

# MASS STRIKE

Journal of the International Luxemburgist Network

Volume 4 • No: 2 • October 2023

## **What is Socialism Today?**

*Eric Lerner*

## **Reflections on Socialism for our Times**

*Deepika Marya*

## **What is Socialism?**

*Erik Van Deventer*

## **How Do We Build a Socialist Movement?: Lessons from Luxemburg**

*Jay Arena*

## **Woman, Life, Freedom**

*Free and noble people of Iran!*

## **Take Back What The Billionaires Have Stolen!**

*The Path To Victory  
In the Global Strike Wave*



A red-tinted portrait of Rosa Luxemburg, showing her face and upper torso. She is wearing a dark, high-collared garment with a lace or ruffled detail at the neck. The background is a solid red color.

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*Cover image: Rosa Luxemburg, (AI enhanced)*



# Introduction

## What is Socialism?

*Second issue in the “Socialism in the World Crisis” series.*

**S**tarting in October, 2021, the International Luxemburgist Network organized a series of four on-line teach-ins on Socialism and the World Crisis. These teach-ins were recorded and the videos are available on the ILN YouTube channel. Our aim is to advance the vital debate within the working class on how to deal with the worst crisis humanity has faced since the Second World War.

We are also publishing edited versions of these presentations. Each issue of Mass Strike will include the presentations from a single teach-in. The first was “What is State-Financed Capitalism?” based on the October 30, 2021 presentation and is available on the [International Luxemburgist Network](#) website. This second issue found here, “What is Socialism?”, is from the December 11, 2021 teach-in.

The authors of this issue address key questions regarding socialism and how to get there: What is the worldwide socialist program to end the pandemic, prevent future pandemics, and lift humanity to a new stage of development? What is the role of a class-wide program? How can it help win concrete struggles? What is the role of fusion energy in a socialist program? What is the mass strike process today? What is the role of independent electoral action linked to mass strikes? What forms of organization do we need? What is delegated democracy?

The political developments since the publication of the first edition of the series have only underscored the relevance of the issues raised in the series, and this issue in particular. The UAW strike and near-strike at UPS, the mass strikes in France and Israel, and, most significantly, [the issuance of the “Charter of Demands” by an Iranian alliance of trade unions and civic organizations](#) at the center of the yearlong revolt all put on the agenda what class and social system will rule. The Iranian movement has called on workers around the world to “carry the banner of these minimum demands” into their own struggles. Agreeing on a common set of demands would be a crucial advance for a reemerging global mass strike movement, one that can take us toward socialism and away from the barbarism the fascists want to drag us into.

*This issue’s authors:*

**Eric Lerner**, member, International Luxemburgist Network; author, *For A Workers Recovery Plan*

**Erik van Deventer**, PhD, NYU Dept. of Sociology, author, *“The Strong Dollar and the Political Economy of Financialization”*

**Jay Arena**, Professor of Sociology, City University of New York’s College of Staten Island, author of *Expelling Public Schools: How Antiracist Politics Enables Privatization in Newark*

**Deepika Marya**, Senior Lecturer in the Honors College, University of Massachusetts Amherst and member of the Amherst Mass. chapter of the DSA

# What is Socialism Today?

*Eric Lerner*

**S**ocialism is the only way out of humanity's present crisis, the only alternative to a new Dark Age, pandemics, fascism and eventual depopulation. The present stage of world economic development comes out of a 40-year decline in the rate of growth of the capitalist economy.

We are now entering the actual contraction, as measured, either by the rate of mortality decline, which has now become a rate of mortality increase or the rise of use of energy, which has now become a decrease in the use of energy. This is a retreat of global society under the leadership of capitalism.

So what is a socialist alternative, what will a socialist program do? We need both emergency and medium-term measures against the pandemic. and these measures require, especially in the medium-term, vast transfers of wealth and control from the capitalists. These emergency measures, many of which can be taken under capitalist rule, include taking control of the government-funded vaccine production, which is what should have been done under American law, and to vaccinate the entire human population mobilizing the defense industry's capacities to increase the production of vaccines and medicines. We need centralized exchange of best practices in fighting Covid and other disease.

