

Mass Strike

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In Defense of Immigrants

Mass Strike

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Workers' Emancipation Will Be Carried Out By Workers Themselves
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"We should not be financing the funding of Essex County, or anywhere, on blood money! We need to tax the rich, not traffic in human beings!" - Jay Arena

On Cover - Top: RDM at the Cherry Blossom Festival on April 14, 2018. **Left:** #LetThemStay protest demanding the closure of Australian concentration camps (© Zebedee Parkes). **Right:** Protest against "Foreigner Law" in Madrid, Spain on Oct. 17, 2009. (Álvaro Herráiz San Martín CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

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Movement Against Immigrant Detention in NJ—A Spark to a Wider Fire

By Eric Lerner and Jay Arena

Movement for Socialism · International Luxemburgist Network



Left to right: Essex County Sheriff Fontoura, "Joe D.", "friend" of immigrants Cory Booker (NJ Senator) and Trump

A version of this article was published in [Counterpunch](#)

"Close ICE Jails!" That's the slogan launched by a network of activists in New Jersey whose immediate goal is to close the detention centers that house immigrants seized by the Immigration and Custom Enforcement agency, ICE. The new network, Resist the Deportation Machine Network, initiated the campaign with protests aimed at the Essex County Correctional Facility in Newark, NJ. But activists intend to spread the campaign through NJ and link up with others fighting to close detention centers everywhere.

Equally important, RDM has mobilized organizers from 25 groups, including not only immigrant rights organizations, but as well unions and groups concerned with worker rights, women's rights, civil rights, environmental issues, and socialist organizations. RDM has built this broad coalition by making clear in its public statements that it is fighting to protect the rights of all.

To build the unity of all workers, and to counter the ruling class efforts to pit native born against immigrant workers, the RDM network adopted in January, 2018 basic Points of Unity (see box) that state: "All who live here, regardless of national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation or gender, have equal rights: they have the right to quality free education, health care, transportation, housing and clean energy, and they have the right to good jobs at good wages."

Pulling a network together

The RDM network originated out of an effort to pull together the many small immigrant-rights organizations in Northern NJ. On the initiative of one of these groups, Cosecha, the local branch of a national organization, two dozen activists met October 21, 2017 in Newark, the



*"ICE's puppet!
Stop Joe D. selling out families for blood money!"*

largest city in NJ. The previous month, the Trump administration had announced that it was ending the protections of DACA recipients, those immigrants who had come to the US as children. Increased waves of detentions and deportations of immigrants generally were well under way. The activists discussed ways that they could cooperate in mobilizing a movement to effectively defend the immigrants and disrupt the detention and deportation machine.

At the meeting, Jay Arena, an ILN activist and member of the Movement for Socialism, emphasized the need to break groups out of single issue “silos” and come together on a program of broad demands, linked to concerted actions. As an example of such actions, Jay put forward the demand to close the immigrant detention center in Newark, which was run by the Essex County government in cooperation with ICE. A newly formed ad hoc committee, Stop Immigrant Detention in Essex county(SIDEC) was already organizing a rally behind this demand. A national campaign to cripple the detention system would be critical in developing the pressure needed to protect immigrants generally.

Other participants joined in advocating a broad movement, linking together the critical issues facing all immigrants and all workers. An activist from Anakbayan NJ described their efforts to redirect military funding to free education for all, ending the military aggressions that increase forced migrations. A second concrete action advocated by activists from DIRE, a Central Jersey organization (as well as by others) was the expansion of rapid response networks to counter ICE raids.

The participants agreed to join together to form a Resist the Deportation Machine network and formulate joint goals and actions at future meetings.

Targeting the County

On Nov. 9, two dozen activists organized by

RDM Network Points of Unity

We are activists working to end all immigrant detentions and deportations. These detentions and deportations, as part of the whole system of mass incarceration, are assaults on the rights of all. All who live here, regardless of national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation or gender, have equal rights: they have the right to quality free education, health care, transportation, housing and clean energy, and they have the right to good jobs at good wages.

1) All who live here have equal rights

End all deportations, end all detentions, end all violations of due process rights, end all limits on the right to vote, to unionize, to organize and to strike. Freedom of movement for all.

2) All who live here have the right to quality free education, health care, transportation, housing and clean energy

We will not be pitted against each other to fight for a share of inadequate public services. The government can and must provide quality services for all, paid for by taxing the rich and corporations slashing weapons spending and ending all US wars and occupations that force people to migrate.

3) All who live here have the right to good jobs at good wages.

We will not be pitted against each other to fight for a share of too few, underpaid jobs. Providing quality free education, health care, transportation, housing and clean energy will also provide good jobs for all.

SIDEC and other groups rallied outside the Essex County government offices in downtown Newark, demanding that the county immediately end the contract to hold 800 immigrant detainees for ICE. In speeches at the



County Executive Joe D(eportation) actively listens to his constituents at the Cherry Blossom Festival on April 14, 2018.

rally and, later, in speeches directly to the Board of Chosen Freeholders at their meeting that evening, organizers explained that detention of the immigrants without charge or trial, in violation of the Bill of Rights, was an attack on the rights of all. "If these immigrants can be held without charge or trial, anyone can be", the author of this article said at the rally. "The detention centers are really what we had in this country for Japanese Americans in World War II—concentration camps."

Participants pointed out that deportations and detentions undermine all workers' rights. The threat of arbitrary detention and deportation deters many immigrants from defending their rights to decent wages and working conditions. This hinders the ability of all workers to defend these rights. It is these threats against immigrants, not their presence here, that enable employers to pay them sub-standard wages and remove their safety protections.

In a follow-up letter to the Board of Chosen Freeholders and County executive Joe DiVincenzo, the organizers said "Without ICE's ability to hold up to 41,000 immigrants in

detention, it would be impossible for it to deport the 400,000 or more immigrants per year it is now expelling. Most of the 100 detention facilities are, like the Essex County Correctional Center, leased from local authorities. Shutting down one of these centers will inspire other campaigns throughout the country. Multiple shut-downs will impede ICE's entire deportation operation. The fewer places available to hold detainees, the fewer deportations." The rally was widely covered in the [local press and TV](#), giving visibility and momentum to the new campaign.

The Board and DiVincenzo, all Democrats, are caught in their own contradictions. Like other Democrats, in words, they support immigrants, declaring Essex county a sanctuary for immigrants. But, also like other Democrats, in deeds they cooperate with ICE, with DiVincenzo in particular defending the ICE contract as needed for Essex County's income. County Executive DiVincenzo has pointed to the profits generated by Essex County immigrant detention program. "Shame on Essex County for profiting off people who have no legal recourse," replied Karin Vanoppen, an activist with RDM. "We can't

have a sanctuary city and county who fills budget gaps and creates jobs jailing innocent people and breaking up families,” says Alejandro Jaramillo of Cosecha NJ. “It is time for city and county governments to stand in true solidarity with immigrants and stop partnering with ICE.”

