselves.

John Brown and Abolitionism

I would like to briefly touch on the abolitionist movement. The U.S. abolitionist movement was part of the broader bourgeois radicalism in the 19th century, developing from radical elements of the Protestant Reformation and the 18th-century Enlightenment. It was also a product of the limitations of the first American Revolution, which continued the enslavement of half a million people. By John Brown's time, the number of slaves had grown to four million.

In the beginning of his political awakening, John Brown admired the anti-slavery Quakers and also closely read *The Liberator*, which was put out by the most famous abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison of Boston. Some of the first abolitionists like Garrison had belonged to the American Colonization Society that formed in 1816. The Colonization Society was a racist alliance between abolitionists and slaveholders promoting the settlement of black Americans in Africa. The underlying purpose of the colonization scheme was to drive free blacks out of the country. Free blacks were viewed with suspicion that they might stir up slave rebellions. Black abolitionists, who saw the organization as anathema, bitterly and vigorously resisted colonization because it told black people that they should leave the land of their birth.

Starting in 1817, a series of black abolitionist conventions was organized in various cities in order to defeat this racist program, in what came to be known as the Negro Convention Movement. After attending the

1831 National Negro Convention, William Lloyd Garrison became radicalized and eventually sharply repudiated colonization. This gained him respect, admiration and support among abolitionists—especially black abolitionists.

There was considerable racism in the abolitionist movement. However, radical abolitionists had a wider vision for human emancipation. As we stated in *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 5 (February 1988): “Although slavery was their preeminent concern, these radical bourgeois egalitarians also fought for many other pressing political issues of the time, such as free education, religious tolerance and workers’ rights.” The women’s suffrage movement first began as a fight within abolitionism over the role of women anti-slavery activists. Women’s rights leaders such as Angelina Grimké and her sister Sarah, who came from a slaveholding family, were staunch fighters for black freedom. They were clear on the connection between black and women’s oppression. Angelina said: “I want to be identified with the negro; until he gets his rights, we shall never have ours.” The radical egalitarianism embodied in this principled position also animated John Brown’s hatred of all oppression.

The beginning of the formation of white abolitionist organizations was the establishment of the New England Anti-Slavery Society. Formed in 1832, it was galvanized by Nat Turner’s slave revolt a year prior, which killed some 60 white people. The revolt was followed by the

CAUTION!!
COLORED PEOPLE
OF BOSTON, ONE & ALL,
You are hereby respectfully CAUTIONED and advised, to avoid conversing with the **Watchmen and Police Officers of Boston,**
For since the recent ORDER OF THE MAYOR & ALDERMEN, they are empowered to act as **KIDNAPPERS AND Slave Catchers,**
And they have already been actually employed in KIDNAPPING, CATCHING, AND KEEPING SLAVES. Therefore, if you value your LIBERTY, and the Welfare of the Fugitives among you, shun them in every possible manner, as so many **BOUNDS** on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.
Keep a Sharp Look Out for KIDNAPPERS, and have TOP EYE open.
APRIL 24, 1851.

1851 Boston abolitionist poster warns black people of slave catchers after passage of 1850 Fugitive Slave Act.

execution of Nat Turner and his followers, and the massacre of a considerable number of black people.

William Lloyd Garrison represented the “moral suasion” wing of the abolitionists. Garrison also thought that the North should secede from the South, which objectively meant leaving the slaves helpless and defenseless. Although he sincerely hated slavery and wanted to see it destroyed, he stood for passive resistance. He rejected political action and instead put forward a futile program to appeal to the conscience of slaveowners to liberate their slaves. Garrison’s slogan of “No Union with Slaveholders” placed the struggle against slavery on the level of particular evils of individual slaveholders.

Frederick Douglass, who started out as a Garrisonian, strenuously objected to this slogan, recognizing that behind it was a defeatist strategy. He counterposed an aggressive fight against slavery. He instead raised in its place the slogan, “No Union with Slaveholding.” This was not a word play, but a different program and outlook. Douglass understood that the slaveholding system had to be destroyed, mainly through political means.

John Brown followed the debates and struggles of the abolitionists closely, especially those of the militant black abolitionists such as the young minister Henry Highland Garnet and David Walker, who advocated that the slaves rise up against their hated oppressors. According to social historian Robert Allen in his book *Reluctant Reformers* (1975), David Walker “was a free black who operated a small business in Boston, and in his spare time acted as a local agent for *Freedom’s*

Journal, a black anti-slavery newspaper.” Walker argued that a “God of justice and armies” would destroy the whole system. His pamphlet, the *Appeal*, called for the immediate abolition of slavery.