We need a wartime mobilization of the physical sciences, as in World War Two, for broad-based physical means of fighting bacteria and viruses. For example, we already know that far-UV light, which is harmless to human beings (it is stopped

even by the tears on our eyeballs) is deadly to almost all microbes. We need a huge program to make that light affordable and generally available. This would be a broad-based step against all air-borne pandemics, just as water sanitation stopped cholera in the industrialized nations a century and more ago.

We need eminent domain to seize control of empty hotels to serve as high-quality isolation zones. Many of these measures could be taken immediately. They would hurt capitalist income, but could be done under present capitalist rule.

But to get out of the period of growing pandemics, to get out of the conditions that lead to pandemics, much more broad-based steps must be taken. We have to complete the process of global urbanization, which is now just about half done, and provide a decent life for all. We need a global system for free housing for the infrastructure that goes with it to concentrate population, away from wildlife that can spread new diseases.

We need reforestation, and the concentration of agriculture in smaller areas, as has been done already to a certain extent in Europe. We need a vast expansion of free public health throughout the entire world. This is possible only with a vast expansion of free education to provide the people-power that public health requires.

The only way to get this vast expansion of infrastructure is to mobilize fully the defense industry in the United States, which is the world's largest defense industry, and that in other countries. That is our reserve industrial

power with the highest technology in industry, which could rapidly overcome the shortages that we're seeing and, in the process, provide hundreds of millions of jobs for people to carry out this program.

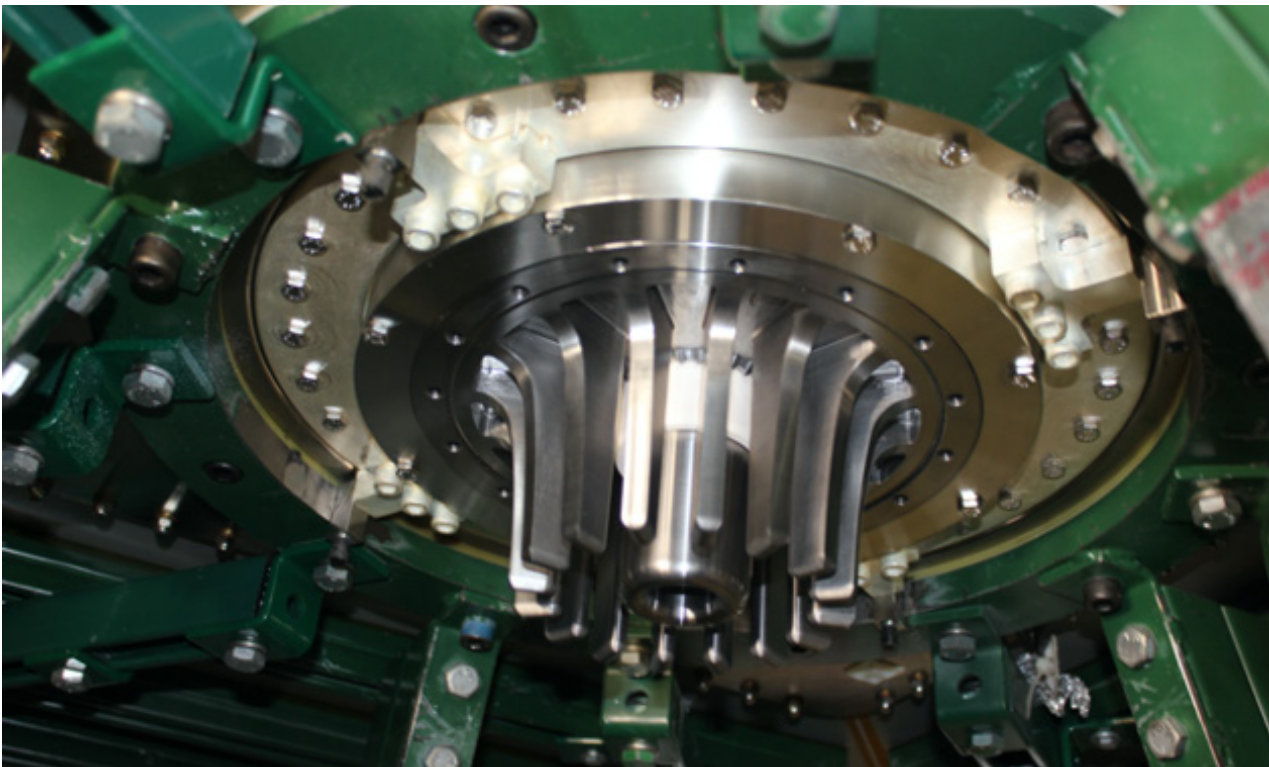
But this program has to be financed by the destruction of capital. The only source of several trillion dollars here is to take back the capitalist income and wealth that they have stolen.

