

# Racism, Fearmongering and the Midterms

## Break with the Democrats! For a Class-Struggle Workers Party!



Reuters



WV Photo

October 4: Poor and homeless children line up to receive donated clothes in Los Angeles (left). October 9: UNITE HERE strikers at Marriott's W Hotel in Boston demand, "One job should be enough" (right). Under Democrat and Republican alike, capitalism impoverishes the working class.

On all sides, the driving force in the 2018 midterm elections was fear. At Republican election rallies, Donald Trump whipped up howling mobs into a racist frenzy against a caravan of desperate Hondurans and other Central Americans trying to flee the made-in-America violence and destitution of their countries. While thousands of National Guard and military troops were dispatched to the Mexican border, the president proclaimed his intent to trash birthright citizenship as codified in the Fourteenth Amendment. Passed after the defeat of the slavocracy in the Civil War, the amendment granted citizenship to the former slaves, a right also accorded to immigrants' children born in the U.S. In these elections, voting rights for black people, achieved through the courageous battles of the civil rights movement, were once again under assault, particularly in Georgia, where black Democratic Party gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams was a target of racist robo calls, as was Andrew Gillum in Florida.

When compared to their Republican opponents, it didn't take much for the Democrats to come across as the "lesser evil." They didn't have to offer much of anything to the working class, black people, immigrants or any of the multitude of dispossessed. It is a testament to the misery inflicted by the capitalist rulers on the population that, according to media reports, the Democrats regained a majority in the House of Representatives largely because they defended the right of people with pre-existing conditions, i.e., sick

people, to have access to health insurance.

Voter turnout was the largest for any midterm elections in over 50 years. On their side, the Republicans picked up at least one more Senate seat, reflecting both Trump's success in riling up white rural backwaters and the fact that each state gets two senators regardless of its population. The "founding fathers" instituted that setup to curb "the will of the people." Key to the Democratic Party's House victory was the suburban vote. The Democrats ran a slew of women candidates, a number of whom played up their previous careers in the military and the CIA, helping to flip a number of districts where Republican women voted Democrat out of revulsion for the misogynist Trump.

The Democrats won the overwhelming majority of the black vote, as well as a hefty percentage of Latino and Asian voters. This result was due more to fear of Trump and

his "Make America Great Again" yahoos than to any confidence that the Democrats would actually fight for their interests. The racism, immigrant-bashing and open bigotry of the White House have emboldened all manner of racist killers, including outright fascist groups. Leading into the elections, a white-supremacist murdered a black man and woman at a Kentucky grocery store, and three days later a Nazi-lover gunned down eleven Jewish worshippers at a Pittsburgh synagogue.

The main get-out-the-vote battle cry of the Democrats was to defend "our democracy" against the racial hatred and violence being stoked by the Trump administration. But what Trump lets loose is simply a raw expression of the reality of the U.S. capitalist order, which is based on the brutal exploitation of labor and vicious racial oppression. Playing on fears of the Trump administration's unbridled reaction, the

Democrats promote the supposed benevolence of the capitalist state and its forces of organized violence. Whichever party is administering capitalist rule, those forces include the cops who daily gun down black and Latino youth; the courts who railroad the poor and oppressed into this country's barbaric prisons; the intelligence agencies who manufacture the lies for war abroad and repression at home; and the military that marauds against the oppressed around the world.

Two days after the elections, thousands took to the streets in demonstrations organized by the liberal Democratic group MoveOn.org, with some self-proclaimed socialists in tow. They mobilized to protest Trump's firing of Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a living relic of the Jim Crow South, and to defend the former head of the FBI, Robert Mueller, who is investigating supposed Russian collusion in Trump's 2016 victory. That the arch-segregationist former top cop of U.S. capitalism and the head of the agency responsible for the murder of 38 Black Panthers in the late 1960s-early '70s are today presented as the guardians of "democracy" is a grotesque indication of what bourgeois liberals and their reformist hangers-on have to offer.

The electoral victories of Democrats Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Julia Salazar and Rashida Tlaib, members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), are presented as evidence that socialism is now getting a real hearing. There is nothing socialist about this. The DSA, whose membership has exploded to some tens of thousands since Trump came to office, particularly among white petty-bourgeois youth, offers but a rehash of Bernie Sanders's failed campaign to win the Democratic presidential nomination in

*continued on page 6*



Toth/News &amp; Observer

Voters waiting outside polling center in Durham, North Carolina. Black people and the poor face ongoing attacks on voting rights.



# Extending the Reach of the Revolutionary Press



Left: Spartacist signs at June 30 immigrant rights march in New York. Right: Striking Marriott worker in Oakland holds up *Workers Vanguard*, October 20.



Anoa J. Changa

During this year's successful *Workers Vanguard* subscription campaign, Spartacist League and Spartacus Youth Club comrades introduced our biweekly revolutionary Marxist press to over 500 new subscribers across the country, with some locals far exceeding their quotas. In the lead-up to the midterm elections,

many people we engaged had illusions in the anti-Trump "resistance," whose main purpose is to rally disaffected youth and workers back into the Democratic Party, the other capitalist party of racism and war. At the same time, they wanted to check out our communist perspective.

A team of comrades, including from

the Grupo Espartaquista de México, the ICL's Mexican section, made an important trip to the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, where we sold our bilingual article on the government's racist targeting of Mexican Americans in the borderlands ("U.S. Denies Passports to Citizens/EE.UU. niega pasaportes a ciudadanos," WV No. 1140, 21 September). Students and workers were interested in our coverage of Trump's escalating war on immigrant rights as well as our opposition to the Democratic Party and our fight to build an internationalist vanguard party. In Texas and elsewhere, those preferring to read in Spanish got our *Suplementos en español*, leaflets of translated WV articles. Some also subscribed to *Espartaco*, the Spanish-language press of the GEM.

Our trip to the borderlands provided a small but useful window into the second-class status of the largely Mexican-derived population in the area. In towns a few miles away from Mexico, most people speak Spanish fluently, but cannot read or write in the language. This underlines that the struggles against "English only" chauvinism and for quality, bilingual education are crucial for the whole population to become literate in both English and Spanish.

In a national political climate that has become increasingly hostile to the elementary right to abortion, our packet of WV articles addressing women's oppression was a popular free "giveaway" with subscriptions this year. Our team visiting New Orleans reported that the article on black socialist and abortion doctor Edgar Keemer (WV No. 1138, 24 August) was welcomed by many young women in a state where only three clinics remain and a recent bill bans the procedure after 15 weeks. As in years past, placards at our literature tables calling "For Free Abortion on Demand!" sparked interest among those seeking an answer to decades of attacks against abortion and to the overall anti-woman onslaught under both Republican and Democratic administrations.

On several campuses across the coun-

try our signs calling to "Break with the Democrats!" were in sharp distinction to the enthusiasm over the New York Congressional primary victory of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Our front-page article in WV No. 1139 (7 September) exposed how the liberal electoralism of the DSA and Ocasio-Cortez has nothing to do with socialism and everything to do with sprucing up the tainted image of the Democrats.