But Walker was contradictory. He combined a militant stance of resistance to slaveholders with a call for the masters to repent and to voluntarily relinquish the slave system. He had explicit instructions on what the slaves must do when they rose up for their freedom: “Make sure work—do not trifle, for they will not trifle with you—they want us for their slaves, and think nothing of murdering us in order to subject us to that wretched condition—therefore, if there is an attempt made by us, kill or be killed.” The Southern planters wanted him captured dead or alive and enacted state bans on anti-slavery literature. Reportedly, both Walker’s *Appeal* and Henry Highland Garnet’s address to the 1843 National Negro Convention appeared together in a pamphlet that John Brown paid to produce. Brown would incorporate the spirit of Walker’s *Appeal* in his attempt to win black people to his revolutionary plans.

Transforming into a Revolutionary

As I mentioned earlier, as a young man, John Brown was an Underground Railroad operator. The Underground Railroad was bringing to the fore the most conscious elements of anti-slavery black radicalism. The great significance of the Underground Railroad, an interracial network of activists who were willing to risk their lives, was not the number of slaves it freed—which was perhaps 1,000 slaves per year out of a population of four million slaves. Its importance in the long run was that it crystallized a black abolitionist vanguard in the North. As the historian W.E.B. DuBois wrote, it “more and more secured the cooperation of men like John Brown, and of others less radical but just as sympathetic.”

In pursuing his growing commitment to black freedom, at age 34, John Brown wrote a letter to his brother about his aspiration to establish a school for black people. He understood the revolutionary implications of this: “If the young blacks of our country could once become enlightened, it would most assuredly operate on slavery like firing powder confined in rock, and all the slaveholders know it well.”

In the 1830s and ’40s, John Brown moved around a lot to earn a living and support his family. He went to Springfield, Massachusetts, and became more familiar with the lives and struggles of black people. Brown moved to North Elba in upstate New York, where well-known and wealthy radical abolitionist Gerrit Smith had donated land to be used by black people for farming. Brown forged ties with Smith as well as with radical black New York abolitionists like James McCune Smith and the Gloucester family of Brooklyn. He had many unsuccessful business pursuits, as a tanner, a land surveyor, a wool merchant. His travels while doing business enabled him to gain indispensable knowledge of the different strands of abolitionism in the Midwest



Madison County Historical Society
Frederick Douglass, seated next to table, at abolitionist meeting in New York State, 1850.

and Northeast. From what he observed, he wasn’t impressed with the talkathons of abolitionist meetings. He never joined them because he disdained mere talk.

Brown was never able to set up a school, but he pressed on with teaching black people history and how to farm and carry out self-defense against slave catchers. His belief in social equality was clear. He shocked one white visitor to his home, who observed that black people were eating at the same table with the Brown family. The Browns showed respect to the black people there by addressing them as Mister and Missus.

John Brown kept his ear close to the ground, the better to follow and assimilate the thoughts of free and fugitive black people. Under the guise of a black writer, he wrote to a black abolitionist paper, the *Ram’s Horn*, to offer his frank opinions on how best to push forward black self-improvement. He didn’t hide his observations or criticisms of what he considered to be negative behaviors of some black people, ranging from flashy dressing to smoking—surely in accordance with his strict Calvinist morality. At the same time, he struggled to win them to the understanding that they should not meekly bow down to white racist aggression, but should resist it.

There was one major development that accelerated his transformation into a professional revolutionary. It was the 1837 violent killing of Elijah Lovejoy, the editor of an anti-slavery newspaper in Alton, Illinois. Lovejoy was attacked by a pro-slavery mob, which also hurled his printing press into the river. His murder shocked the abolitionist movement. Lovejoy was the first abolitionist martyr—and it could happen to any of them.

John Brown’s developing revolutionary social consciousness cost him some racist “anti-slavery” friends. As the biographer Tony Horwitz noted: “The Browns believed in full equality for blacks and were determined to fight for it” (*Midnight Rising: John Brown and the Raid that Sparked the Civil War* [2011]). The family’s resistance to segregation came to a head when they fought for integration in a Congregational church they attended. During a revival meeting, black

people in attendance were seated in the rear of the church. At the next church service, Brown and his family gave up their seats and led the black worshippers to sit in theirs, located in the family pew. The deacons of the church were outraged and later wrote to them that they should find somewhere else to worship. This vile racism led John to distance himself from the institution of the church.

Preparing for Battle

Consciously wanting to link up with militant black abolitionists, John Brown put Frederick Douglass high on his list. Douglass and Brown had their first meeting in 1847 in Springfield, Massachusetts. Brown had avidly read Douglass’s abolitionist paper, *The North Star* (later *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*), and went on to share his developing plans. According to Horwitz:

“Brown pointed to a map of the Allegheny Mountains, which run diagonally from Pennsylvania into Maryland and Virginia and deep into the South. Filled with natural forts and caves, these mountains, Brown said, had been placed by God ‘for the emancipation of the negro race’.”

This meeting was a turning point in Douglass’s evolution from a protégé of Garrison into a revolutionary abolitionist. Brown fought to convince him of the futility of non-resistance to the slaveholders. He told him that the only thing the slaveowners appreciated was sticks upside their heads—something like that. Five years later, Douglass would abandon his naive faith in pacifist non-resistance. He began to openly state that slavery could be destroyed only through bloodshed, which shocked his former comrades.