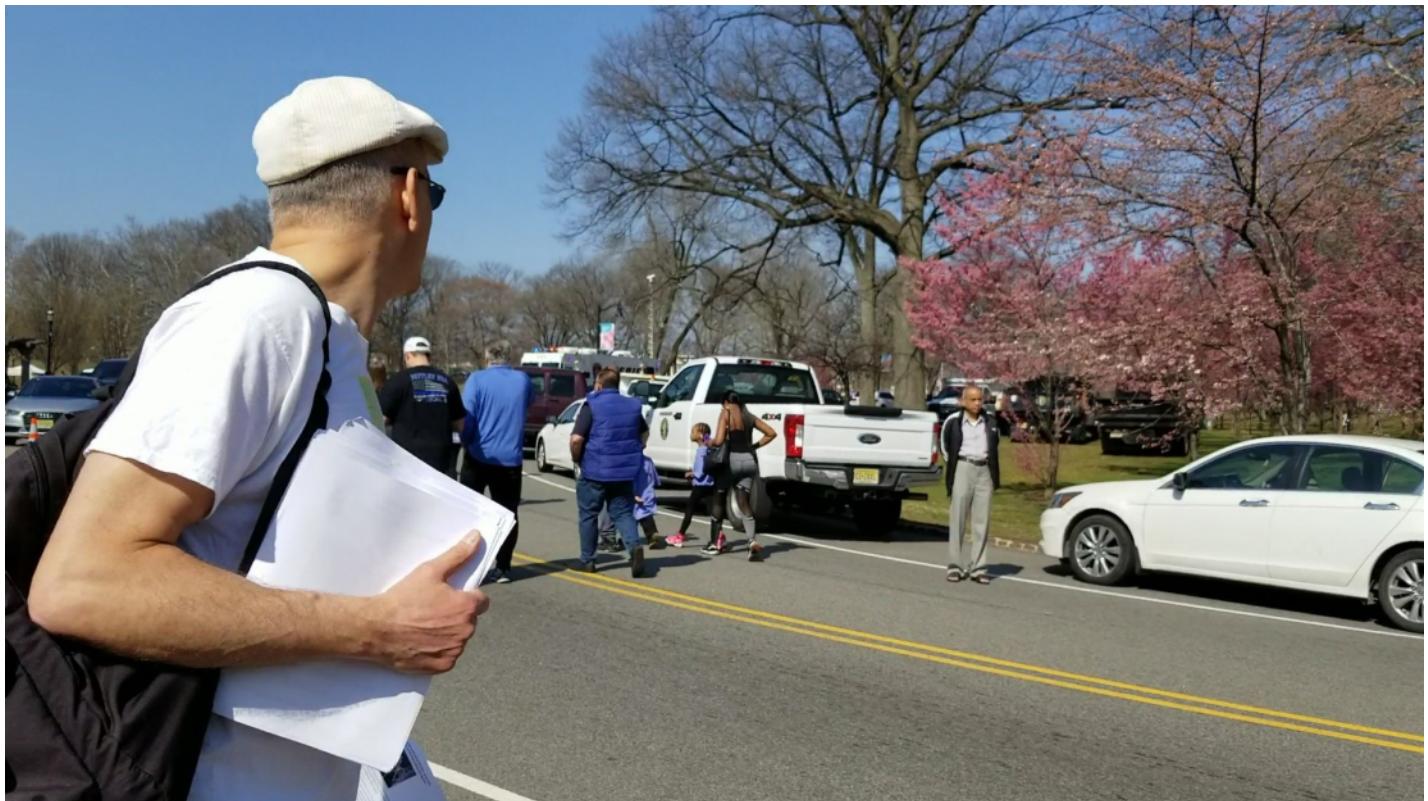
Agreeing on the goals

In December, the RDM agreed that the campaign to close the detention centers would be its first joint action. Essex would be the first target, but organizers intended that the campaign will rapidly spread to nearby Hudson and Bergen counties, and inspire similar campaigns throughout the country. A larger rally was targeted for outside the Essex County detention center on Jan.27, 2018.

In the context of common actions, the new network debated what were their common goals. In the past ILN activists had found little support among activists for broad demands, like Jobs for All, as ways to unify the movement.

Activists tended to find such demands as too far beyond what seemed possible. Now, however, the network was considering adopting similar concepts as points of unity—goals for the movement that were not yet immediate demands, but that could show concretely how the immediate demands were linked to the broader interests of the entire working class.

There was an active debate within the network to clarify what was the point, the usefulness of having such points of unity. Some feared that, since the initial draft contained the words “we all agree”, that the point of unity would be used to exclude groups who did not specifically endorse them. Through debate on the Internet and in a series of meetings, activists clarified that the points of unity are intended to say what we were for, what our vision is. They counter the divisive narrative that claims that anything won for immigrants must be at the expense of the native-born. The points of unity instead make clear that we are fighting for the rights of all, for an expansion of the resources available to all, not for a re-distribution of the crumbs left



This is not the race County Executive Joe D(eporation) agreed to attend! Jay Arena of SIDEc and Luxemburgist International Network hot in pursuit at the Cherry Blossom Festival on April 14, 2018.

to us by the billionaires. Its purpose is to guide the public statements, literature, online messages, etc. that are made on behalf of RDM, in explanation of our actions and demands. Once these points were clarified in the exact wording, the points of unity were overwhelmingly adopted.

The unity strategy scored its first success when more than 100 activists from a broad coalition of over 25 unions and immigrant rights, worker rights, women's rights, civil rights, environmental, and socialist organizations demonstrated January 27 at the Essex County Correctional Facility (ECCF) in Newark, demanding to shut down immigrant detention there.

"These hardworking detainees should be released immediately to be reunited with their families," says Carol Gay, President, NJ State Industrial Union Council, one of the endorsing organizations. "They have not been charged with crimes. Profiting from human suffering and detainment of innocent people is immoral."

The rally concluded with a brief, symbolic blocking of the guards' entrance to the jail, as the demonstrators chanted "shut it down, we'll be back!"

RDM intends to escalate the campaign, starting with confronting DiVincenzo at campaign and other events. Other steps under discussion are a possible independent candidacy against him, a ballot initiative to end the contract with ICE and direct action to close the detention facility. One possibility is to link the issue of how to replace the blood money in the ICE contract to the savings that could be made by replacing the county's dozens of profitable contractors with direct government employment, a "deprivatization" campaign that would strike at the heart of Joe D.'s power base and link the interests of immigrants and government workers.

In addition to continuing to broaden the



RDM activists tell Joe D(eportation) to "close ICE jails" at the Cherry Blossom Festival.

campaign locally, RDM activists believe that spreading the campaign is key to its success. We think that the campaign to close the detention facilities is the most direct way to throw a wrench in the deportation machine. We clearly can't wait for Congress to act. Shutting down this whole machine is the best way to protect the rights of all now threatened with deportation—the DACA youth, Salvadorans, Haitians, Hondurans and others losing their Temporary Protected Status (TPS), everyone who lives here. We urge those who fight this campaign locally to get in touch with us, so we can support and coordinate with each other's work.

At the same time, we are urging groups everywhere to adopt the "points of unity" as the best way to rally broad support. This broad statement of basic rights applies everywhere, not just in the US, but with trivial changes anywhere in the world where capitalists try to pit workers against each other. They are a concise statement of the common interests of the entire working class. To the extent that we can build our unity behind these common interests, and link them to concrete struggles, like those one against the detention centers, we can build the movement needed to win.

Our Answer to The Muslim Ban—Freedom Of Movement, Equal Rights and Citizenship for All

Statement of Movement for Socialism



"No Hate, No Fear, Everyone is Welcome Here!" This chant, popular at the many airport demonstrations against Trump's Muslim ban, embodies the real alternative to the ban—Freedom of Movement, free immigration, for all. The alternative to Trump's naked discrimination in immigration is not a return to the disguised discrimination of existing immigration law. The only way to protect the rights of all is to defend the freedom of movement of all—guaranteeing to all the right to choose where they live. That is the only policy that can protect the rights of working people everywhere.

When the Movement for Socialism demands "Equal Rights and Citizenship for All Who Live Here" we don't mean just those living here today. We mean welcoming everyone who chooses to come here, in the past or in the future.

That was, after all, the original "immigration policy" of the United States. Up until 1879, it was the policy of the United States to, in the words of an 1868 treaty between the US and China, "recognize the inherent and inalienable right of man to change his home and allegiance, and also the mutual advantage of the free migration and emigration of their citizens and subjects, respectively, from the one country to the other for purposes of curiosity, of trade, or as permanent residents."

Today, just as in 1868, nothing in the US Constitution allows the US government control over who moves here or who leaves. The

present immigration laws are all unconstitutional.

The mass actions against this ban can be the first big step in building a unified movement for all our demands, not just against a particular executive order. Defending the right of all who live here and all who come here is part of defending the equal rights of all, whether they be immigrants, racial or ethnic minorities, women, gays, disabled, union members or whatever group Trump and the capitalist system singles out. The demand unifying all these struggles is "Equal Right and Citizenship for all Who Live Here!"

But to welcome all to live where they choose is to provide enough education, housing, transportation, medical services and energy for all. So our demand for a massive federal project to expand these vital services so that they can be free for all is vital to a coherent program that guarantees freedom of movement. Without such a demand, we can't counter the virulent idea that we must fight each other over the crumbs left to us by the capitalists.

Since the only way to fund such a program is to take the money from those who have stolen it—the capitalists and the corporations—this demand makes clear as well who and where the real enemy is—the Enemy is at Home!