This also is the cure to inflation, popping the bubble of not only real estate, but of the stock market, which leads to inflation. So obviously these steps involve the taxation of capital. But they also must involve the stopping of the global theft of working class incomes: the bailouts and bond purchases by the Fed and other central banks that funnel this money directly to the holdings of corporate America. Simply stopping this bond purchase program and selling off immediately the trillions of dollars of corporate bond holdings would immediately lead to the mass bankruptcy of the entire financial system.

Under present laws this would require the social ownership and control of all finance. Since the financial institutions own outright over 70% of the top thousands of corporations this would immediately lead to the socialization and public ownership of 75% of the economy.

An additional vital part of this program is going to be less familiar to most activists. Socialism means a fusion-energy-powered economy. What we're talking about requires tripling energy consumption, and that's impossible with fossil fuels. Right now, we're using 14 billion tons of fossil fuels per year, leading to 7 million deaths from fossil fuel air pollution alone, completely excluding effects on the climate.

Five trillion dollars in energy costs, which is also a major force driving inflation, makes it impossible to triple energy consumption with the present energy sources. Solar and when are far too expensive to use as base load, round-the-clock, energy.



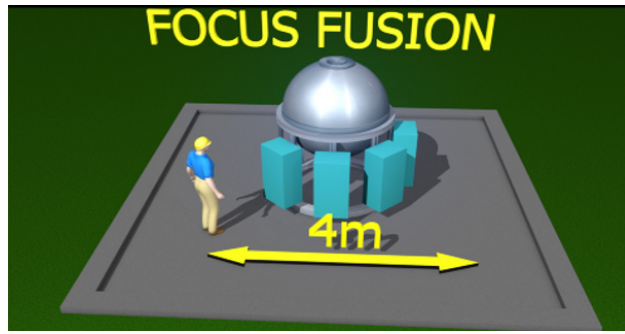
**Figure 1.** (Top) Artist's conception of a Focus Fusion energy generator, capable of producing 5 MW of electric power continuously, enough for a small town in the US. (bottom) Photograph of the core of LPPFusion's FF-2B experimental fusion energy device in Middlesex, NJ. The central cylinder is only 6 cm in diameter.



We need energy that is denser. In other words, more energy per unit mass, cheaper, cleaner and safer than fossil fuels, and for that the only alternative is fusion energy. Fusion fuel has a million times the energy density of oil. One gram of hydrogen-boron fuel has the energy content of one ton of fossil fuel.