We made particular efforts to distribute our press to longshore workers at ports on the East, Gulf and West Coasts. During the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Labor Day rally in Los Angeles, our article on fallen ILWU militant Byron Jacobs, a white longshoreman killed on the docks in Longview, Washington, when a mooring line snapped, was much appreciated by members of this powerful, integrated union. Also popular was a piece written by our comrades in Greece covering the dockworkers strike at the Port of Piraeus against the Chinese shipping giant COSCO (WV No. 1137, 27 July). In these sales, we emphasized the need for joint struggle of *all* port workers and for a campaign to organize the unorganized among the port truckers and warehouse and intermodal workers.

During our sub drive, we intersected strikes by hotel workers that spread from Chicago to Boston and various other cities, including in the Bay Area. Joining the picket lines and rallies in solidarity with the strikers, our comrades handed out our leaflet titled "Victory to Chicago Hotel Strike!" reprinted in WV No. 1140 (21 September). In our coverage of the strikes at Marriott hotels (WV No. 1142, 19 October), we noted that the strike slogan "One Job Should Be Enough!" speaks to how the capitalist rulers have so squeezed workers in this country that they are forced to work multiple jobs just to survive.

Included with an annual subscription to WV was a brand-new issue of our *Black History and the Class Struggle* publication, which reflects our commitment to black liberation through socialist revolution. As a result of efforts by our comrades, more than one library added a complete set of *Black History* to its collection. The new issue, which includes 2017 articles on the fascist mobilization in Charlottesville and the tearing down of Confederate monuments, was popular with students at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, many of whom were involved in toppling the "Silent Sam" Confederate monument on their campus. An article in WV No. 1139 defended these courageous protesters. Like other leftists on campuses nationwide, they have had to confront violent provocations by fascists and white-supremacists.

After one Howard University student read our criticism of Spike Lee's *BlacKkKlansman*, where we expose how the cops and Klan work hand in hand, he tweeted that he was "shook" and encouraged others to talk to us. Our Leninist press is not only committed to telling the truth but is also a collective organizer for the vanguard party we aspire to build that can change society. *Workers Vanguard* welcomes all our new readers and encourages comments. We congratulate our determined and fiery comrade Gene in New York for selling the most subscriptions (again)! ■



TROTSKY

## Marking the 1917 October Revolution

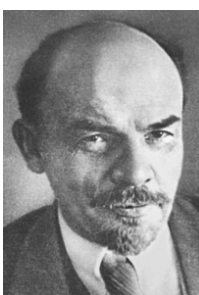
*Addressing the Sixth All-Russia Congress of Soviets one year after the workers, under Bolshevik leadership, had seized power in Russia, V.I. Lenin reaffirmed the revolutionary internationalism that animated the 1917 October Revolution. In particular, he stressed the vital necessity of the extension of proletarian revolution to the advanced capitalist countries and throughout the world. This perspective is in flat opposition to the anti-Marxist program later embraced by J.V. Stalin that socialism can be achieved in a single country.*

Comrades, from the very beginning of the October Revolution, foreign policy and international relations have been the main questions facing us. Not merely because from now on all the states in the world are being firmly linked by imperialism into a single system, or rather, into one dirty, bloody mass, but because the complete victory of the socialist revolution in one country alone is inconceivable and demands the most active co-operation of at least several advanced countries, which do not include Russia. Hence one of the main problems of the revolution is now the extent to which we succeed in broadening the revolution in other countries too, and the extent to which we succeed meanwhile in warding off imperialism....

Comrades, we have survived a year and have achieved some success, but all this is still insufficient when we consider the powerful enemy bearing down on us. This enemy, Anglo-French imperialism, is world-wide, powerful and has defeated the whole world. We are going to fight it not because we think ourselves economically and technically on a par with the advanced countries of Europe. No, but we do know this enemy is going to topple into the abyss into which Austro-German imperialism once toppled; we know that the enemy, which has now ensnared Turkey, seized Bulgaria and is bent on occupying the whole of Austria-Hungary with the object of establishing a tsarist, gendarme regime, is heading for its doom. We know this as a historical fact, and that is why, while in no way attempting the impossible, we say we can beat off Anglo-French imperialism!

Every step in strengthening our Red Army will be echoed by a dozen steps in the disintegration of and revolutions in this apparently all-powerful enemy. There is therefore no cause whatsoever for despair or pessimism. We know the danger is great. It may be that fate has even heavier sacrifices in store for us. Even if they can crush one country, they can never crush the world proletarian revolution, they will only add more fuel to the flames that will consume them all.

—V.I. Lenin, "Speech on the International Situation" (8 November 1918)



LENIN

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# The Working Class Must Defend Immigrants

The following article is an edited translation from Spartaco No. 82 (October 2018), publication of our comrades of the Lega trotskista d'Italia.

The government of the far-right racist Lega (formerly Lega Nord—Northern League) and nationalist Five Star Movement (M5S) inaugurated its rule with what they do best: attack immigrants, minorities and the poor. One day after they took office, on June 2, Minister of the Interior and Lega leader Matteo Salvini thundered that “the party is over for illegal immigrants” and threatened to deport hundreds of thousands of people en masse. He announced plans to start a registry of the ghettoized and oppressed Roma (Gypsy)

**SPARTACO**



population and to dismantle their camps. Finally, he threatened to evict all poor families from “illegally” occupied houses because “private property is SACRED.”

The government showed its vicious face to refugees, taking hostage hundreds of immigrants who had been picked up by the ships *Aquarius* and *Diciotti*, in an attempt to divert them to other European Union (EU) countries. It also threatened to close Italian ports to ships carrying immigrants. Racist murders came quickly on the heels of the government’s arrogant proclamations. On June 3, Sacko Soumaila, a 29-year-old farm worker from Mali and a trade-union activist in the Unione sindacale di base (USB) trade-union federation, was shot in an abandoned factory while looking for sheet metal to build a shelter for his co-workers.

Refugees and the Roma people are in the government’s crosshairs, but its broader aim is to attack millions of immigrant workers who are an integral part of the working class in this country. For the last 20 years, citizenship rights have been denied by every Italian government, including the last one led by the Partito democratico (PD), which distinguished itself by opposing the introduction of birthright citizenship for the children of immigrants born in Italy! If the Lega/M5S government gets away with marginalizing and isolating immigrant workers, the path will be paved for driving down wages and worsening working conditions for *all* workers.

Capitalist governments use demagoguery and terror against immigrants to divide the working class and obstruct united struggle against the capitalist offensive. The Lega/M5S slogan “Italians First” is intended to stop Italian workers from defending their immigrant class brothers and fighting to improve conditions for everyone. Anti-immigrant chauvinism is a primary means to shackle the Italian working class.

Many workers blame poverty and unemployment on immigrants, who allegedly “steal jobs,” instead of directing their anger against the capitalist bosses and the whole system of exploitation. Central responsibility for this situation lies with “leftist” politicians and the treacherous trade-union leaders. They crippled any class-struggle opposition as their friends in the PD government, beginning in 2013, dismantled the gains of past workers’ struggles bit by bit. The Lega/M5S victory represents a massive rejection by layers of the oppressed of years of austerity and misery imposed by the PD and the EU. Their policies—the Fornero labor reform, the “Jobs Act,” wage and hiring freezes in the public sector, etc.—were the main pillars of a decade marked by poverty and intensified exploitation.

Nobody should be fooled by the “anti-racist” wheedling of the PD now that it’s out of office. The PD is a capitalist party that wants to return to the helm of the executive committee of the ruling class (the government) and bolster the reactionary structure of the EU.