So, to defend basic rights, we must demand that we all get the free housing, education, transportation, health service and energy that we need.

Mobilize! In defense of immigrants, for an alternative to capitalist politics

By Eric Lerner and Jay Arena



Protest against Trump's Muslim ban Executive Order at Newark Airport, January, 2017

The surprise victory of Trump signals a new level of assaults on immigrant workers in the United States, and through them, on the entire working class. It reveals the inability of the Democratic Party to function even as the "lesser evil" illusion so dear to the hearts of many on the left. To activists, this outcome poses the danger of escalating racist assaults, but at the same time the potential for a massive counter-mobilization and for the initiation, at long last, of a real alternative to capitalist politics.

The most immediate threat is to undocumented immigrants, particularly those in the "Deferred Action" (DACA) programs. Trump has repeatedly promised to end these young people's working papers and to immediately detain and deport them and their families, some 2-3 million immigrants. He will have the power to do so as soon as he is sworn in, as the deferments were granted only by executive actions. While currently deportation procedures take time, detentions could begin at once, as could the revocation of work papers.

Trump's behavior is erratic, but there is little reason to expect he will hesitate to fulfill this particular election pledge, which involves no conflict with competing capitalist interest, unlike his trade-war vows. An all-out assault on immigrants would in fact befit wide swaths of employers by creating an increasingly desperate workforce.

The DACA program was won by a political mobilization of immigrant youth. There is every reason to believe that this coalition and a much broader one could be mobilized to fight ALL deportations. The spontaneous anti-Trump demonstrations, while unorganized, are evidence of the determination of people to act. What is needed is not a national mass demonstration, which can easily be ignored, but mobilization on the ground, locally and regionally to physically block detentions and deportation, as was done successfully in the Southwest in recent years. As mass mobilizations of abolitionists nullified Fugitive Slave laws in New England before the Civil War,

so mass mobilizations today must nullify any attempt at mass detention.

The time to mobilize is NOW, in the two months before Trump is inaugurated. Immigrant rights, civil rights, peace, African-American and other organizations must as soon as possible set up meetings everywhere to plan Rapid Response Networks that can mobilize to block detentions and attempted deportations. ALL detentions and deportations must be blocked. When confronted with resolute opposition, Trump has shown that he will back down.

But any response to attacks on immigrants will have only limited and temporary effects unless at the same time we start NOW building a broad alternative to capitalist politics and power. The working class sorely lacks any effort to build a

party that represents its interests not just at elections, but year-round, bringing the same program to every battle, in every place mobilizing the broadest layers in defense of common interests. In the face of capitalist racism, bigotry and misogyny, we need a PARTY FOR ALL.

The outline of the common program of such a broad-based, democratically-run party are already clear in demands that have been adopted at various times and places around the country and the world. There can be, and no doubt will be discussion over details, but in broad outline we can agree on three basic points:

1. JOBS FOR ALL/FREE PUBLIC SERVICES FOR ALL



Movement for Socialism (and International Luxemburgist Network) member Jay Arena lead chants at Jan. 20 march in Newark for Free public services, Jobs for all, Equal rights and citizenship for all and Public banks for all.



Jan. 20 March in Newark, NJ

A democratically-controlled federal public works and public service program to provide **free** education (through college), healthcare, housing, transportation and clean energy **FOR ALL** through direct government employment with good wages and reduced hours. Fund the program by taxing the wealthy and corporations, slashing weapons spending and ending US wars and occupations. Through this program, provide jobs and training **FOR ALL** who want them, including all immigrants and the formerly incarcerated.

2. RIGHTS FOR ALL

Legalization **FOR ALL** who live here, equal rights **FOR ALL**, including the right to vote. End all deportation and detention without charge.

End mass incarceration. Unconditional defense of the rights of women to control their bodies, and of the rights of all, regardless of race, religion, or any other distinction. Unlimited right to unionize, organize and strike.

3. BANKS FOR ALL

Nationalization of all finance (banking, insurance, etc.) under democratic control.

It is not too early to begin building such a movement-based party to run candidates in state elections in 2017 and nationally in 2018. It is not too early to connect every struggle to a common program. Is this realistic? We must make it reality. What is not realistic is to continue to rely on the Democrats.

The Capitalist Attack On Public Education: How Do We Fight Back?

By Jay Arena



Queens College campus CUNY
Muhammad Ghouri (CC BY 2.0)

The U.S. ruling class, like their counterparts across the globe, have stepped up the attack on public sector workers and services in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis. Public education—one of the largest non-military components of public spending and highly unionized—has been a primary target of this class offensive. Between 2008 and 2015, budget cuts have led to nearly 300,000 fewer K-12 teachers and other support workers while the student population has grown by over 800,000 during the same time period.

Far from bailing out local school districts, the Democratic Obama administration used the budget crises to step up the expansion of privatized, union busting “charter” schools. Going far beyond his Republican predecessor, Obama’s so-called “race to the top” initiative has led to the closure and/or privatization of public schools across the country, particularly those with high percentages of black and Latino students and teachers.

Public colleges and universities, whose major source of funding is from state governments, have been assaulted by Democratic and Republican governors and legislatures alike.

Between 2009 and 2015 state funding for two and four year public universities dropped nearly \$10 billion, with states now spending 18% less per student than they did before the recession. Budget gaps have been closed through expanded use of contingent “adjunct” faculty and skyrocketing tuition increases.

These cuts have helped construct a \$1.3 trillion mountain of student debt, an amount that now exceeds all credit card and auto loan debt combined.

The Long War on CUNY

The City University of New York is the largest urban public university system in the U.S., with over 275,000 students, 20,000 faculty, and



CUNY Professors and student demonstrate at College of Staten Island

15,000 technical, clerical, and maintenance workers across 23 campuses. The long term assault on CUNY that began in the mid-1970s was part of the larger ruling class offensive to confront their crisis of profitability and labor discipline. As part of the bosses solution to the crisis—above all instilling the crucially important ideological message that “nothing is free” (for the working class)—CUNY instituted tuition for the first time beginning in 1976.

Despite important periods of student and labor protest, such as in the late 1980s, the state and city have continued to starve CUNY for funds. Between 1991 and 2015, state support has declined from 74% to only 53% of the CUNY budget. During the same period state aid per student has dropped by 35% in inflation adjusted dollars. Like elsewhere, the cost of this underfunding has been placed on the backs of students and workers through increased tuition, deteriorating facilities, dubious “on-line” classes, and drastically increased use of contingent

faculty paid a fraction of what full-time faculty receive. From a minuscule percentage before the 1970’s fiscal crisis, today contingent faculty comprise some two-thirds of the approximately 20,000 member faculty, and teach over half the classes, at CUNY.

The Bureaucrats’ Dead-End Strategy

The Professional Staff Congress (PSC), affiliated to the AFL-CIO’s American Federation of Teachers, represents the 25,000 faculty and professional staff at CUNY. Members had been, until recently, working under a contract that expired in October of 2010, and received the last contractual raise (as opposed to regular step increases under the expired contract) in 2009. Although the union bargains with CUNY management and board of trustees, the real power is held by the Governor, Andrew Cuomo. A loyal ally of Wall Street and vying to be a “serious” future presidential candidate, Cuomo was holding hard on his agenda of public sector

austerity, school privatization and massive corporate tax breaks.

In the fall of 2015, after several years of fruitless bargaining sessions and a civil disobedience action at CUNY headquarters, the University finally presented a wage “offer” of 6% over six years (including the years without contract). On the other side of the ledger the cost of living in New York shot up 23% between 2009-2014: CUNY was really demanding a serious wage cut. In the face of an intransigent Governor, and the clear bankruptcy of their lobbying strategy of their Democratic Party allies, the PSC leadership called a rare public meeting of the entire membership to lay out their new strategy.