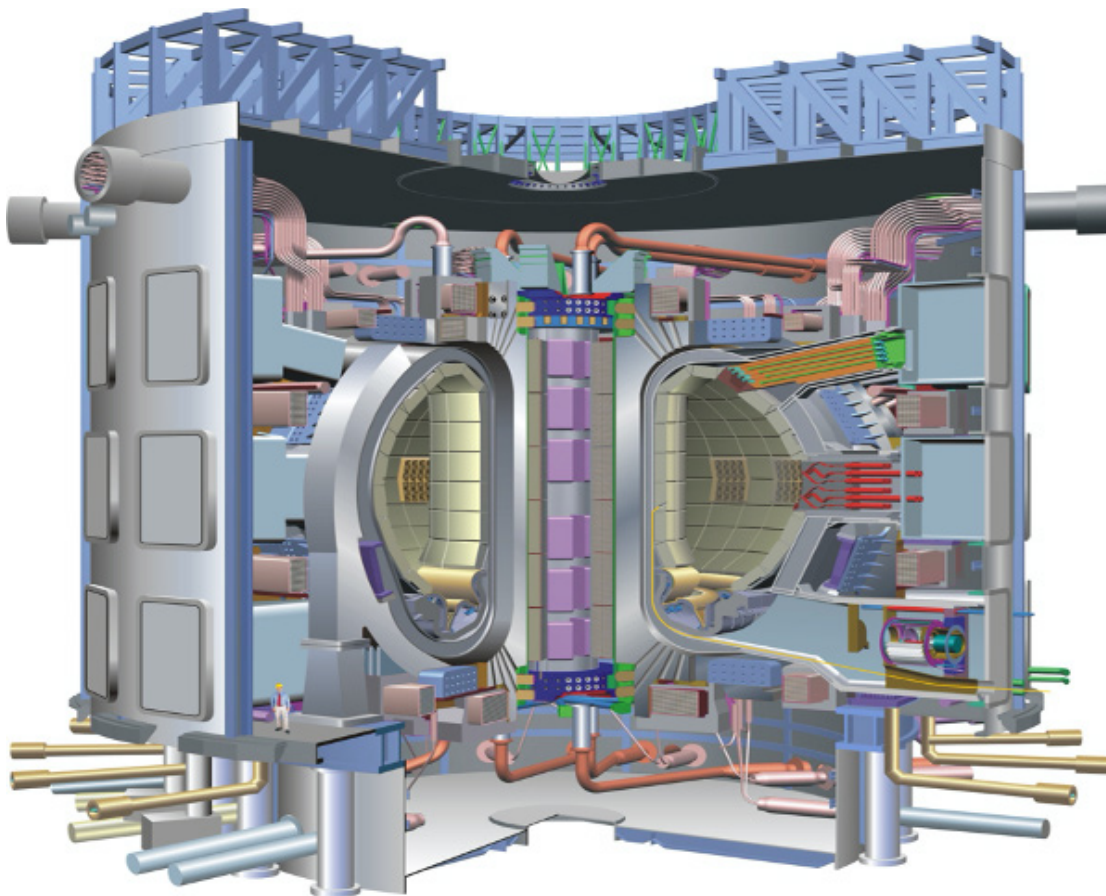
What is fusion energy? It is the energy that powers the sun and the stars, it's the power that drives the universe.

I am a fusion energy researcher, and, together with a few other people, I run a small company in Middlesex, New Jersey. We're talking about using a fuel fusion fuel made from hydrogen and boron, which is immensely abundant, can be derived from seawater. We are developing decentralized, cheap, compact fusion generators which will have helium gas as the only byproduct. There is no radioactive waste.



If developed, (we're still in the course of developing these devices), our device would be 10 times cheaper than any existing energy source fusion energy. It would make possible decentralized five-megawatt generators. This could also make possible the total recycling of all waste products, using already existing commercialized plasma torch technology, which can reduce any waste product to useful elements.

You can learn more about all this at our company website: [lppfusion.com](http://lppfusion.com).



**Figure 2.** Artist's conception of the ITER tokamak fusion device, under construction in France. Note human figure in lower left for scale.

People ask, “why don’t we have fusion now?”, since people have been working on it for half a century. The main answer is that governments have wrongly concentrated on a single hugely costly device called the tokamak, and right now they’re building such a tokamak in France. If you can see this tiny little guy in Fig. 2, you’ll see the gigantic scale of this machine, compared with our machine (Fig.1) that sits in a small room.