The anti-immigrant policies pushed by Salvini and Labor Minister Luigi Di Maio of M5S are in line with those of the PD

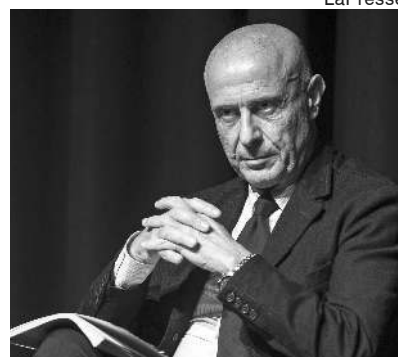
## Italian Government Steps Up Racist Attacks



Above: Coast Guard ship *Diciotti* with migrants onboard, August 21. They had been prevented from disembarking on order of Interior Minister Matteo Salvini (top right). Bottom right: Salvini’s predecessor, Marco Minniti of Partito democratico, also carried out vicious attacks on immigrants.



LaPresse



ZUMA

## European Union Enemy of Workers and Immigrants

and the “center left” governments before it. One such, the Romano Prodi government, enacted the Turco-Napolitano Law in 1998 with the support of Rifondazione comunista (RC) to expedite deportations. On 12 April 2017, a majority PD parliament approved the Minniti-Orlando decree, which expanded the network of detention centers for undocumented immigrants and limited legal rights for asylum-seekers. The decree toughened the notorious Bossi-Fini law binding residency visas to employment contracts. Two months later, on 28 June 2017, that same parliament threatened to block NGO ships from Italian ports. Just before the last elections, the PD boasted that it had reduced

the number of immigrants making it to shore by 70 percent, stating:

“One should not forget the *approval of the migrant decree* at the beginning of the year, which resulted in an increase in repatriations; while on February 2, a *memorandum was signed with the Libyan prime minister Fayed al-Sarraj* to counter the flow of illegal immigrants. The key points of the decree were greater control of Libyan borders and technical support to local organizations combating human trafficking. An essential point to reduce immigration was the creation of centers in Africa to identify migrants.”

—democratica.com,  
23 December 2017

The current government, as well as its PD predecessor, tried to get the multiple

factions vying for power in Libya to act as border guards for Italy by stopping immigrants from leaving Libya and throwing them into prison camps. From there, they are often sold into slavery. Italy has provided ships and weapons to the puppet government of Sarraj, trains its military forces and keeps a contingent of 400 soldiers in Misurata. The current government, like the PD government before it, not only aims to prevent immigration, but to re-establish Italy’s historic role as the foremost imperialist exploiter of Libyan resources, particularly hydrocarbons. Italy, which bloodily oppressed the Libyan people for a century, feels that role has been threatened by imperialist rivals since the NATO bombings that devastated Libya in 2011. *Italian troops out of Libya and Niger!*

### Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!

African and Asian immigrant workers from countries whose economies have been devastated by decades of imperialist domination and exploitation have no rights, live in fear and are exploited by the ruling class as a reserve army of low-cost labor. The capitalist rulers’ immigration policies rest on two pillars: regulating immigration in accordance with capitalism’s demand for labor and segregating immigrant workers. Immigrants, who are denied the “rights” of Italian workers, face harsher exploitation, which is used to drive down the conditions for all workers.

There can be no compromise between the internationalist program required by the proletariat to fight for power (or even wage defensive struggles in the imperialist epoch) and the poisonous racism that divides the working class in the interests of the bourgeois masters!

We of the International Communist  
*continued on page 4*



AFP

November 2017: Migrants in overcrowded detention center on the outskirts of Tripoli, Libya. Italy has enlisted Libyan forces to act as its border guards.

Italy...

(continued from page 3)

League fight for full citizenship rights for everyone who manages to set foot inside a country, regardless of how they arrived or whether they have legal papers. We oppose all forms of police violence and repression against immigrants and call on the trade unions to fight to stop deportations. It is crucial to struggle against the innumerable forms of racist oppression of the immigrant population. The Muslim minority, for example, is constantly criminalized in every way imaginable. These demands are fundamental to forge working-class unity.

The new government (like its predecessor) manipulates poverty and unemployment as a lever to incite a war by the poor against immigrants. To fight unemployment, we demand a much shorter work-week with no loss in pay. All work should be shared by all available workers. Contract agencies, cooperatives, and *caporali* (labor contractors linked to the Mafia) must be swept aside and jobs be made permanent under union control. This government, which claims to be for “change” and “dignity,” is a capitalist government. It will say that there is no money for full employment (because money shouldn’t leave the bosses’ pockets). But if capitalism is incapable of guaranteeing decent jobs and living conditions for everyone, then it must be abolished and replaced by a new social system: a collectivized economy that places the enormous resources and technological capacity of society at the service of all.

European Union: Enemy of Workers and Immigrants

From day one, the new government has been harassed by the EU, which will not tolerate any challenge to the monetary and financial order that maintains the dominance of the imperialist countries at the core of the EU. The European and Italian banks holding the country’s public debt want every cent extracted from the population to be deposited in their vaults. No threat to the EU’s existence will be tolerated. Every time the government dares to mention increasing public spending, financial institutions threaten to sell off Italian state bonds, and pro-EU politicians raise the bogeyman of an increased financial spread relative to German bonds that would put Italy at a disadvantage.

High finance and big capital are worried about the growth of the rightist extremists in Europe (such as the Lega in Italy, Orbán in Hungary and Le Pen in France) *not* because of the far right’s hatred of immigrants and workers, but because their right-wing nationalist policies threaten the downfall of the EU.

We have always opposed the EU and the euro on principle. We do not seek alternative policies for the capitalist rulers, but oppose the EU on the basis of the revo-



August 28: Protest in Milano against meeting between Salvini and ultra-nationalist Hungarian prime minister Orbán. Banner on left denounces Salvini for deportations and shooting of immigrants.

lutionary, proletarian and internationalist principles of Marxism and with the perspective of fighting for a Socialist United States of Europe. As we wrote last year in *Spartaco* No. 80 (September 2017):

“The working class must fight for *Italy out of the EU and the euro*. An Italian exit could precipitate the collapse of the EU. This would be in the interest of all workers and the oppressed and strike a hard blow against the bosses. The end of the EU would not mean the end of international capitalism, or of the exploitation and racism that are intrinsic to this system of production, but it would facilitate workers struggles across Europe and more sharply expose that the main enemy to combat is one’s ‘own’ national exploiter.” —translated in WV No. 1118, 22 September 2017

The EU exists to strengthen the competitiveness of its dominant imperialist powers, centrally Germany, in the world market against their American and Japanese rivals and increase the exploitation of the working class. The Italian ruling class has also benefited from its participation in the EU, although Italian capitalism has lost lots of ground to its stronger German rival. The EU oversaw the dismantling of the entire “*Stato sociale*” (the social safety network)—all the gains won after World War II, when the imperialists needed to contain working-class struggle during the Cold War against the Soviet Union.

Following capitalist counterrevolution in the USSR in 1991-92, the Italian capitalist rulers launched a ceaseless offensive to take back what they now deemed “unnecessary expenses.” What passes for the “left” in Italy today is totally discredited after 20 years of supporting capitalist governments, the EU and the euro. Their support led to vicious attacks and the immiseration of the working class. In Italy today, there is not a single sizable parliamentary party that even pretends to represent the interests of the working class.