Going forward, several challenges loomed for both revolutionary abolitionists, Douglass and Brown: the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the further expansion of slavery to the Western territories like Kansas, and the Dred Scott decision of 1857. The last involved a slave named Dred Scott who sued for his freedom on the basis that he had resided in a free state for many years. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney ruled against Scott and went on to assert that black people, free or slave, were not U.S. citizens. In the words of Taney, which are echoed by today’s modern-day slaveholders—the ruling class in this country—black people “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.”

Let me say a few things about the continued expansion of slavery. The South’s cotton production was booming in the 1840s and ’50s. It supplied most of the world’s demand, outstripping other American exports combined. Northerners wanted slavery to stay put where it was.

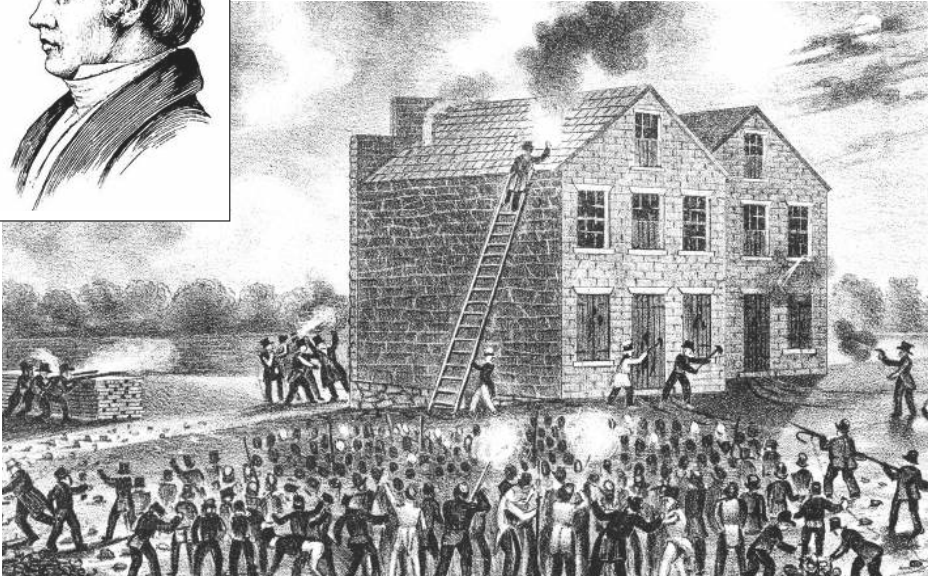
Many white laborers were primarily concerned with having to compete with black people for jobs, not with the inherent brutality against and degradation of slaves. Some Northern states, such as Ohio and Illinois, had long enacted “Black Laws” that set controls on freed blacks and deterred black people from migrating there. Meanwhile, there were bloody land grabs under way, such as during the 1846-48 Mexican-American War, when the United States seized about half of Mexico’s territory. The appetites of slaveowners and prospective ones were

continued on page 7



Abolitionist Elijah Parish Lovejoy, killed by pro-slavery mob that burned warehouse where he published anti-slavery newspaper in Alton, Illinois, 1837.

Appletons’ Cyclopædia of American Biography (inset); Everett Collection



DSA...

(continued from page 1)

The reformists promote the lie that capitalism can be made to operate in the interest of the working and oppressed masses. The capitalists are represented by their parties—in the U.S., that means the Democrats, the Republicans and small-time parties like the Greens. The capitalist state and its machinery of repression, like the police, exist to preserve bourgeois rule.

Democracy under capitalism is a facade used by the bourgeoisie to obscure its class dictatorship. As Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin wrote in 1918: “Bourgeois democracy, although a great historical advance in comparison with medievalism, always remains, and under capitalism is bound to remain, restricted, truncated, false and hypocritical, a paradise for the rich and a snare and deception for the exploited, for the poor.” We do not give political support to *any* capitalist politician or party; to do so would subordinate the interests of working people and the oppressed to the class enemy.

We champion the fight for union jobs at good wages; for quality, fully government-funded health care for all; for free, quality education for all at all levels; for full citizenship rights for all immigrants. Our purpose is to link such demands to building a multiracial revolutionary workers party committed to a socialist future through workers revolution. International