On November 19, 2015, at the famed Cooper Union in Manhattan, some 1,000 PSC members gathered to hear union President Barbara Bowen and other top union officials enunciate—not democratically debate—their plan. The new organizing blueprints amounted to a series of escalating public protests targeting the Governor and CUNY Chancellor, including

symbolic civil disobedience actions coordinated with the police. These protests—all corralled into the NYPD’s notorious “protest pens”—were to be combined with stepped up pleading with CUNY management to work with the union to lobby the Governor and state legislature in Albany to secure funding for a “fair” contract. The one new significant proposal Bowen made was the leadership’s decision—first announced at the October delegate assembly meeting of campus chapter representatives—to hold a “strike authorization vote.” The vote, if approved, would give the leadership the authority to call a strike and defy New York State’s public sector strike ban. Under the hated Taylor law, which governs state and local government public sector collective bargaining, a strike ban is backed up by severe penalties, although workers (but not the PSC) have successfully defied it in the past. Despite the seemingly radical step, no date was set for the vote nor were plans initiated to elect a strike committee to build for a serious class struggle strike.



While the PSC advertised the November mass meeting as an opportunity for members “to discuss and plan for the (strike) vote” and overall strategy, little or no opportunity was provided for meaningful debate and decision making. The only space for rank and file input was the one minute allotted—yes, one minute—at the end of the meeting to address those gathered.

I used my time to argue that the only way to make advances was by mobilizing our own ranks, our students, other CUNY workers and the broader working class. That is, we needed, a new strategic orientation away from seeking alliances from above with CUNY management and “friends of labor” in the Democratic Party, and toward a class wide struggle from below. As a first step in forging that unity I advocated the union adopting three key demands: 1. Ending the two-tier teaching regime through establishing equal pay for equal work, 2. A free, open admissions CUNY, 3. A mass, democratically controlled, direct-government employment program to create free public services and jobs for all.

The “open mike” session was of course not designed for allowing any real democratic input and discussion, but it was useful—though unintended by the leadership—for various dissident currents within the union to connect.

CUNY Struggle and the March 12 (2016) Popular Assembly

At the November 19th mass meeting I made contact with two CUNY graduate students who were also disgruntled with the bankrupt strategy of the union leadership and their anti-democratic decision making. They had recently started holding meetings with a group of mainly graduate students under the loose banner of “CUNY Struggle.” I subsequently met with the two activists to see how we might collaborate. Informed by Rosa Luxemburg’s emphasis on workers forging unity through democratically deciding on their common demands and plan of

struggle to win the demands, and drawing on the experience with a similar initiative that ILN members helped spearhead in 2013 in Newark, New Jersey, I proposed organizing a “Popular Assembly” to unite the various dissident ranks within CUNY. They agreed and we began working on what would eventually be called the “CUNY Popular Assembly.”

From January-March 2016 we met several times, in meetings ranging from a handful to twenty people to plan out the Popular Assembly (PA). The largest contingent were graduate students, but the gatherings also brought in undergraduates students, with the largest number affiliated with a Maoist-influenced student group—Revolutionary Student Coordinating Committee (RSCC)—as well other full time and contingent faculty, and community members.

The original idea was to develop a set of demands through discussions at the PA planning meetings as well as at “pre-assembly” gatherings at as many CUNY campuses as possible. These demands would then be debated, amended, and voted upon at the PA. The second part of the PA would be deciding on a set of actions to build support and a powerful movement around them.

Instead of a pre-PA assembling of demands, the mainly graduate students organizers decided to have “breakout sessions” in the first part of the PA for attendees to discuss issues and develop demands. These groups would then report back to the larger assembly on what they decided. From this list the PA facilitators and attendees would then select the demands that were shared by various groups and bring these up for a discussion and vote.

The March 12 day-long PA, which was attended by approximately one-hundred students, faculty and other CUNY workers, and community members, followed the above format. Out of the varied demands/proposals that emerged from the breakout sessions, seventeen were agreed

upon. These ranged from ending the two tier regime through equal pay for equal work, to a free open admissions CUNY, to abolishing the CUNY board of trustees and creating a university democratically-run by workers and students.

The time spent on the breakout sessions reduced time for assembling and then debating the proposed demands, all of which led to some confusion on what was actually being debated. Adding to difficulties was the sectarian intervention of members of the “Internationalist Group,” whose members used their time to lecture and harangue attendees rather than address the demands being debated.

The end result was that while the PA did agree on the seventeen demands there was little time—partly due to the ambivalence of some of the key organizers—to address the most crucial part of the gathering: the actions that would be taken. In the end, the PA came to no agreement on any actions/campaigns/plans to win the

demands we had agreed upon. Partly due to the exhaustion of activists following the PA, the subsequent implosion of RSCC, and lack of agreement on actions, CUNY Struggle meetings went dormant and most activity was relegated to the CUNY Struggle list serve and blog.

Nonetheless, despite the setbacks, the fact that activists, despite their differences, were able to hold the PA and democratically discuss and agree on set of demands was an important advance. This was a crucial step in building the powerful movement we need.

Off-Broadway Theater: Cuomo’s Cuts and the Strike Authorization Vote

The most crucial action item the PA failed to address was that of the pending strike authorization vote. In January 2016 Governor Cuomo announced a \$485 million state cut to CUNY—a third of state funding. At the same time he “offered” to redirect \$240 million of the cut for a contract settlement in an effort to drive





a wedge between faculty and the students who would bear the brunt of these cuts. The PSC denounced the cut and stepped up plans to hold, for one of the few times since the union's formation in the early 1970s, a strike authorization vote.

Finally held in early May, members approved the measure by a resounding 92% margin. Yet, there was no serious effort to build for a strike. No strike committees, as union activist Sandor John had called for at the November 19th meeting, were formed. The effort to reach out to the broader working class consisted of the formation of the "CUNY Rising Alliance," which was essentially a collection of foundation funded non-profits and union officials, all of whom orbit around the Democratic Party. In contrast to the PA, CUNY Alliance did not provide the rank and file of the member groups an opportunity to democratically decide the demands and actions of the alliance.

In late March, after a civil disobedience action at the Governor's office in Manhattan, Cuomo backed off his \$485 million dollar cut. This was

pure theater on Cuomo's part, with the PSC part of the supporting cast. The decision allowed the PSC leadership to claim, to their base, that their "militant" actions had garnered concessions. Cuomo, on the other hand, could look reasonable and magnanimous while still pleasing his base of Wall Street vultures by the continued starvation of CUNY. Therefore, we were back to square one since the concluded 2016 legislative session—famously decided by the "three men in a room" (Governor and heads of the Senate and Assembly)—did not include new money for a contract nor funding for the union's "Maintenance of Effort" MOE bill to cover increased general operating expenses.

The VOTE NO Campaign

Over the summer of 2016, after students and faculty had dispersed, the PSC and CUNY entered into "intense negotiations." In late June a tentative deal was reached that provided for a 10.4% across the board salary increase over seven years—from 2010, when the contract expired, through October 2017. This was basically the same as that reached by the

AFSCME union representing clerical and maintenance workers a week earlier.

Activists in CUNY Struggle, and a wider layer of contingent faculty, mounted a campaign against the sell-out contract. Three main critiques were advanced by the NO VOTE campaign. First, the wage increase did not keep up with the national inflation rate over the period of the contract and was well below that of NYC, especially for housing. Therefore, the union had effectively agreed to a wage cut. Second, the negotiated across the board wage increase deepened the pay gap between the tenure/tenure track faculty and contingent faculty. Furthermore, the supposed gain of three year contracts for contingent adjunct faculty, instead of the current one year, would only cover a small fraction in that category while introducing yet another tier. Third, the union signed off on a significant increase in the number of non-tenured Lecturer positions, while those with three year contacts would be subject to continuous reviews, all representing a further erosion of tenure.

CUNY Struggle activists and others spoke against the approval of the contract at the union's July delegate assembly meeting where it was presented for approval before being sent to the entire membership for a vote. President Bowen acknowledged that this was not the contract they wanted, but emphasized "you can't go out on strike for simply a few percentage increase in pay" if you want to mobilize the membership. In my intervention I agreed with Bowen's assessment and argued this is why we need to strike over ending the two tier divide and for a free, open admissions CUNY. This is the kind of strike that would inspire and mobilize our members, students and broader working class.

CUNY activists, despite taking place during the summer lull, organized pickets at the PSC and CUNY central offices calling for a NO VOTE. Through articles written by the CUNY Struggle supporters and others, along with press coverage of the protests, the campaign received

significant media coverage, particularly in left oriented outlets.