The PD is the party that most staunchly defends the EU, with the help of the majority of the reformist left and the treacherous trade-union leaders. The union bureaucracy upholds the EU as a supposed bulwark in defense of workers’ rights. The exact opposite is true. The Italian capitalists made enormous profits by joining the EU, allowing them to participate in pillaging eastern and southern Europe. Workers across Europe have been devastated.

In spring 2017, after strikes by air traffic controllers in France and Italy, major air carriers appealed to the EU to stop further strikes. Ryanair accused the European Commission (EC) of “standing by and doing nothing while air traffic controllers’ unions held Europe hostage.” The EC then published a series of anti-strike measures on 8 June 2017 to guarantee “100 percent continuity of airline services for flights in the airspace of EU member states affected by strikes.” Back in 2014, the EU tried to destroy Spanish port workers unions for damaging “free enterprise.”

Salvini and Di Maio turned back NGO boats and held refugees hostage to try and convince Germany and France to change the rules for distribution of refugees in Europe and revise the Dublin III Regulation. Dublin III stipulates where refugees must file applications—i.e., which country must detain or deport them.

For years, the Italian bourgeoisie has demanded revision of this regulation, which sanctions the domination of the Northern-Central European countries in decision making over the flow of immigration. Italy’s capitalist rulers view Dublin III as an obstacle to driving out a few thousand immigrants to other EU countries. Many liberal and reformist groups, from Potere al Popolo (Power to the People) to Rifondazione comunista, single out Dublin III for opposition. The regulation is an embarrassment to them because it exposes their promotion of the myth of “freedom of movement” associated with the Schengen Agreement and of a so-called “social Europe.”

We do not have a position on the allocation of refugees. Instead, we oppose *all* deportations, regardless of the laws and agreements that sanction them. We oppose the whole construct of the EU and have no intention of suggesting ways to moderate EU agreements.

The conflict sparked by the refugee crisis exposes the reality of the EU as a consortium of capitalist nation-states, each with its own interests, which cannot fundamentally be reconciled. The EU is not a pan-European “superstate” and there is no such thing as European “citizenship.” By definition, the EU is based on suspending internal borders to the free *movement of capital*, allowing the more powerful countries to easily plunder weaker ones, like Greece and East European countries.

The Schengen Agreement *never* meant “freedom of movement” for people. “Freedom of movement” has never existed for anyone with black skin or an East European passport, or the Roma. In 2017, President Emmanuel Macron’s “liberal” France said

to hell with Schengen and Dublin, turning back 45,000 people at the French-Italian borders of Bardonecchia and Ventimiglia. Entry to France was simply denied on the basis of skin color. European capitalist states have not hesitated to arrest, jail and deport hundreds of thousands of non-EU immigrants and slap restrictive measures against citizens of East European EU member states. Under the Schengen Agreement, the “external” borders of the EU have been closed with ship blockades of coastlines and walls of barbed wire, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of immigrants.

The fixation on reforming or abolishing the Dublin Regulation reveals the politics of liberal and reformist groups who peddle the belief that the EU is a “supranational” formation, supposedly more advanced and progressive than its individual national states. These groups promote the lie that a Europe with open borders will peacefully overcome the interimperialist conflicts that defined the 20th century. This is why they shriek that any call to “exit” the EU represents a “step backward” toward nation-states, as if the imperialist nation-states disappeared with the creation of the EU.

The demand for “open borders,” or for a “Europe without internal borders,” is raised by a spectrum of organizations ranging from the Catholic church to anarchists and Maoists. We communists decisively reject the utopian call to “open the borders.” This demand expresses the pipe dream that capitalist states will dissolve on their own and that racist oppression will disappear absent a revolutionary struggle. But in the real world, this demand serves only to put a humanitarian mask on the imperialist EU.

The borders of capitalist nation-states, along with their police forces, armies, jails and courts, are basic elements of class domination. The state is the fundamental instrument by which the ruling class—the owners of the factories, means of transportation and finance—maintains its rule over the working class and all the oppressed. To call on the ruling class to “eliminate borders,” to do away with the police, jails, etc., only serves to disarm those seeking a way to fight against the capitalist system. It creates the illusion that racism, war, police violence, etc., can be eliminated without a proletarian revolution, without a civil war by the exploited against the exploiters.

The idea that borders are always and necessarily reactionary is false. In the days of Italian colonial rule, there were no borders between Italy and Libya or Croatia. Today, to implement its right of independence against Spanish repression, a Catalan Republic would need a strong border separating it from the Castilian monarchy and its armed forces. Lenin explained that national divisions will completely disappear only in a communist future:

“By transforming capitalism into socialism the proletariat creates the *possibility* of abolishing national oppression; the possibility becomes *reality* ‘only’—‘only!’—with the establishment of full democracy in all spheres, including the delineation of state frontiers in accordance with the ‘sympathies’ of the population, including complete freedom to secede. And this, in turn, will serve as a basis for developing the practical elimination of even the slightest national friction and the least national mistrust, for an accelerated drawing together and fusion of nations that will be completed when the state withers away.” —“The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up” (1916)

Down With Protectionism!

The Lega and M5S won the elections by campaigning for protectionism, also promising tax reforms and a “guaranteed minimum income” (*reddito di cittadinanza*) that raised the hopes of millions of desperate workers and the unemployed. But the proposed “flat tax” will especially benefit the bosses, who will line their own pockets with profits and not reinvest in production. And the “guaranteed minimum income” would only undermine the unions, handing out a pittance for basic survival while eliminating current forms of union-won unemployment insurance. Workers would have to take jobs, no matter how bad the working conditions, or do

SPARTACIST LEAGUE/U.S.

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4

WORKERS VANGUARD



“public work” that would previously have been done by permanent workers under the protection of a union contract. The economic measures pushed by the Lega and M5S would increase exploitation and misery for the working class.

The government also threatens more protectionism. In June, Salvini stated: “No more welcome mats. We will block ships carrying Asian rice.” Minister of Agriculture and Lega member Gian Marco Centinaio attacked the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and the EU, saying it permits trade in imitations of the products that are Italy’s pride and joy, such as Parmesan cheese and mozzarella (not to mention wheat). Di Maio added that tariffs could be introduced to protect Italian products from cheaper imports. Most of these threats are probably paper tigers given the weakness of Italian capitalism and its dependence on exports. (Moreover, one can’t fight a trade war based on Parmesan and mozzarella!)

As Marxists, we oppose economic protectionism by imperialist countries. The bosses use it as a weapon to pit workers of different countries against one another and to create a climate of venomous chauvinism that spawns fascist groups.

In 2010, to break the resistance of combative auto workers in Pomigliano, Sergio Marchionne (the now-deceased CEO of Fiat Chrysler) threatened to move production to different locations in Italy as well as



Foggia, August 8: Migrant farm workers protest against work conditions after 16 laborers were killed while being transported in unsafe vans.

have frequently been in the forefront of important struggles. In fact, immigrant workers have won the main gains wrested in class battles in recent years. Immigrant logistics workers, mainly organized by SI Cobas (a “rank and file” union federation), have been at the center of important fights against subcontractors who hire them out to big transport companies.

of Puglia to demand better working conditions, adequate transportation and legalization of their status in Italy. After the killing of Sacko Soumaila, a massive protest in Rome was organized by the USB, which has led a courageous unionization drive among immigrant workers. But the call for the demonstration exposed the pro-capitalist politics of the leaders of this “rank and file” union. It read:

“Labor Minister Di Maio and immigration minister Salvini must take a stand.... This dramatic story poses a question to the new government: how do they intend to promote change? By restoring rights and dignity to the workers or by fanning the flames of a war among poor people and kneeling to EU diktats. The country is holding its breath. We don’t have a clear idea of what the new ministers will do and especially whether they will fulfill their electoral promises.”