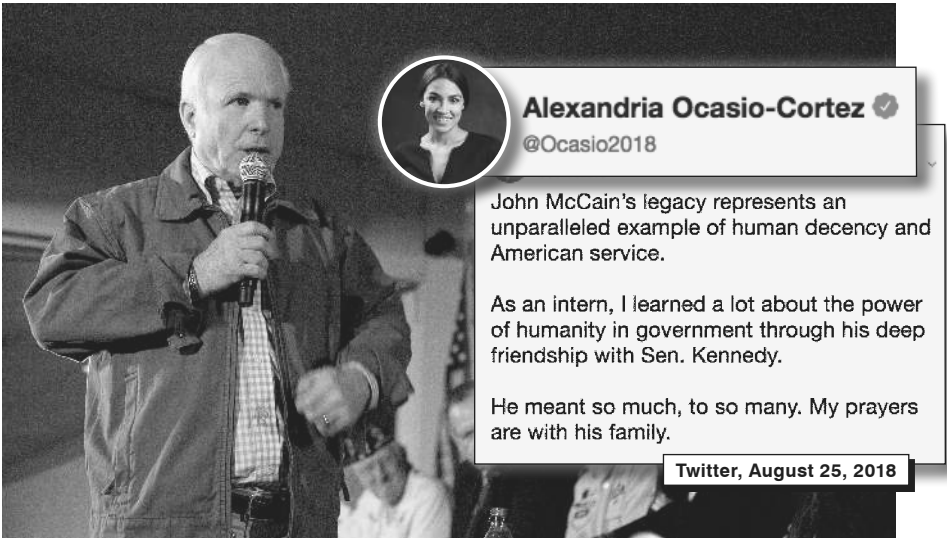
Ronald Haeblerle
Hundreds of Vietnamese civilians, most of them women and children, were massacred by U.S. Army at My Lai in 1968.

working-class rule will lay the basis for rationally planned economies based on production for need, not profit, and for qualitative development of the productive forces, opening the road to the elimination of scarcity and to the creation of an egalitarian society.

Break with the Democrats!

Ocasio-Cortez’s socialist veneer is so thin as to be see-through. As she herself explained, her views are rooted in Democratic Party history, drawing on the policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) and Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ). “It’s time to own that our party was the one of the Great Society, of the New Deal, of the Civil Rights Act. That’s our party. That’s who we are.” This sentiment was echoed by prominent DSA spokesman and *Jacobin* editor Bhaskar Sunkara who published an article in the *Guardian* (1 September) titled, “What’s Your Solution to Fighting Sexism and Racism? Mine Is: Unions.” In it, he yearns for the Democratic Party to go back to “its promises of shared prosperity and equality” under FDR, which he argues laid the basis for the growth of the unions.

FDR was *forced* to grant New Deal concessions because of the tumultuous class battles of the early 1930s, with key strikes led by reds (see Spartacist pamphlet *Then and Now*). His aim was to put a lid on class struggle, stabilize U.S. capitalism in the face of the Great Depression and lull workers into believing that the government would act on their behalf. Legislation like the 1935 Wagner Act was meant to bring mass union organizing



Ocasio-Cortez posted Twitter tribute to late Senator John McCain, war criminal and imperialist hawk from Vietnam to Iraq.

drives under the machinery of government control. Sunkara paints FDR’s New Deal as “anti-racism.” In fact, it was a pact between Northern liberals and the racist Dixiecrats, who imposed lynch-mob terror on the black masses in the South.

Likewise, LBJ’s “Great Society” reforms came as a result of the massive struggles of the civil rights movement. With plebeian uprisings erupting in places like Harlem and Watts, the Johnson administration enacted legislation, such as the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, which have since been whittled away, in order to co-opt civil rights leaders and quell the upheav-

there was sentiment among the workers to do. But William “Wimpy” Winpisinger, a DSA leader and the president of the IAM machinists union, which included airline mechanics, refused to call for solidarity labor action, selling out the strikers.

The unions need a new leadership, one based on class struggle not class collaboration. Such a task requires a political fight against the labor bureaucracy and the likes of the DSA, who act as the agents of the bosses inside the union movement. The struggle to revitalize the unions must be integrally linked to forging a workers party that acts as the tribune of the people. Such a party will fight to mobilize the social power of the multiracial working class in defense of all victims of capitalist oppression as part of the struggle for proletarian revolution, which will lay the basis for the liberation of black people and all the oppressed.

Beware Pro-Democratic Party Hustlers

Since its founding, the DSA has been an extension of the Democrats’ voting machine. It has loyally supported every Democratic Commander-in-Chief, including Bill Clinton, who escalated the racist “war on drugs” and gutted welfare, and Barack Obama, who bailed out Wall Street at the expense of working people, reveled in assassination by drone and deported an unprecedented number of immigrants.

Over the past two years, the DSA has grown substantially, now boasting more than 50,000 members. This has sparked an internal debate on whether to “realign” (take over) the Democratic Party, exit their host or leave things as they are. Looming behind this controversy is the fact that the DSA’s membership growth is due to Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez garnering attention precisely because they were running on Democratic Party tickets.

While the DSA has long been openly riding the Democratic bus, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and Socialist Alternative (SAIt) serve as its spare tires. Having spent months doing donkey work for Sanders in 2016, SAIt now boasts of having “worked with the Ocasio-Cortez campaign” (socialistalternative.org, 2 July). After explicitly calling for a vote to Julia Salazar, SAIt incredulously encourages “Salazar to more clearly warn her supporters that the Democratic Party, as a whole, is a barrier to socialist change” (socialistalternative.org, 21 August). This as they assiduously reinforce that same “barrier.”