The PSC leadership, grouped in the "New Caucus," has assiduously cultivated a left image in The Nation and similar outlets, and thus was particularly stung by the critiques emanating from these venues. Bowen, along with fellow union officer Nivedita Majumdar, and contract bargaining committee member and the leading contingent faculty supporter of the leadership, Michael Batson, feverishly issued pieces defending their "militant and progressive union" and the contract they had won. The pieces oscillated between touting the "strategic change" won in the contract and "power to win more," while warning of the dangers of losing everything by voting to reject the contract.

Batson for example, warned that "voting no on this contract without a realistic and achievable plan to win something better would be a major setback for our members." He failed to add that the leadership repeatedly blocked any discussion of an alternative to their losing strategy.

In the end, with little opportunity for a critical debate, and going years without a raise, the contract was approved in early August by a 94% margins and with some 72% of the union's members voting.

Building a Class Wide Alternative

The political challenge now before CUNY workers and students is the same facing our brethren across the USA: how do we mount an effective fightback in the face of the united ruling class assault? The current modus operandi of the PSC union leadership, as demonstrated by the recent concluded contract campaign is simply, despite the radical verbiage, to negotiate the terms of surrender. This leadership does of course, often eloquently, denounce the many capitalist attacks on public education. But, when it comes to building a real fightback, their response, in the end, is



CUNY Strike of 1969

essentially the same as Margaret Thatcher: There is no alternative. The rise of Trump has only intensified this losing politics among the trade unions and non-profits as they tighten their embrace of the Democratic Party in a desperate attempt to protect the privileges and perks of the bureaucrats in the name of “fighting the right” and defending their membership.

In contrast, we must be clear that there is an alternative and it begins by demanding what we want, not what we have been told is permissible. At the top of that agenda must be ending the two-tier divide between full time and contingent faculty and for reestablishing a free, open admissions CUNY. These are an initial set of demands that can unite CUNY workers, students, and the broader working class in a powerful strike movement that could really build and exercise working class power.

The upcoming contract campaign—the recently signed agreement expires in November 2017—offers an opportunity to build movement around these demands and present a real

alternative to the dead end strategy of the current leadership. Unfortunately, the self-appointed leadership of CUNY Struggle—mainly by dint of controlling the email list serve—has moved to block any attempt to build a political challenge. A few CUNY Struggle meetings were held in the early Fall of 2017 to decide on a plan of struggle for the contract. The leadership, who are clearly more interested in having a discussion list rather than forging a clear political challenge to the current leadership, ran the meetings to guarantee no agreement could be reached. Exasperated, attendance declined and then the graduate student leaders stopped calling meetings altogether. When some objected to not calling meetings, and others attempted to raise a discussion about the need for CUNY Struggle to take a clear position of independence from the Democratic Party, they were purged from the list serve!

While CUNY Struggle has reached a dead end, the pressing need, which Trump’s victory just underscores, is to build a real class wide fightback. This is the only real alternative.

Plateforme 2016 and the Fight for a Workers Program in France (translated from French article in Plateforme site)

Aug. 21 2016

We support and are greatly encouraged by your work in disseminating and popularizing a program of demands that addresses the crisis of unemployment, not only in France but in the entire world. The winning of your demands for a reduction of working hours, for free housing and public services, for naturalization for all would eliminate both mass unemployment and the anti-immigrant campaign that uses unemployment as an excuse. If you can succeed in making these demands a key part of the ongoing struggle against the El-Khomri law, as you are trying to do, it will be a tremendous victory for workers everywhere. In the first week of the occupation of the Place de la République in Paris, activists organized the Program and Perspectives Committee, which was named

“Plateforme2016.” During the first month of the Nuit Debout (Up All Night) movement in April, 2016, we held nightly meetings to discuss our initial proposals for a program of demands: increased wages for workers, financed by a cap on incomes; hiring of the unemployed through a reduction of the work week to 25 hours; liberty and economic democracy through the collective management of companies and through a Federation of workers-consumers.

The atmosphere of these meetings, which gathered 50 to 150 people and lasted from 9 in the evening to midnight or 1 in the morning remains unforgettable to us. Many participants came there to express their suffering at work, the suffering of their relatives, their parents and anger that sometimes accumulated for generations. Those who hesitated to speak at



Students protest labor law

Photo: Clément Gruin (Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA 4.0) 17 March, 2016



High school student protests labor law

Photo: Clément Gruin (Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA 4.0) 17 March, 2016

the impressive Popular Assemblies easily took the floor in the assemblies of our committee. People spoke easily and the discussions were direct. Each meeting allowed us to discuss the objectives of Plateforme2016.

Plateforme2016 is based on the needs expressed by those who are suffering, the real needs of people. These needs, despised by the rulers, the rich and other bourgeois, we want to translate into political objectives, into immediate mobilization targets. We said that the needs of the majority are clearly opposed to the interests of the capitalist minority, of the oligarchy and the direct interests of the whole bourgeoisie, and therefore that we have to wage a class struggle, uniting with those who cannot tolerate the evil that is done to them.

Participants also made clear that the needs of a particular fraction of the oppressed are not

opposed to the needs of this or that other fraction of the exploited people. Quite the contrary! For example, the solution to the unemployment problem is to hire the unemployed in order to both meet the labor needs of the unemployed and provide the free time needed to those who work too, thanks to a drastic drop in the work week.

One question was frequently raised. How to reduce the working time and ensure a maintenance or increase in wages? The answer we have made is simple: the pay gap between top and bottom should be reduced and a cap placed on income. According to all available data, we could easily double the income of half of the poorest French by a more egalitarian policy.

Discussions on the issue of salary increase and the issue of income inequality has led us to

argue regularly about proposals for "salary for life" and the "universal income," on the question of the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and the meaning that we had to give this slogan, and on the differences between bourgeois property that we would do well to eliminate and the right to personal property or property use, which prohibits its use by others. Once we had covered the main objectives of social change, the debate widened inevitably to the need for revolution and the use of violence to give birth to a true transformation of society.

The initiators of Plateforme2016 gave its main task as helping the Nuit Debout movement to set clear objectives for mobilizing workers and trade unionists involved in the struggle against the Labour Act, objectives that will become part of defining the goals for a new society. After all, wasn't the starting point of Nuit Debout the fight against the Labor Law and the world it represents?

In the fight against the Labor Law and its world, the question of changing the government obviously arises. But how to create the political capacity to get rid of the present government? If the world of the government is characterized by class antagonisms and relations of exploitation, to what world are we going to win? We return to the program, we return to the prospects of the movement.

In line with what was laid on the first night of occupation of the site: "We have nothing to demand," "we want to reclaim the tools to work.'

Through Plateforme2016, we have sought to popularize the objectives for the struggle that would allow us, by direct and collective action, to satisfy by ourselves our own needs, ignoring the employer's authority or the authority of our elected democratic representatives. We said that it is necessary to create counter-powers, counter-institutions, to multiply them on the company level and on a territorial level. We

must lay the foundation of new institutions that will replace the old. Meanwhile, those counter-powers are immediately useful, because they represent the framework of solidarity and mutual assistance which allows us to win a number of intermediate objectives. These counter-powers may represent at first a union or associative core. They can later become a true canvas of workers councils and representative assemblies of entire sectors.

We have nothing to expect from the government of Valls, nor from any government of left or right. We don't accept the slogan "let's be ungovernable." We're opposed to bourgeois dictatorship and powerlessness, the prospect of changing the world, of "governing ourselves by ourselves."

Plateforme2016 Evolves

In the second month of occupation of the square, our meetings were held several times a week rather than daily. In contrast, the interventions of the comrades of the committee were more numerous in the People's Assembly. We presented our main proposals that had been selected and discussed but not yet adopted at the Assembly Saturday, May 15.

We found ourselves in conflict with the militants who had unfortunately little idea of the great responsibility which we had, as active participants of Nuit Debout, to encourage the adoption of clear mobilization targets in the Assemblies, to talk to the people, to talk to workers and to motivate their involvement in the movement against the Labor Law. The few people who have taken a public stand against our proposals had considered that we still enjoyed a lot of time to discuss every detail of the proposals, argued that these proposals have to be approved by other committees, and that therefore the vote of the Assembly at that time was not "legitimate."