—“Break with EU Diktats to Fight Social Inequalities,” contropiano.it

Since the new government took office, USB leaders have adopted a posture of “critical” support to the Lega and M5S, presenting them as a step forward for workers. This is a suicidal policy that ties the hands of the workers to their mortal enemy while giving the government time to consolidate its rule. The USB maintains that the *caporali* system “must be fought by prevention, by reinforcing existing hiring centers and labor inspectors, and providing them with adequate means.”

Labor inspectors have been around for decades and serve only to provide a veneer of legality to the most abject forms of exploitation. Thus, the leaders of the USB push workers to have confidence in the instruments of their exploiters.

It’s not only the USB union bureaucrats who demand that the capitalist state act in defense of immigrant workers. Self-styled Marxists like the Partito comunista dei lavoratori (PCL) do likewise when they demand “immediate confiscation without indemnification of land owned by those using *caporali* and demand that the exploitation of ‘black work’ be made a crime. Supervision of the fields should be entrusted not to state inspectors and prefects, but to laborers committees. They know who exploits them and they are the ones who can report them” (“The Struggle of Immigrant Laborers,” pclavoratori.it, 13 August). While implicitly denouncing illusions in “labor inspectors” (who everybody knows are a joke), the PCL creates an even bigger illusion: that “laborers committees” should denounce their exploiters to the police. Thus, they directly subordinate class struggle to the uniformed agents of the capitalists.

The difficult struggles of rural laborers require the class unity of all workers—immigrants and Italians—in one union. Particularly in agriculture, where the bosses are notorious for dividing workers along ethnic and national lines, the unions must have an exclusive monopoly on employment through a union hiring hall. The *caporali* temporary hiring system must be replaced with union control of hiring, based on seniority, with jobs divided equally among all workers. This must be a central demand of the strug-

gle, along with abolishing piecework, an eight-hour day, and permanent jobs and wages comparable to industrial workers. These demands will be wrested not through the good offices of labor inspectors, but through hard class struggle, including strikes, picket lines and farm workers committees that insist that union conditions are met.

In the case of agricultural laborers, especially seasonal workers, it is crucial to rally the support of workers in other industries, like metal workers at Ilva steel works in Taranto or Fiat in Melfi, who are just a few kilometers from the tomato fields and are also under attack by the bosses. Unions should take a stand alongside immigrant struggles by organizing the unorganized and building workers defense guards to protect immigrants against violence and deportations. From the fields and construction sites in the south, to factories and warehouses in the north, immigrant workers are destined to play a key role in the class struggle and the socialist revolution in this country. They will enrich the working class with their own traditions of struggle, potentially providing a bridge of proletarian internationalism, linking the struggles for socialist revolution in Italy and their countries of origin.

### For a Multiethnic Revolutionary Workers Party!

A revolutionary workers party and a class-struggle leadership of the trade unions are necessary to transcend national and ethnic barriers and unite the working class. The current workers misleaders function as agents of the ruling class in the proletariat. They defend the existence of capitalism and merely seek to bargain for a few crumbs from the bosses’ table for a small layer of skilled and privileged workers. An integral part of their defense of private ownership of the means of production is supporting the “competitiveness” of companies owned by their *own* bourgeoisie. This necessarily means supporting bourgeois nationalism.

In order to lead the international working class, a revolutionary party must be built based on the internationalist principles of Marxism. Such a party would act, in the famous words of V.I. Lenin, leader of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, as a tribune of the people “who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth *before all* his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for *all* and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat” (*What Is To Be Done?* [1902]).

This is the kind of party that we in the Ltd’I, the Italian section of the International Communist League, strive to build. *Join us!* ■



SI Cobas union members on strike in Carpiano against SDA shipping company, November 2016.

to Poland and Serbia, pitting Fiat workers against each other. Instead of organizing united class struggle across national borders, the trade-union bureaucrats accepted the conditions imposed by Fiat, while complaining that the government was not defending national interests and products “Made in Italy” (see *Spartaco* No. 73, October 2010).

Economic, financial and military force is the only way for the ruling classes of the imperialist countries to divide up the world’s wealth. As Lenin wrote amid World War I:

“In the realities of the capitalist system, and not in the banal philistine fantasies of English parsons, or of the German ‘Marxist’, Kautsky, ‘inter-imperialist’ or ‘ultra-imperialist’ alliances, no matter what form they may assume, whether of one imperialist coalition against another, or of a general alliance embracing all the imperialist powers, are inevitably nothing more than a ‘truce’ in periods between wars. Peaceful alliances prepare the ground for wars, and in their turn grow out of wars.”

—*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916)

The task of the working class is to wage a class-struggle fight to overthrow the imperialist EU alliance and build the Socialist United States of Europe. Then, the proletariat throughout Europe could establish economic coordination as a key component of worldwide revolution, the only real hope for workers on the planet.

### Immigrant Workers and Class Struggle

Immigrants are not helpless victims, but a growing component of the working class in many strategic sectors of the economy: metalworking industries, construction, transport and health care. They

These workers have won significant contractual gains and unionized a sector that was previously under the thumb of *caporali*, the mob-infested labor brokers euphemistically called “cooperatives.” Since 2016, more than 2,000 Sikh farm workers, who worked for as little as three and a half euros per hour, repeatedly waged strikes in the greenhouses of Agro Pontino and won a wage increase to five euros per hour and union representation by the FLAI CGIL agricultural workers federation.

Several recent episodes have thrown a spotlight on the exploitation of immigrant farm laborers. In early August, 16 died in two separate car accidents in Foggia while crammed like cattle into dilapidated vehicles. In Padova, a 44-year-old Polish woman farm worker was locked in an apple crate for two weeks by the farm owner for protesting work conditions.

Such incidents are just the tip of the iceberg of the obscene exploitation that has propped up the entire agribusiness sector for decades. For 1.2 million agricultural laborers, the legal minimum wage is a paltry seven euros per hour. But the reality is much worse. Half these farm workers are employed in what is known as “black work”: they are paid under the table for piecework, and continually threatened with layoffs. Immigrant workers make up 36 percent of the agricultural workforce, concentrated in the north of Italy. They are paid two to three euros per hour and live in hellhole ghettos or shacks scattered across the countryside. The living and working conditions are hardly any better for thousands of women and Italian farm workers in the south.