No less effusive, but a little more cagey, the ISO has carried out its own debate on its website on whether to openly endorse “progressive” Democrats (“dirty break”) or maintain a fig leaf of “independence” (“clean break”). A piece on socialistworker.org (6 August) by one Eric Blanc enthuses that socialists “can, under certain conditions, effectively use the Democratic Party ballot line,” which he argues “isn’t a question of principle.”

In response, ISO honcho Alan Maass laid down the party line—sort of: “It is a principle to not support Democratic Party candidates—or at least a conclusion that is directly related to the principle of working class independence”

(socialistworker.org, 8 August). Given that the ISO celebrated the Ocasio-Cortez victory as “a testament to the appeal of a left political alternative,” Blanc and others are simply taking such excitement to its logical conclusion. Why buy the pompoms if you can’t join the cheerleading squad? Underlining that the “clean break” vs. “dirty break” debate is *not* based on any principle, the ISO is once again supporting the New York gubernatorial campaign of Howie Hawkins on the capitalist Green Party ticket in a safely Democratic blue state.

For New October Revolutions!

Militant youth and workers who want a society free of oppression and exploitation should look to the example of the 1917 Russian Revolution led by Lenin’s Bolshevik Party, which expropriated the capitalist class and landlords and established a workers state. Anti-communist to their core, the “democratic socialists” are motivated by hostility to the Russian Revolution. As we elaborated in “DSA: Democratic Party ‘Socialists’” (WV No. 1113, 2 June 2017), the newfound popularity of groups like the DSA comes in the context of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and East European deformed workers states, a momentous defeat for working people and the oppressed worldwide. Pummeled by the bourgeoisie’s “death of communism” propaganda for nearly three decades, left-leaning activists largely perceive Marxism to have been a failed experiment.

DSA founder Michael Harrington earned his stripes leading radicalized youth away from Marxism during his time in the Socialist Party, which acted as loyal servants of the U.S. government during the Cold War against the Soviet Union. Later, as the U.S. waged war to crush Vietnam’s insurgent workers and peasants, Harrington echoed the counterrevolutionary drive of the imperialists, stating, “I am anti-communist on principle—because I am pro-freedom.”

The line between social democracy and communism is drawn in blood: In January 1919, amid the struggle to extend the Russian Revolution to Germany, revolutionary leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were assassinated by reactionary military forces at the behest of the Social Democratic government. Today, the DSA, ISO and other progeny of those who drowned Luxemburg’s revolutionary struggle in blood like to cite her as an authority. But she could have been writing about them when she noted in her 1900 work *Reform or Revolution* that those who push “legislative reform *in place of and in contradistinction to* the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the *same* goal, but a *different* goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modification of the old society.” ■

WORKERS VANGUARD
Suplemento en español

¡Por lucha de clases,
ninguna confianza en los demócratas!

**El caso Janus: Ataque al
movimiento obrero**

El siguiente artículo ha sido traducido de Workers Vanguard No. 1113, 4 de agosto de 2018.
El caso de la Suprema Corte Janus vs. AFSCME ha sido discutido dentro los círculos del sector público. Lo que debería ser un asunto de los sindicatos, se ha convertido en un asunto de la AFSCME (Federación Americana de Empleados Estatales, de Condado y Municipal, que incluye a los empleados que habrían la práctica conocida como *agency shop* en el sector público, que obliga a los empleados que no sean a unirse al sindicato a pagarle a éste una "cuota de representación"). El sindicato los representa así como lo hace con sus miembros. Sin embargo, Janus reanuda la decisión del caso de 1977 *Abood vs. Detroit Board of Education*, que permitió al *agency shop* haciendo con ello "dilema al trabajo" lo que para todos los empleados públicos. Dado que el voto decisivo en esta decisión fue 5-4, la corte se inclinó por el *agency shop* a menos del margen de votación. No es casualidad que el fallo sea en contra del sindicato, lo cual sugiere que el fallo sea en contra del sindicato.
El caso Janus es el resultado de una campaña de los miembros sindicales que incluye a los militantes herbertos Koch y el grupo de presión de extrema derecha American Legislative Exchange Council. El gobernador republicano de Illinois y el senador Bruce Rauner presionó la decisión original en nombre de Mark Janus, un trabajador social que se opone a la AFSCME. El caso se basa en el argumento espurio de que la obligación de pagar cuota de representación "viola" la libertad de expresión protegida por la Primera Enmienda. Esto no es más que una fachada del

Manifestación ocrea en Washington, D.C., parte del "National Day of Action" contra el anticomunismo caso Janus de la Suprema Corte, 24 de febrero.