Our proposals on hiring the unemployed and lower working time to 25 hours, increasing



Mass demonstration in Paris, July, 2016
Photo: Jules78120 (Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA 4.0)

wages and pensions, financed by the income cap, and collective management of companies in order to meet the social needs of people, in accord with environmental requirements, were finally adopted by a vote of the meeting. But the movement's dynamic was much lower this time, with much lower attendance at the meetings, so unfortunately the vote had nothing of the resonance that adopting this measure would have had a month earlier.

But vote or no vote, besides the daily debates around a project mobilization and social liberation, we presented the Plateforme proposals regularly in the People's Assembly. That was the main thing. In presenting the main amendments, and discussions and debates around these amendments, we could measure the popularity of a number of measures. For example, the abolition of private ownership of means of production and exchange was one of

the most applauded measures by the People's Assembly, at a time when 1,500 or 2,000 participants were present.

New ideas have been advanced and debated, ideas that have made their way and continue to make their way into popular consciousness. It is the great success of our activism.

Plateforme2016, our program of demands, was distributed in more than 15,000 copies. The right-wing press gave us publicity. Joseph Mace-Scaron wrote in Marianne, magazine of the National Front party of Marine Le Pen, that our proposals gave "the impression of coming right out of a mimeograph of the 1970's" (22 to 28 April 2016), while in the rightist newspaper L'Opinion, editorial writer Nicolas Beytout said that our proposals outright revealed "the existence of an absolute danger" (Friday 29 and Saturday, April 30, 2016). In fact, proposals

Plateforme2016 have been widely broadcast on the Web to the point that for several weeks, we were contacted almost daily by people from all over France and even often from abroad.

In early June, a meeting was held in Paris, with a Luxemburgist activist from the US who had contacted us by email and who was excited by the radicalism of our goals. He was able to tell us about his experience with the Occupy Wall Street movement. In South Africa, a group of activists has also directly inspired proposals Plateforme 2016 to write a new manifesto. Our exchanges are published on the blog Plateforme2016.

There is a possible alternative to capitalism! It is desirable for the vast majority, indeed, essential. At Plateforme2016, we wanted to break the mental barriers that prevent us to project ourselves into another world, the world without capitalists, without exploiters, without classes. It is up to us to build it!

We have persevered for nearly three months, but we have not limited our interventions to the Place de la Republique. We also organized

elsewhere.

Several series of leaflets for various demonstrations and rallies against the Labour Act were circulated by the groups formed around Plateforme2016 in front of workplaces, train and subway passengers, where we organized many speeches.

Alongside the stand that we held regularly on the Place de la Republique, people interested in the development of ideas outlined in Plateforme2016 were invited to organizational meetings every week since April 16. It is in this framework that we have decided to publish 2000 double-sided copies to expose our strategy for the fight, and a set of stickers with 15,000 copies.

It is in also in this context that we are trying to organize a movement that aids the struggles of unions and associations, which helps unite these struggles on the objectives of the platform.

We intend to continue the momentum around the occupation of the Place de la Republique. We continue to meet. A first training and



exchange weekend was organized around the issue of social classes and the abolition of bourgeois property. We expect already a meeting outside Paris in the last week of August to engage in reflection around our strategy and our program.

Some of us share the belief that Nuit Debout can be a starting point for building a political movement. Mélenchon has wanted to ally with Nuit Debout. We have heard repeatedly from representatives of Varoufakis, former Greek Finance Minister of the Syriza government.

For us the movement that needs to be continued is that of a liberation movement against capitalist exploitation and oppression, a movement whose strategy and methods accord with its overall objectives. All advances are good to take in the current capitalist framework. But our horizon is certainly not confined to any rotten compromise with the bourgeoisie. We want everything! All the riches of this world, all political power! We do not want to share anything with the gravediggers of humanity, the warmongers, the destroyers of nature, the exploiters of workers!

We believe that we must continue to make the Place de la République in Paris a rallying point, a center of information, exchange and encounter. But we must also move the meeting points and convergence at the base, both at work and at home. This is where the comrades will be most useful in the field. Those who do not come to the Place de la République, who did not come to the demonstrations, who were left behind, we have to go find them, organize them, build with them the bonds of solidarity that will allow us move forward without fear of employers and the government and ignoring their abject blackmail.

We are preparing for the beginning of September. We will help revive the momentum to make the mobilization of September 15 [a national day of protest against the Labor Law] a success.

In this perspective, we are launching now a call for many to participate in the interprovincial Assembly of 8 September, at the Labor Exchange, to organize the mobilization campaign. Several comrades of Plateforme2016 were elected delegates to the Coordinating Committee to organize this meeting. We will go to all the meetings, all the initiatives to organize and unite on concrete and mobilizing objectives of Plateforme2016.

Program adopted by Plateforme2016:

- Hiring of the 6 million unemployed, with 1 additional hiring for every 4 current employees.
- Reduction of work week to 25 hours with a sliding scale of working hours.
- Increase minimum wage to 1,500 euros/month net with retirement, student scholarship and minimum income increased to 1,000 euros/month.
- Transparency of salaries, wages equality for women and men and opening of company accounts.
- Capping of income to 4 times the minimum wage.
- Free health care, regional transport, education, vocational training and opening of the university to all, regardless of age or degree. Free essential goods.
- Requisition of empty housing, abolition of rent and guarantee of the use of the housing property.
- Expropriation of large fortunes, abolition of capitalist property and direct, collective management of companies.
- All power to assemblies of workers and residents to plan production according to social needs and ecological imperatives.

Greetings to Plateforme 2016 from the US section of the International Luxemburgist Network

By Eric Lerner



Mass protest against Labor law

Photo: Jules78120 (Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA 4.0) April 6, 2016

Aug. 21 2016

We support and are greatly encouraged by your work in disseminating and popularizing a program of demands that addresses the crisis of unemployment, not only in France but in the entire world. The winning of your demands for a reduction of working hours, for free housing and public services, for naturalization for all would eliminate both mass unemployment and the anti-immigrant campaign that uses unemployment as an excuse. If you can succeed in making these demands a key part of the ongoing struggle against the El-Khomri law, as you are trying to do, it will be a tremendous victory for workers everywhere.

Here in the United States, we have been working since 2008 to win first a core of activists and then broad masses to a very similar set of demands. In 2011 we joined with other

activists in the Occupy Wall Street Movement to set up the Demands Working Group, which adopted as its first demand *Jobs For All*, "a massive, democratically-controlled public works and public service program, with direct government employment, to create 25 million new jobs at good union wages. This is to be paid for by new taxes on the wealth and income of the rich...as well as by ending all U.S. wars...The new jobs will aim to radically expand access to education, healthcare, housing, mass transit, and clean energy—and are to be open to all, regardless of immigration status or criminal record."

We did not succeed in getting this demand adopted by the entire Occupy movement (due mainly to its undemocratic structure). But in 2013, a conference representing over 100 local and regional organizations in Newark, NJ adopted a very similar demand, making clear

that we were demanding that “the new jobs will be to build the facilities and provide the services to create free quality public services.” This year, this program was introduced into an ongoing struggle at the City University of New York, the third largest public university in the United States, with a total enrollment of more than half a million students. A conference of over 100 professors and students adopted the demand for “free public services for all.”

In this organizing, we have emphasized that there is more than enough work for all to do. The free public services that we all need requires a vast expansion of housing, hospitals, schools, transport and the staffs that build and run them. Infrastructure needs enormous repairs and expansion. This is why “Free public services for all” means “Jobs for all.” We have also emphasized the need for direct government employment.

A century ago Rosa Luxemburg pointed to the critical role of mass-democratic organizations in the leadership of such mass strike movements, a role that has been verified in the many mass strikes since her time. We think that Plateforme2016’s role in advocating the formation of new organizations with mandated and recallable delegates to both lead the struggle and to takeover economic management is a great step forward in disseminating this idea among workers in struggle. The formation of

such organizations on a local, regional, and national scale in the battle against the labor law could provide an alternative to the leadership of the union bureaucrats—an alternative at the national level that was lacking in the great mass strike of May, 1968.

We intend to help spread word of your organizing to the US and to other countries. The International Luxemburgist Network, a small organization of several dozen activists around the world, will be putting a description of Plateforme2016’s history and work in the next issue of our journal, *Mass Strike*. When I met with several of your members in Paris, we agreed to begin to exchange articles in our respective publications, and ILN also will be sharing our articles with workers’ publications in the UK and India. We invite all to visit our website, www.luxemburgism.org to contribute articles to *Mass Strike*, to help with translations into French and to republish our articles.