After the carnage in Foggia, immigrant laborers waged a solid strike in the fields

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**Lega/M5S intensificano la guerra del Pd agli immigrati**

**La classe operaia deve difendere gli immigrati**  
Il governo di Lega e Cinque stelle (M5S) ha iniziato dalle miniere e i pozzi. Il 2 giugno, giorno successivo all'insediamento del governo Matteo Salvini ha trovato, per gli immigrati clandestini, la sua prima "missione": di essere espulsi dal paese. In nome della sicurezza, il governo ha annunciato di voler schedare e espellere gli immigrati clandestini dalla popolazione non, pianificata e coperta, verso del Partito democratico (Pd), che si è distinto per aver sempre fatto il suo corso di fidi agli immigrati, non si fida se riesce a espellere e trasferire i lavoratori immigrati, il governo Lega/M5S potrebbe la sua per espellere gli immigrati, ma le condizioni di lavoro e i salari di non gli operai. I governi capitalisti usano la demagogia e il terrorismo per dividere la classe operaia e impedire che creino, a loro volta, come l'ormai copiato, la legge del governo. La legge del governo è la legge del capitale, che si ripete che gli operai italiani e stranieri in difesa della loro famiglia di classe immigrati, cercando per semplice la L'Unione Europea è nemica di operai e immigrati!

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(continued from page 1)

As candidates of the Democratic Party, which no less than the Republicans represents the interests of the capitalist rulers, DSAers bolster illusions in the Democrats as a “party of the people.” They are helped in this regard by reformist groups like Socialist Alternative (SA) and the International Socialist Organization, which laud the DSA’s electoral success as the pinnacle of the Democrats’ anti-Trump “resistance.” SA Seattle city council member Kshama Sawant gushed in a November 9 letter to her DSA “sisters”: “Your elections represent a significant step forward for the U.S. working class.”

“Don’t buy the lie that the alternative is refurbishing the capitalist Democratic Party! It means that the working class and all those at the bottom of this society will remain trapped in the thoroughly rigged system of American capitalist democracy, which is the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

## For Class Against Class!

Not so long ago, these two states were battleground states for the labor movement, with Michigan auto workers and Wisconsin public workers getting pum-

America's rulers, Democrat and Republican alike, arrogantly believe that they can get away with one attack after another against working people and the oppressed without provoking any struggle. But the rulers and their labor lieutenants cannot eliminate the class struggle, which is born of the irreconcilable conflict of interests between labor and its exploiters.

A black and white photograph capturing a massive crowd of people gathered in a large, circular hall, likely the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. The crowd is densely packed, filling the space from the floor up to the high, arched ceiling. Many individuals are holding up signs and banners, some of which are clearly visible, such as "Vietnam Veterans Against the War" and "No More War". The architecture features high ceilings with exposed beams and large windows, creating a grand and historic atmosphere. The overall scene conveys a sense of a significant, organized public demonstration.

nal of strikebreaking laws too vast for the workers to successfully fight. A few years ago, they also said that strikes were out of the question because the economic conditions during the world financial crisis were too dire. Yet the strikes that founded the industrial unions were waged amid the Great Depression, the most devastating capitalist economic crisis in history. Workers had been paralyzed with fear of losing whatever meager livelihood they had and of being cast into the sea of millions who were unemployed, starving and homeless. Union membership, at the time represented mainly by the craft-based, overwhelmingly white American Federation of Labor (AFL), had plummeted, while the vast majority of workers who labored in the giant auto, steel, rubber and other industries were unorganized and despised by the AFL bureaucracy.

As in the 1930s, it will take hard-fought labor battles to revive and extend the unions, organizing the millions of unorganized workers who are brutally exploited but at the same time have tremendous potential power. What is needed is a class-struggle leadership of the unions, one armed with a Marxist political program that links labor's fight to the struggle to build a multiracial workers party

With his “crazy town” White House and promotion of all-sided reaction, Trump is a manifestation of the dangerous irrationality of U.S. imperialism—of an empire in decline. When the U.S. emerged as the top imperialist power at the end of World War II, America’s rulers boasted that it was the dawn of the “American Century.” But less than 30 years later, the sun was setting on that century. In the face of the economic resurgence of West Germany and Japan, together with the cost of its long, losing war against the Vietnamese workers and peasants, the U.S. went off the gold standard in August 1971, leading to devaluation of the dollar. This move signaled that the U.S. was no longer the world’s undisputed economic powerhouse.

More speedup and multi-tier wages were introduced, much production was shifted to the South as well as overseas, and the crushing of the PATCO air traffic controllers strike in 1981 marked the beginning of a broad onslaught against the unions.

Along with the attacks on labor came the shredding of civil rights era programs that had been enacted to buy social peace, particularly in the wake of the ghetto upheavals of the 1960s. Republican president Ronald Reagan kicked off the attack on black “welfare queens,” but it was Democratic president Bill Clinton who ended “welfare as we know it.” Untold numbers of black and other poor single mothers and their children were condemned to unmitigated poverty. At the same time, the Clinton administration pursued a racist drive for mass incarceration of poor black youth, doubling the prison population to more than two million.

With the 1991-92 counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union—the world's first workers state and a military counterweight to U.S. imperialism—it appeared that America's rulers had succeeded in their quest to be the masters of the world. But even as the U.S. achieved unmatched military supremacy, its domestic manufacturing base continued to corrode overall. Virtually no investment was made to repair crumbling roads, bridges, levees and other infrastructure. Instead, the capitalist class largely poured its profits, appropriated through the exploitation of labor, into speculative binges. This helped fuel one recession after another, including the housing bubble scam that triggered an economic crisis in 2008 unrivaled since the 1930s Great Depression.

ones responsible for the ruin of masses of people in the U.S. and around the world. In a meeting with top bankers shortly after he took office, Obama issued assurances that he would protect them against public outrage over the economic carnage, saying that his administration “is the only thing between you and the pitchforks.”

But contrary to Democratic Party pundits and the liberal media, “deplorable” white workers are not responsible for Trump’s victory. His actual base is the far more well-heeled middle-class supporters of the Tea Party. Driven into a frenzy by the fantasy that “their country” is being taken over by black people, Latinos and the poor, the Tea Party emerged as a racist backlash against the Obama presidency. It overlaps with the bible-thumping, anti-abortion evangelicals who have gone all out for Trump—although it is worthwhile to recall that they were first introduced into the political mainstream by Democratic president Jimmy “ethnic purity” Carter.

There is widespread, seething discontent in this country. But as has been seen particularly in the last few years, absent a working-class alternative, this discontent can go in many different directions, including toward right-wing reaction. The anger and discontent of the American working class needs to be expressed in *class struggle*. It is through such struggle that workers can overcome the racial and other divisions fomented by the bosses. This year's strikes by teachers and other school workers and by Marriott hotel workers, as well as the rejection of a sell-out contract by UPS workers, point to an impulse to struggle by working people. But this impulse has been repeatedly thwarted by the union misleaders.

Millions are scrambling to get by through miserably paid jobs, with many having lost the money put into their homes or having been tossed onto the street. There is a pressing need to build a multiracial revolutionary workers party that would unite the employed and unemployed, the ghetto poor and immigrants in a struggle for jobs and decent living conditions for all. The needs of the masses can be satisfied only through a proletarian revolution that establishes a workers government, where those who labor rule. ■

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Homeless man with his possessions, New York City (left).

Mother and child from Honduras seized in Texas after crossing the border (right).

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The following contribution was submitted to Workers Vanguard by Spartacist League Central Committee member Reuben Samuels.