Intento de llevar a la AFSCME y otros sindicatos del sector público a la bancarrota y a su liquidación. La misma línea de destrucción fue control en un caso similar, *Firefighters v. California Teachers Association*, que intentó vencer los costos sindicales obligatorios pero no llegó a ningún lado. Janus es el ataque más reciente en una batalla de décadas que los gobiernos capitalistas han librado contra el movimiento

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6

WORKERS VANGUARD

Protesters Topple UNC Confederate Monument

On the night of August 20, the infamous “Silent Sam” statue of a Confederate soldier at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill was toppled by anti-racist activists as a crowd of hundreds triumphantly cheered. This vile monument was erected under Jim Crow to commemorate UNC students who fought on the side of the slavocracy during the Civil War. In a speech given at its unveiling in 1913, Julian Carr, a UNC trustee and veteran of the Confederacy, bragged that when he returned from the war, he horsewhipped a black woman, right there on campus, for insulting a “Southern lady.” For 50 years, black students and others had protested this racist monument, which served not only as a daily reminder of the degradation of black people but also as a celebration of white-supremacist terror. At long last, a multiracial group of students and faculty, leftists and other activists took matters into their own hands and tore it down—a commendable act.

But the ghosts of the Confederacy are alive and well at UNC: the administration has seen to it that four protesters were charged with rioting and defacing a public monument, while at least ten other anti-racist protesters have been arrested, including at subsequent rallies against restoring the statue. We demand: ***Drop the charges against all the anti-racist protesters now!*** This includes Maya Little, a black graduate student and member of the public workers union UE Local 150, who is charged with vandalism for spilling red ink and her own blood on “Silent Sam” in April. She could face expulsion from the university.

Giving the lie to the image of UNC as a liberal bastion in the South, the UNC grandees are deploring the “violence” and “mob rule” of those who tore down this symbol of lynch mob terror. In the same vein, Democratic Party governor Roy

Drop Charges Against Anti-Racist Protesters!



Confederate monument “Silent Sam” torn down by protesters at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, August 20. Reuters

Cooper denounced the “violent destruction of public property.” Meanwhile, the chancellor of UNC-Chapel Hill seeks to preserve this monument to slavery, perhaps elsewhere on campus, in the guise of “commemorating the fallen.” There should be no illusions that the university administration will stop honoring the racist heritage of this campus founded by slaveowners. The bourgeois administration serves the capitalist class, whose system was built on the bedrock of black oppression.

Ominously, local fascists have mobilized on the Chapel Hill campus in

defense of “Silent Sam.” On August 25, members of an outfit called Alamance County Taking Back Alamance County (ACTBAC) carried Confederate flags into a crowd of anti-racist protesters. One of these fascists punched a UNC student in the face—outrageously resulting in the student being cited for affray (fighting in public). Earlier, at the initial August 20 action, a fascist pulled a knife and threatened to kill a graduate student.

ACTBAC carried out another provocation on August 30 when they marched, under heavy police protection, into the

middle of a celebration by anti-racists around the statue’s pedestal. Protesters chanting “Nazis go home” and “Cops and Klan go hand in hand” were pepper-sprayed and three were arrested. Anti-fascists had already exposed the fact that one cop at the first “Silent Sam” protest sported a tattoo with the symbol of the Three Percenters, a racist right-wing militia. Rallies to defend Confederate monuments are incitements to deadly racist terror, as shown one year ago in Charlottesville, Virginia, where the fascists rampaged and murdered Heather Heyer. The fascists must be crushed through mass, disciplined mobilizations based on the social power of the integrated labor movement.

In a throwback to the hysteria against left-wing activists in the civil rights movement, the capitalist press and campus administration are decrying the presence of “outside agitators,” including “communists” and antifa. The reformist Workers World Party (WWP) has been singled out, as it was last year for its role in toppling a Confederate statue in nearby majority-black Durham. In a victory for working people and minorities, all the charges against those arrested for that action have been dismissed.

Slavery’s legacy is embodied not only in Confederate monuments and flags but in the reality faced by black people, in the South and the North: segregated education and housing, poverty, rampant police terror and mass incarceration. Black equality cannot be achieved without uprooting and destroying capitalism through workers revolution. That requires building a multiracial revolutionary workers party that stands completely independent of and in opposition to the capitalist Democratic and Republican parties. ***For black liberation through socialist revolution! ■***

John Brown...

(continued from page 5)

whetted. The question was sharply posed: Could Southerners carry “their” property into new territories? Would those territories be free or slave?

The Compromise of 1850, which was contentious in Congress, concluded that California would be a free state, while the question of Utah and New Mexico was left to the white settlers to decide. Along with this, the new Fugitive Slave Act (the first was enacted in 1793) now mandated that ordinary citizens were required to aid in the capture and return of runaway slaves, even forming posses to do so. Northerners in effect became deputized slave catchers.

Douglass had plenty to say about the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. In 1852 he remarked: “The only way to make the Fugitive Slave Law a dead letter is to make half a dozen or more dead kidnapers. A half dozen or more dead kidnapers carried down South would cool the ardor of Southern gentlemen, and keep their rapacity in check.” Anti-slavery fury was swelling in the North, and in places like Boston, slave catchers were set upon and fugitives freed. However, because the full power of the federal government lay behind the enforcement of the law, militant abolitionists were not always successful.