Luxemburg as well first pointed to the role of unifying demands in preparing the ground for mass strikes that are central to the revolutionary process. The first step in building a global movement around a unified program of demands that are in the interests of workers everywhere is in widely disseminating such demands and integrating them into ongoing struggles. Together we are now taking that first step.



Rosa Luxemburg speaks to a crowd in 1907

Greek Workers' Only Real Hope is Fearless Action

By Eric Lerner



Greek protestors during one day General Strike July, 2011

April 11, 2015

The first act of the Greek drama ended swiftly. Entering “negotiations” with no strategy and no real threat in hand, the new Greek government of Syriza came out empty-handed. Without any fig leaf, the terms of the agreement reached February 20 with the EU are simply an extension of the existing bailout and all its horrors of unending austerity. Despite the apologies from liberals worldwide, the Eurogroup’s statement—the terms the Greeks agreed to are unequivocal: “Funds are to be used only for recapitulation and resolution”—only for paying the debt,” there is no reduction in the debt. “The Greek government promises to pay the creditors in full and timely” and there is no shift in the fiscal surpluses which are to be “in line with the agreement of Nov. 2012.” In other words, the Greek workers must continue to pay off the debt. This is a complete and abject capitulation.

Despite all the rhetoric since this agreement was reached, the Greek government continues to reinforce this capitulation, most recently dutifully paying the IMF debt on April 9, even though it is on the verge of defaulting on pension and wages at the end of April.

But the hopes raised by the Greek election will not disappear so swiftly as the courage of the Syriza cabinet. Now will Greek workers accept passively, as the Prime Minister has, the continuation of crushing austerity policies? A reaction is inevitable as this debacle emerges in government policies.

The question which will determine if that reaction can change those policies and force a real confrontation with the European bankers is what alternative policy can be offered to the craven one of the Syriza leadership? Is the only alternative the exit from the Euro, a new

drachma and drastic devaluation, with its attendant ills of inflation and real wage cuts? What is the actual strategy that can lead Greece out of its impasse?

The answer is that only resolute action that goes beyond the confines of capitalist “reality” can lead Greece, and the rest of Europe forward. That means concrete feasible steps that result in the transfer back to the workers of the tens of billions in wealth that has been taken from them. These steps must include:

Stopping all payments on all foreign debt, limits on the movement of capital out of the country, a tax on the wealth of the richest Greeks, seizure of productive properties for non-payment of taxes and, most important of all, a massive government public works and public services program to put Greeks back to work and restore essential services.

None of these steps require a new currency and all can be accomplished while still using Euros and avoiding a devaluation.

Rescuing Capitalism is Impossible

The key strategic error being made by the Syriza top leadership is made clear in the essay by Finance Minister Varoufakis, “the Confessions of an Erratic Marxist.” Varoufakis writes that it is the duty of leftists to “rescue capitalism”—to save capitalism from the disastrous neo-liberal policies that have been destroying the world economy. To attack capitalism, Varoufakis argues paves the way not for socialism, which he views as politically impossible, but only for fascism.

The fundamental problem with this strategy is that **capitalism is beyond rescue** in the present epoch. As Rosa Luxemburg pointed out a century ago, capitalism requires continual expansion into a non-capitalist surrounding economy to survive. It can’t exist as a closed system. Today, Luxemburg’s concepts are being dramatically confirmed. The only thing keeping the global capitalist economy afloat is the

growth of China’s economy. China’s capitalist economy in turn is financed mainly by the sales of state-owned land. This sale of non-capitalist property fuels the vast infrastructure projects. These projects then produce the demand for a rapid expansion of industry and of imports of goods and capital for the rest of the world.

Land is scarcely an inexhaustible resource and as, Luxemburg described in detail in her book “The Accumulation of Capital,” such methods lead to an inevitable crash. The global crash of 2008 was due in large part to the slowing of the rate of Chinese expansion and a second and probably considerably larger crash is the inevitable consequence of the current peaking of many of the drivers of Chinese expansion, including the real estate boom and the steel industry, which now produces 50% of the world’s steel.

The policies of neo-liberalism are not a free choice of the capitalists. **They are the inevitable product of an historical epoch in which capitalist expansion is becoming impossible.** In a closed capitalist system the expansion of profits can only occur by decreasing workers' incomes. This, of course, in a closed system reduces the market, decreasing sales and putting renewed pressure on profits in an endless downwards spiral. The periodic debt crises are not the cause, but merely the symptom of this inexorable transfer of income from workers to capitalists.

The growing series of endless local wars that have smashed over half a dozen countries to bits are another symptom of this crisis. They are fomented by the crushing austerity and unemployment that drives tens of thousands of young men to become fanatical killers. The wars in turn facilitate even more ruthless capitalist looting of the terrorized and atomized populations of these ruined states.

The Greek situation is an example in miniature of the global crisis. The Greek government can pay salaries and maintain vital services, or it can

pay the debt. It can't do both, which is what the Syriza leadership is currently trying to do—by negotiating more loans!

Going Beyond Capitalism Today

Objectively there is no choice for workers worldwide but to go beyond capitalism. The capitalist future offers only unending declines in standards of living, a collapse of services, depopulation, a long agonizing retreat to a new Dark Age. But unfortunately the lack of substantial victories for the working class in the past decades leaves the vast majority of the population skeptical that real social change is possible. What is necessary today are steps that go beyond capitalism, but at every point appear to all, and in fact are, feasible and sensible. At the same time, that means mobilizing the political support needed globally to carry out such change.

In Greece, the very first step that must be taken is to abrogate the Greek government foreign debts and stop all payments on them. The debts were incurred by corrupt governments fully in thrall to the Greek oligarchy and deserve no respect from workers in Greece, Germany or anywhere. They are not debts owed by Greece to other countries, but claims by banks and the capitalists on Greek workers' incomes.

As soon as debt payments are halted the “cash crunch” of the Greek government disappears. The government actually takes in more than it spends, excluding the debt payments and, again excluding the debt payments, the country as a whole imports just about as much as it exports. (Sources: Bank of Greece [here](#) and [here](#))

However, this is in the current depressed state of the Greek economy and the crippled condition of the Greek government's essential services. Any steps to economic recovery require more government income to fund more expenditure. Since 2009, government expenditures have fallen by \$8 billion euros a year and working

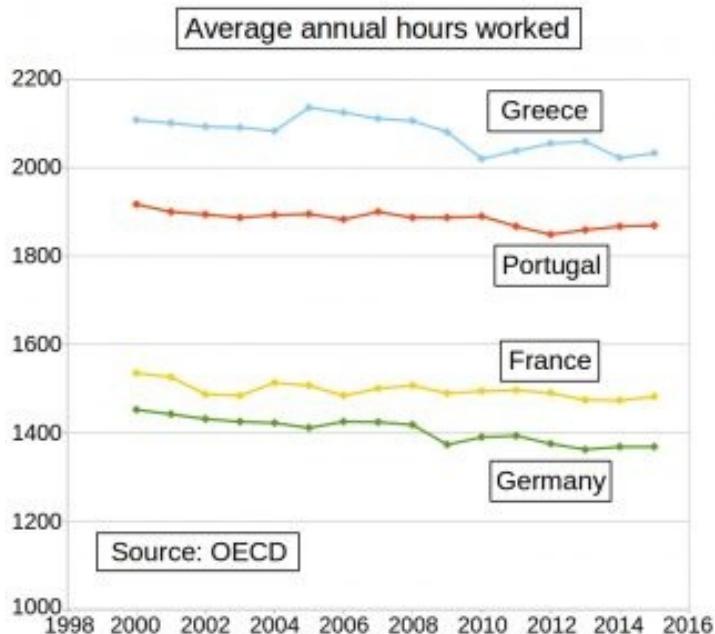


class incomes by about \$22 billion per year.