The Supreme Court under Justice Roger Taney (1836-1864), known for the 1857 Dred Scott decision, has rightly been branded one of the most reactionary in U.S. history. That notorious decision formalized a *racial* definition of citizenship by declaring blacks “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” It sought to make the law of the lash the law of the entire country. Instead, it *hastened* the Civil War that crushed slavery and would render the Scott decision moot. When that pro-slavery Taney court got in the way of pursuing that war, President Lincoln defied it. No court, whatever its composition, could suppress the inevitable conflict between the two social systems—Northern capitalism and Southern chattel slavery—upon which this nation was founded.

To ensure Northern victory over the Confederacy, emancipation was not enough. Citizenship rights had to be extended to the black freedmen; and not only to them, but to anyone naturalized or born here, as codified in the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868. (Male suffrage followed in the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870.) But the language of the Fourteenth Amendment went further, granting protections to *any person*: “Nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

Based on the Amendment’s “due process” and “equal protection” clauses, civil rights protections were extended nationwide to “persons of Mexican descent” in the 1954 *Hernandez v. Texas* decision. Under the same Earl Warren Court (1953-1969), two weeks later “separate but equal” school segregation was struck down in *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 1982, the Supreme Court returned again to the Fourteenth Amendment in the case of *Plyler v. Doe* to strike down

# 14th Amendment and Birthright Citizenship



Library of Congress

**Soldiers of 4th U.S. Colored Infantry, one of the detachments assigned to defend Washington, D.C., during Civil War. Fourteenth Amendment was major gain issuing out of smashing of slavocracy.**

a Texas statute that denied K-12 educational funding to undocumented immigrant children. These decisions were living testament to the fact that black freedom and immigrant rights go hand in hand. They, along with other partial legal gains, came in the context of social struggle. As struggle receded, these gains were followed by major reversals.

The Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, known as the Reconstruction Amendments of 1865-1870, were a product of the most equalitarian period in American history. They also demonstrate the limits of bourgeois democracy. Immediately after the Civil War, black freedmen were denied land and forced back onto the plantation as sharecroppers. The Thirteenth Amendment abolished involuntary servitude and slavery *except*

“as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted,” which would serve as a basis for virtual slave labor in the prisons. The “due process” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment contains its own exception. In declaring that no state shall “deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law,” it sanctions states to deprive people of precisely those things *with* due process. The Amendment provided no protection for the 120,000 Japanese Americans, at least two-thirds of whom were citizens, interned during World War II. Nor does the Fourteenth Amendment today protect the tens of thousands of immigrants interned in this country’s detention centers for having sought refuge from the ravages of U.S. imperialism in their homelands.

Nevertheless, despite its limitations, the Fourteenth Amendment continues to be the legal bedrock for many bourgeois-democratic rights won by workers and the oppressed, including abortion and gay rights, demonstrating the centrality of black emancipation to the struggles of all the oppressed and a workers’ reconstruction of this benighted land.

Fostered by the decades-long *bipartisan* assault on immigrant rights, Trump’s brash attack on birthright citizenship threatens to resurrect the race-based citizenship it took a civil war to abolish. Our demand for full citizenship rights for all immigrants has as its foundation the emancipatory gains of that war, though it will take a third American revolution, a proletarian revolution, to achieve complete equality.

## NYC Transit...

(continued from page 8)

a small scale in 1999 when the Partisan Defense Committee initiated a labor/black mobilization against the KKK in NYC. It is through class struggle that the unions can be revitalized and rebuilt in this country, where the ruling class has waged war against the workers with virtually no resistance from labor “leaders.”

This perspective is integral to building a workers party that fights for a workers government. By expropriating the bankers, the real estate barons and the rest of the capitalist class, the workers in power would use this society’s productive wealth to rebuild cities and crucial infrastructure, providing jobs, quality health care and integrated housing and schools for all.

### Labor Fakers Play Bosses’ Game

Thompson’s Progressive Action often complains about higher pay and “different disciplines” for workers at the MTA-operated Metro-North and Long Island Railroad (LIRR) regional commuter lines. Thompson says that the MTA treats LIRR workers better because they are mostly white whereas whites are a minority in the heavily black, Latino and immigrant workforce of NYC transit. In fact, the MTA is out to squeeze *all* its workers. “Plantation justice” at NYC transit exemplifies the racist discrimination the capitalists have long used to divide labor and weaken its struggles. While hitting black workers the hardest, the MTA overseers crack this whip to drive the entire workforce to the limit.

The way to fight back is through racially integrated *union struggle*. But Thompson’s answer is to look to the government

for redress, calling on the Justice Department, the top enforcer of racist “law and order,” to “look into the situations” at NYC transit and the regional rail lines. If the Justice Department or any other arm of the capitalist state were to intervene, it would be to weaken union job protections, fueling a race to the bottom for all workers. That is also the case when the courts are invited into union affairs in the name of “union democracy,” as various TWU out-bureaucrats have done over the years.

To fight racist discrimination, and improve conditions for the entire workforce, the transit union needs to flex its muscle and show its collective power. Joint labor struggle by regional rail workers, who are divided among many craft unions, and transit workers is necessary to achieve equal wages and benefits at the highest level for all. United labor action could also lay the basis for a single industrial union embracing all rail, subway and bus workers in the area.

The Local 100 bureaucracy has betrayed that prospect over and over again. A key example was the December 2005 NYC transit strike, a demonstration of the union’s power. Carried out at the height of the holiday shopping season, the walk-out stunned the arrogant capitalist rulers and drew immediate blowback from the government. Democratic state attorney general Eliot Spitzer issued Taylor Law injunctions and billionaire Republican mayor Michael Bloomberg called strike leaders “thuggish,” a clear attempt to stir up racist animosity against Local 100 and its leader at the time, Roger Toussaint, a black Trinidadian.

Local 100 was stabbed in the back by the TWU International and the city’s labor officials, who pressured the union to end

the strike. But the strike was cheered by working people throughout the city, not least in the ghettos and barrios. Despite this popular support, the Toussaint leadership, which Thompson falsely paints as “militant,” did not appeal to regional transit workers to walk out in support of the TWU. Here was Toussaint, who sued the union on his way to becoming president, up against the strikebreaking courts. After less than three days, he folded, sending fired-up union members back to work with no contract in hand and massive legal reprisals hanging over their heads. The courts went on to slam individual strikers and Local 100 with heavy fines and even jailed Toussaint for a short time. Ending the walkout while it was solid was deeply corrosive to the union. At one point, up to half the membership had stopped paying dues.

Toussaint’s successor, Samuelsen, renounced the 2005 strike entirely. A slavish supporter of Cuomo, Samuelsen kept Local 100 members working under an expired contract from 2012 to 2014. At the same time, he talked about supporting a potential strike on the LIRR. But when the nearly 6,000 LIRR workers voted to strike in 2014, Samuelsen knifed them in the back by cooking up a concessionary Local 100 contract with Cuomo, which put pressure on LIRR workers to settle. True to form, the MTA announced that it would pay for minuscule TWU raises by skipping payments to the underfunded LIRR pension plan.

The Samuelsen regime also pitted Local 100 members against each other by acceding to the Tier 6 pension “reform” for new hires. This measure has jacked up deductions from wages for the pension fund and introduced wage caps and restrictions aimed at slashing pension

benefits. With Utano calling to “fix Tier 6” by lobbying Albany, the various opposition slates call at most to “fix or nix” it. Union militants must oppose *all* wage and benefit tier schemes, which erode the very purpose of unions by pitting veteran workers against younger ones. Equal pay for equal work! Full benefits for all!