For his part, John Brown responded to the Fugitive Slave Act by forming a secret self-defense organization to fight slave catchers. The organization was called the United States League of Gileadites, named after Gideon, a figure in the Old Testament who repelled the attacks of enemies who far outnumbered his forces. Brown drew up a fighting program for the League called “Words of Advice.” In the League’s manifesto, he offered such tactics as “when engaged do not work by halves, but make clean work with your enemies.... Never confess, never betray, never renounce the cause.”

With a plan slowly germinating in his mind, John Brown was gathering the forces for the raid on Harpers Ferry. As then-Trotskyist George Novack wrote about Brown in January 1938 (printed in the *New International*), “By establishing a stronghold in the mountains bordering Southern territory from which his men could raid the plantations, he planned to free the slaves, and run them off to Canada.” Accordingly, Brown did a serious investigation of the terrain, including circling on a map figures on slave concentrations throughout the South. This information was discovered after he was captured at Harpers Ferry.

John Brown also prepared through reading and travel. A number of his business pursuits enabled him to go to places outside the U.S. like England, for example, where in 1851 he went seeking better prices for his wool. A key part of his trip to Europe was to inspect military fortifications, like at Waterloo where Napoleon met defeat. He studied military tactics and especially guerrilla war in mountainous terrain. He read books on Nat Turner’s revolt, the Maroons—the runaway slaves in Jamaica and other places who waged guerrilla warfare—and Francisco Espoz y Mina, the guerrilla leader in Spain during the Napoleonic Wars. He also had books on Toussaint L’Ouverture, leader of the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804, and a biography of the leader of the English Revolution of 1640, Oliver Cromwell. Brown was familiar with and recited for his friends and followers the story of Spartacus, who led a slave rebellion against Roman rule.

His preparations for war meant that he didn’t spend a lot of time with the rest of his family in North Elba. They understood and agreed, knowing that while he was away, it was their duty to resist the slave catchers, even if it meant imprisonment or death. Brown cared deeply for his family’s welfare and tried to alleviate some of their brutal poverty. He did what he could to support them as they all endured incredi-

ble hardships and suffered many setbacks. For example, John himself fathered 20 children and lost nine of them before they reached age ten, including three on three consecutive days. The Brown family knew that the cause of the slaves’ eman-

cipation transcended their personal lives and they stuck it out, together. For John Brown, slavery was the “sum of villainies,” the ultimate atrocity against human freedom. And the fight lay ahead.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

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WORKERS VANGUARD

Protesting Hellish Conditions

Support Prisoners Strike!

SEPTEMBER 2—For the last two weeks, prisoners across the country have courageously carried out work stoppages, hunger strikes and commissary boycotts to protest their unspeakable conditions—brutalization by prison guards, massive overcrowding and exploitation as virtual slave labor. Protests have occurred in at least eleven states, and organizers report that prisoners in six more states have pledged to join. At the federal immigrant detention center in Tacoma, Washington, some 200 detainees went on hunger strike to demand the closure of I.C.E. detention centers and to show solidarity with the prison protests. The British *Guardian* (31 August) reported that prison strike organizers have been met with “swift and vicious reprisals,” thrown into solitary, stripped of communication privileges and transferred to distant prisons.

The strike began on August 21 and is due to continue until September 9. August 21 marks the anniversary of both the 1831 slave revolt led by Nat Turner and the 1971 assassination of Black Panther Party activist George Jackson by guards in California’s San Quentin prison. Jackson was targeted for his role in organizing black, Latino and white prisoners and breaking down hostility between them. September 9 commemorates the beginning of the 1971 Attica prison uprising, which was drowned in blood on orders of New York governor Nelson Rockefeller. The Attica prisoners—black, Puerto Rican and white—defiantly declared, “We are men! We are not beasts and we do not intend to be beaten or driven as such” (see “Remember Attica,” WV No. 1103, 13 January 2017).

In his powerful prison letters, George Jackson wrote: “Black men born in the U.S. and fortunate enough to live past the age of eighteen are conditioned to accept the inevitability of prison” (*Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* [1970]). Since that time, the prison population has grown sixfold to more than two million people, one-third of them black. The mass incarceration over the last few decades is largely a product of the racist “war on drugs” carried out by both Democratic and Republican administrations. Having condemned the mass of black and Latino youth to desperate poverty, the U.S. rulers whipped up hysteria over ghetto “superpredators”—to be gunned down by trigger-happy cops or be packed off to prison by the courts,

with no sentence too lengthy. Spending for prison libraries has been slashed and access to education axed. Solitary confinement, a form of torture, has grown explosively, particularly for those tagged as “gang members.”