There is only one source to recover that money—the wealth of Greek capitalists and the profits of Greek corporations. The only way is to take back what the capitalists have stolen from Greek workers. As Thomas Picketty's best selling book “Capital in the 21st Century” abundantly details, a direct tax on the wealth of the wealthiest is an excellent way to reverse the concentration of wealth and income that has occurred globally over the past 40 years. **A wealth tax of about 10% per year on the wealthiest 1% of individuals is the second step that needs to be imposed.**

Right now, at least \$200 billion of Greece's total financial wealth of \$900 billion is in the hands of the wealthiest 1%. (Estimate based on [2013 Global Wealth Databook](#)) A 10% tax would raise \$20 billion per year, increasing the Greek government's income by about 65%.

Of course, the oligarchs will try to evade such taxes, moving their money overseas. To prevent that the Greek government should place strict control on the movement of capital abroad. In addition, the government is already the dominant shareholder in the major Greek banks. **It should actually exert direct control over the banks**, and use their records to track down the real wealth of the wealthiest. The failure of the Syriza government to take this basic step has already allowed the oligarchs to move billions of euros out of Greece. Each day of

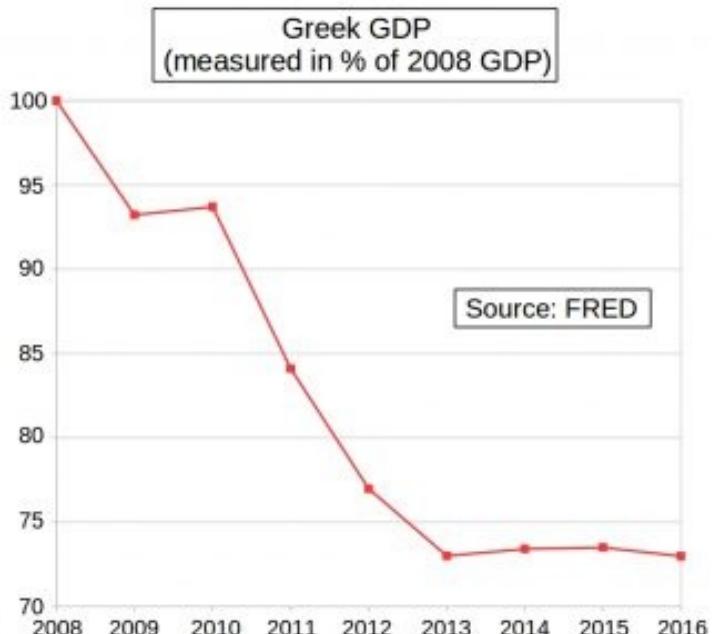


delay makes this situation worse.

Equally important, despite capital flight, governments everywhere have the power to seize productive property to pay for back taxes. Greek corporations make about \$100 billion a year in profits. **Seizing, “de-privatizing,” the profitable assets of tax-evasive oligarchs** will bring instant revenue into government coffers.

But all these steps deal with gathering in money revenue. The real key to restarting the Greek economy is what is done with the money. It has to be used to mobilize the now-idle human resources of the country, the vast number of unemployed, to real social benefit. **The way to do this is to initiate a massive public works and public service program to provide free education, health care, transportation and housing to all Greeks.** A \$20 billion a year program would create about 1.3 million new jobs at current wage rates, enough for nearly all the current 1.4 million unemployed in Greece. About half the jobs would be those directly created by the program and the other half would be those resulting from more spending throughout the Greek economy due to the new income of the direct employees.

This program must be democratically run by the



workers and communities involved at all levels. The jobs must be direct government employment, not through contractors. This is the only way to eliminate the corruption that has plagued the Greek public sector for decades.

By heavily taxing the capitalists and creating a public works and service program, the Greek government will be able to shift the type of imports to Greece and thus can greatly improve living standards without significantly increasing the trade deficit. Greater amounts of necessary goods will replace lesser amounts of luxury goods.

Each of these steps is feasible for the present Greek government and will appear eminently sensible to the population. But they also go beyond capitalism, because if they are sustained over time, and spread to other countries, they would transfer to the state complete ownership of the productive wealth. And they would make impossible the essential function of capitalism, which is to increase profits year by year. Over a short period of time, capitalists can sustain huge losses. But if they become permanent, capital will disappear. And if they succeed in Greece, they will threaten to spread elsewhere.

The Real Fascist Threat



The thieves gather: Greek Premier Tsipras (center) meeting with French President Macron and German Chancellor Merker in 2017

So if these steps threaten capitalism, won't the EU leaders do everything they can to defeat them? Won't they overthrow the Greek government, engineer a coup, bring in the fascists? This is the fear that Varoufakis uses to justify his hopeless strategy of "rescuing capitalism." The alternative, in his view, is fascism brought in by the vengeful capitalists.

But this argument ignores the actual historical process by which fascism triumphed in the 1930's and the real threat of fascism today. In an industrialized country, with an urban population, it is impossible to impose a military dictatorship or bring fascism to power without a substantial popular base of support and without the demoralization of the left. What actually brings fascism to power is the betrayal by leftist governments of the hopes that their supporters have placed in them. If a leftist government actually carries through on its promises, its popular support both at home and abroad will

cut any possible support from under the fascists' boots.

In France in the 1930's, the Popular Front Government, like the present Syriza leadership, sought an alliance with a small right wing party, the Radicals. While the 1936 General strike at the beginning of the Pop Front regime won substantial concessions for the working class, the Popular Front rapidly backed away from these gains during the subsequent two years. It allowed the flight of capital, devalued the franc, and then announced in February 1937 a "pause" in pro-worker reforms. In the process the Pop Front demoralized their own supporters and allowed right wing parties to gain strength as the only alternative to the failure of the Blum regime to substantially end the economic crisis. The result was a major popular base of support for fascism, which undermined France's fight against the Nazi invasion and underpinned the collaborationist Pétain regime set up under the

Nazi Occupation in 1940.

In Germany, the Socials Democrats, in power in the 1920's made concession after concession to the **capitalists**, not the workers, allowing armaments spending to increase while slashing social benefits. After falling from power, the party continued to have no solution to mass unemployment. So millions of the unemployed turned to the Nazis.

Nowhere in history can Varoufakis or others who agree with him point to an example of a leftist government that carried through pro-working class polices without compromise and then was toppled by a military coup by a fascist movement.

Yes, world capital will do whatever they can do to defeat a Greek government that has dumped the debt. But in today's political climate, a new German invasion of Greece to enforce debt payment is an impossibility. And the best insurance against internal threats is a fearless and uncompromising policy that transfers wealth from the capitalists to the workers, with no concern for the future viability of the doomed system of capitalism.

The Critical Role of Democratic Structure

The key question is how can the Syriza leadership be persuaded or compelled to change their current policy and how can a new, resolute, policy be supported in action? The answer is easy to state, but hard to accomplish—democratic structures and decisions at all levels. Within Syriza, activists have to fight at all levels to change the structure of the party to make everyone, including the Prime Minister, responsible to delegates elected by the party members.

But equally or more important is developing democratic institutions to make demands on the government from without. As in France in 1936, mass strikes can occur in Greece in the current situation. In such strikes, it is imperative to set

up truly representative organs of workers democracy with delegates elected for short terms, responsible to electing assemblies.

The weakness of the popular assembly movement in Greece in 2009-2011 was that the assemblies were not representative of the whole population, but were meetings of whoever came. At the end of the movement, there was an effort to send delegates from community or neighborhood assemblies to an Athens-wide or national council of assemblies. In the current situation, that latter model of delegates, elected for very short terms, or a single meeting, could be one that can be taken up within workplaces as well as neighborhoods to organize mass democratic institutions that could demand that the Syriza government take resolute action, and as they grew, actually assume some governmental functions.

Setting up the embryos of such mass democratic institutions is a task for activists in unions, community organizations and left parties. **A first step can be to organize open forums to discuss this and other alternative programs, to aim for broad agreement on goals, which is a requirement for united action among many organizations.**

The construction of a democratic movement cannot be limited to Greece. Greece is a small country and a small part of Europe. For Greece to succeed in freeing itself from the troika and the banks, it will need the active support of workers organizations across Europe, indeed worldwide. Instead of meeting with hostile EU Prime ministers, the Syriza leader would be better off touring European anti-austerity coalitions, building a Europe-wide coalition to take similar resolute action Europe-wide. Even the beginnings of such a movement would strike fear into the hearts of the EU leadership and would be the best protection for any actions by the Greek government against the debt. Equally, even a small start to such a movement would be a reason for raising the hopes of European workers, and throughout the world.