Thompson has done his bit to divide the union by resorting to race-baiting, going after John Ferretti and Seth Rosenberg, who are associated with the former Revolutionary Transit Worker (RTW) outfit supported by the League for the Revolutionary Party. In response to their occasional verbal militancy, Thompson denounces them as whites with “weird politics” who are trying to rope in unsuspecting black TWU members. Such demagoguery serves the MTA bosses, pure and simple.

In fact, Ferretti and Rosenberg are opportunists like their RTW forebears who backed the union-suer Toussaint. The two had offered to toss out their self-declared principles in order to reach a “compromise on points of unity” as part of the PA slate. Spurned by Thompson, they then proposed that all of Utano’s opponents run a common slate, thereby offering to support any other pro-Democratic Party sellout. Now running as “Local 100 Fightback,” Ferretti and Rosenberg give their own backhanded support to the “lesser evil” capitalist party by their calls for the TWU to join the Democrats’ anti-Trump “resistance.”

The class collaboration that defines the Local 100 bureaucracy and its current challengers reinforces “plantation justice” at the MTA. Workers need a leadership that will fight against the bosses’ racist divide-and-rule schemes with the tools and methods of class struggle. ■

# WORKERS VANGUARD

## For a Fighting Union!

# NYC Transit Workers Under Fire

The 41,000 members of Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100, who have begun to vote for union officers, desperately need a fighting leadership. It has been well over a year since New York governor Andrew Cuomo declared New York City’s decrepit subway system to be in a “state of emergency.” The transit crisis made world news last summer as the public fumed over trains delayed or canceled due to power outages, faulty switches, equipment failures, crumbling tunnels and worn-out tracks. Andy Byford, who had been brought in after his stint as Toronto transit chief to run the NYC system, has tried to “fix” things by forcing more deadly speedup on the workforce, just as he did in his last job.

Transit workers grimly joke that the “summer of hell” has been extended to all four seasons. The “state of emergency” was a pretext for driving workers harder and longer under hazardous conditions. The Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), a New York State agency, has relaxed safety rules to get trains and buses up and running faster, a major factor in the death of bus helper Stephen Livecchi in Queens in March. Train runs are being scheduled to cut out break time. With budget cuts looming, scores of cleaner, track inspector and customer service booth agent jobs are on the chopping block, promising even filthier trains and more dangerous tracks and stations. Meanwhile, assaults on workers, including by the cops, have spiked.

As we wrote in “NYC Subway Shambles” (WV No. 1123, 1 December 2017), responsibility for this disaster lies with the bankers, Democratic and Republican politicians and MTA bosses “who have let things go to hell, while making working conditions miserable” for Local 100 members. The ruling class has long refused to shell out what’s needed for good, functional mass transit in its own financial center. This is a sure sign of the irrationality of the capitalist profit system that has let this whole country’s infrastructure rot away.

Overworked and underpaid, TWU Local 100, along with members of the Amalgamated Transit Union, are the ones who keep the subways and buses running. This gives transit workers enormous potential power to fight for decent wages and working conditions, for more jobs and better service on behalf of the city’s millions of working people. To do that means taking on the MTA bosses and the government they answer to. And that requires fighting against the program of a supposed partnership with the bosses and their political parties that has defined generations of Local 100 bureaucrats and undermined the power of this union. But none of the slates in the union elections offer a way forward.

The current leadership under Tony Utano is widely reviled for bootlicking service to the MTA brass. While Utano is an acolyte of former Local 100 president (now TWU International president) John Samuelsen, some of his opponents style themselves after Roger Toussaint, Samuelsen’s predecessor in the Local 100 bureaucracy. All of the contenders support the capitalist Democratic Party. Utano endorsed Cuomo, an enemy of public workers unions, in this year’s gubernatorial primary. Others favored Cynthia Nixon, who began her campaign



Upgrading switch equipment on Sixth Ave. line, 2017. Transit workers face more speedup, hazardous conditions under “state of emergency.”

## TWU Local 100 Elections: Sellouts and Fakers

by attacking transit and construction workers before figuring out that donning a “pro-union” mask was a better way to keep workers tied to the Democrats. With the Local 100 contract due to expire in May, none of the slates make a point of opposing New York’s Taylor Law, which bans strikes by NYC transit workers and other state employees.

These elections are basically a contest over who gets to act as labor lieutenants for the MTA and the governor. The TWU, like the rest of the labor movement, needs a leadership that fights it out class against class, independent of and in opposition to all political parties and state agencies of the capitalist enemy.

### No to “Law and Order” Unionism!

Anyone who rides the subways knows that the homeless population on the trains and in the stations has mushroomed in recent years. Tossed onto capitalism’s

scrap heap, many of the homeless suffer mental illness, aggravating their desperate state. Occasional confrontations resulting from this situation come on top of the rise in physical assaults on subway personnel by members of the public enraged over delays and service breakdowns. In the guise of protecting workers, the Local 100 bureaucrats have joined with management to whip up support for more cops to beat down the homeless and suspected wrongdoers (read minority youth). Wanted posters cosigned by the TWU and MTA have gone up in terminals with pictures of black and Latino “perps.” Utano echoes the bosses’ calls to equip workers with body cams, a scheme to both spy on workers and aid police attacks on the homeless and others.

The Progressive Action (PA) caucus of Tramell Thompson also calls for more repression of the homeless, who are being driven out of the stations at the same time

that “progressive” Democratic mayor Bill de Blasio is cracking down on people sleeping on the streets. Thompson, whose base is among younger train operators and conductors, seeks to appeal particularly to black workers who bear the brunt of the MTA’s notorious “plantation justice” disciplinary system. Yet this supposed “militant,” a supporter of Black Lives Matter, complains that none of those on the wanted posters are getting caught and wants more cops deployed in transit. The result would be further brutalization of the poor and more union victims like Kiyva Rivera, a female train conductor viciously assaulted by the NYPD in 2016, and black station agent Darryl Goodwin, hounded to death after he didn’t open a subway gate fast enough for the cops.

In the worst tradition of Samuelsen, Toussaint and other Local 100 mislead-ers, Thompson lauds the Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association (PBA) as a strong “union,” painting the cops as fellow trade unionists. These are deadly lies! The cops are the hired thugs of racist capitalist “law and order.” Their job is to break strikes, terrorize blacks and other minorities and repress any struggle against this rotten system. The police have no place in the labor movement! Neither do their security guard auxiliaries. Transit Property Protection Agents out of the TWU! The union has no business collaborating with the cops in any crackdown against the homeless.

Tirades against the homeless by the Local 100 tops and their would-be replacements serve the bosses by pitting transit workers against the poor. The hysteria over crime diverts attention from the real source of violence and abuse of workers: the capitalist exploiters, their government and their cops.

Because of its reach throughout the city, the TWU can win broad public support for its struggles against the MTA slave drivers. By the same token, the union should be a leading force in the fight for a massive public works program; for free mass transit; for health care and decent jobs for the unemployed and working poor, many of whom are one missed paycheck away from being tossed onto the streets. Union power must be mobilized against the fascist race-terrorists, as happened on

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Racist police hassle homeless man, January 2018. In August 10 tweet, Progressive Action caucus grotesquely criticizes Local 100 tops for not having done more to publicize “Wanted” posters jointly issued by union and MTA bosses.