The U.S. prison system is the concentrated expression of the depravity of this racist capitalist society, based on the brutal exploitation of labor and founded on black chattel slavery. Addressing their dehumanizing conditions, the prisoners demand an end to the massive racial discrimination in legal charges, sentencing and granting of parole; an immediate end to laws stiffening sentences because of alleged gang membership; access to rehabilitation programs and restoration of Pell grants, which make attaining a college degree possible; voting rights for all confined citizens and released felons.

Some six million people, disproportionately minorities, have lost the right to vote due to felony convictions, which also disqualify many from access to public housing, food stamps and other benefits. A prior felony also makes finding a job virtually impossible. We call to abolish all laws preventing felons from getting jobs or licenses. Strike down criminal background checks for job applications! Full access to all public services, includ-

ing public housing! Full voting rights for prisoners and convicted felons!

Against the hated system of coerced prison labor, strikers call for “an immediate end to prison slavery,” demanding they be paid the prevailing wage in their states. The use of prison labor has a long history. After the end of the Civil War, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution that codified emancipation from slavery also contained an exception with which to forge new chains: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States.” Across the South, primarily the black poor were rounded up for concocted “crimes” such as vagrancy or loitering and were “leased out” to pay off exorbitant fines by picking cotton, mining coal, building railroads.

In today’s era of mass incarceration, prisons and detention centers have become sources of ultra-cheap or free labor, generating huge profits for private companies and also filling government coffers. Half of those fighting wildfires in California are prisoners paid a paltry \$2 per day plus \$1 per hour for this life-threatening work. A Department of Justice brochure touts its “cost-effective labor pool.” Meanwhile, prisoners are forced to pay for personal

necessities like toiletries and extortionately priced telephone calls, only to have as much as half their pittance withheld, in some cases to pay “restitution” for the crimes they were convicted of.

The Spartacist League and the Partisan Defense Committee, a non-sectarian, class-struggle legal and social defense organization associated with the SL, have signed a petition endorsing the strikers’ demands and the PDC has donated to their fund. We urge others to do so as well (see below for details). That the strikers have put it all on the line testifies to their courage, but also to their desperation. Isolated and with no social power, the strikers need the support of those outside prison walls—publicity for their demands, financial support and defense against the inevitable crackdown by prison authorities. Fighters for the rights of labor and minorities must demand amnesty for all prison strikers. No reprisals!

It is in the workers’ class interest that the labor movement’s social weight be brought to bear on behalf of the prisoners. Not a few union members have their sons, daughters, mothers or fathers locked up in those dungeons. Together with white, Latino and immigrant workers, black workers, a large component of the unions, have the social power to fight against the capitalist class enemy and its barbaric prison system.

A good start would be to expel prison guards, cops and security guards from the unions. There is hardly a more damning indictment of the pro-capitalist labor bureaucrats than their recruitment of the capitalists’ armed thugs into unions like AFSCME and the Teamsters. The job of the cops and prison guards is to violently suppress the working class and the ghetto and barrio poor. Yet the craven reformists of Socialist Alternative call in an August 29 article for prison guards to “strike in solidarity with prisoners” to get better working conditions! Better conditions for prison guards means more firepower and a freer hand to brutalize and subjugate prisoners—just what the strikers are protesting! As part of the fight for a new, class-struggle labor leadership, we demand: Cops and prison guards out of the unions!

Along with the military, cops and courts, prisons are a mainstay of the capitalist state, whose purpose is to defend the rule and profits of the bourgeoisie. Abolition of the prison system can *only* be achieved when the capitalist order with all its machinery of repression is shattered by proletarian socialist revolution. Under the leadership of a revolutionary workers party, the social power of the working class will be mobilized in the fight for a workers America, where the capitalists’ tremendous wealth would be ripped out of their hands and placed at the disposal of the many. Workers rule internationally will begin to lay the material basis for an egalitarian communist society, where there will be no need for prisons or for any other apparatus of state repression. ■

The prisoners’ petition can be found at: sawarimi.org/national-prison-strike
Donate to the strike fund at: fundly.com/2018-prisoner-strike

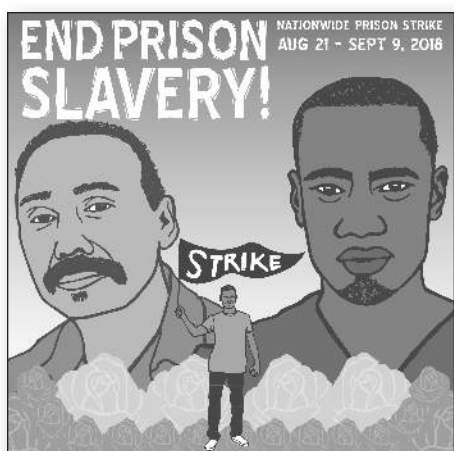


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Top: Guard from Chicago’s Cook County Jail mercilessly beats prisoner, 2013. Bottom: Ohio prisoners deployed to fields in slave-like conditions, 2009.



Melanie Cervantes/IWOC

Poster for prison strike demanding end to inhumane treatment and dire conditions.