We need instead a crash program that funds all possible routes to fusion, and that demand has to become part of a socialist program.

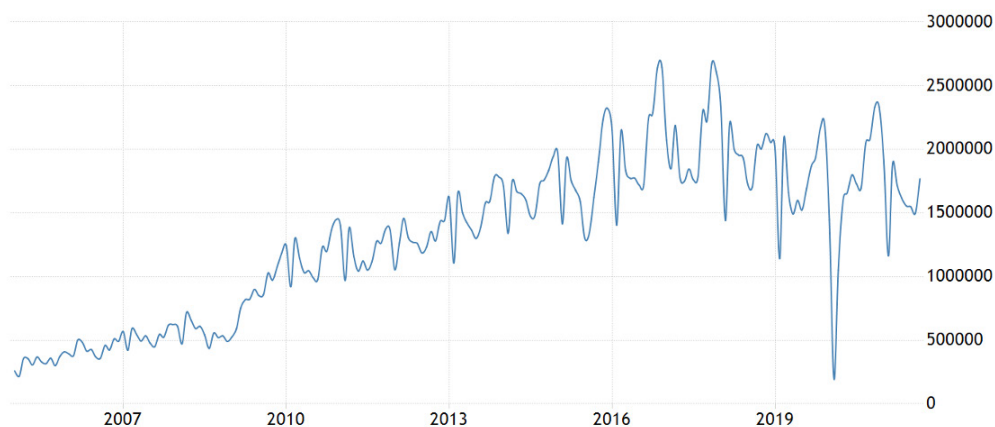
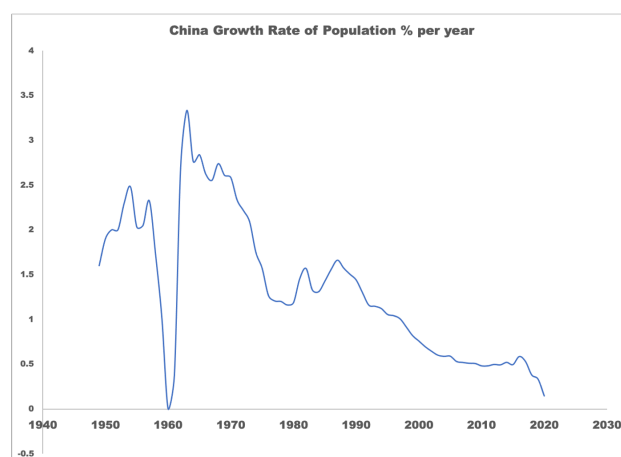
The third point is that socialism means democratic delegated control of society and the economy at all levels. Why do we need democracy not just state ownership?

First of all, without democracy, the re-establishment of capitalism is inevitable, as shown by the historical examples of the Soviet Union and China. Decision makers are separated from workers. That is the basis of class society in capitalism and inevitably leads to its reemergence.

Second of all, democracy is essential for running an advanced industrial society. Bureaucratic states can manage to transition from an agricultural and industrial society, but they cannot manage once an industrial society has emerged. It is far too complex for a centralized dictatorial bureaucracy.

Finally, democratic movements alone can defeat fascism. Only by giving individuals real ability to participate in the decisions that a movement makes can we show what real freedom is and educate people against the false promises of a fascist movement.

Is China a counter-example? Here we have an undemocratic capitalist country that seems to be doing fine against the coronavirus, and has grown rapidly. The basic fact is the Chinese model is unsustainable because it is based on underinvestment in the next generation. The combination of the housing shortage, and a one-child policy means that there is going to be a 1% annual decline in the working page population for the next 20 years and a 2% annual decline in the population of childbearing women. We can be certain of that, because all of these people who have already been born.



SOURCE: TRADINGECONOMICS.COM | CHINA ASSOCIATION OF AUTOMOBILE MANUFACTURERS

**Figure 3.** (top) China’s underinvestment in working class family needs has led to an accelerating drop in the birth rate and the start of a decline in population in the present decade. (bottom) Chinese auto production peaked in 2017.

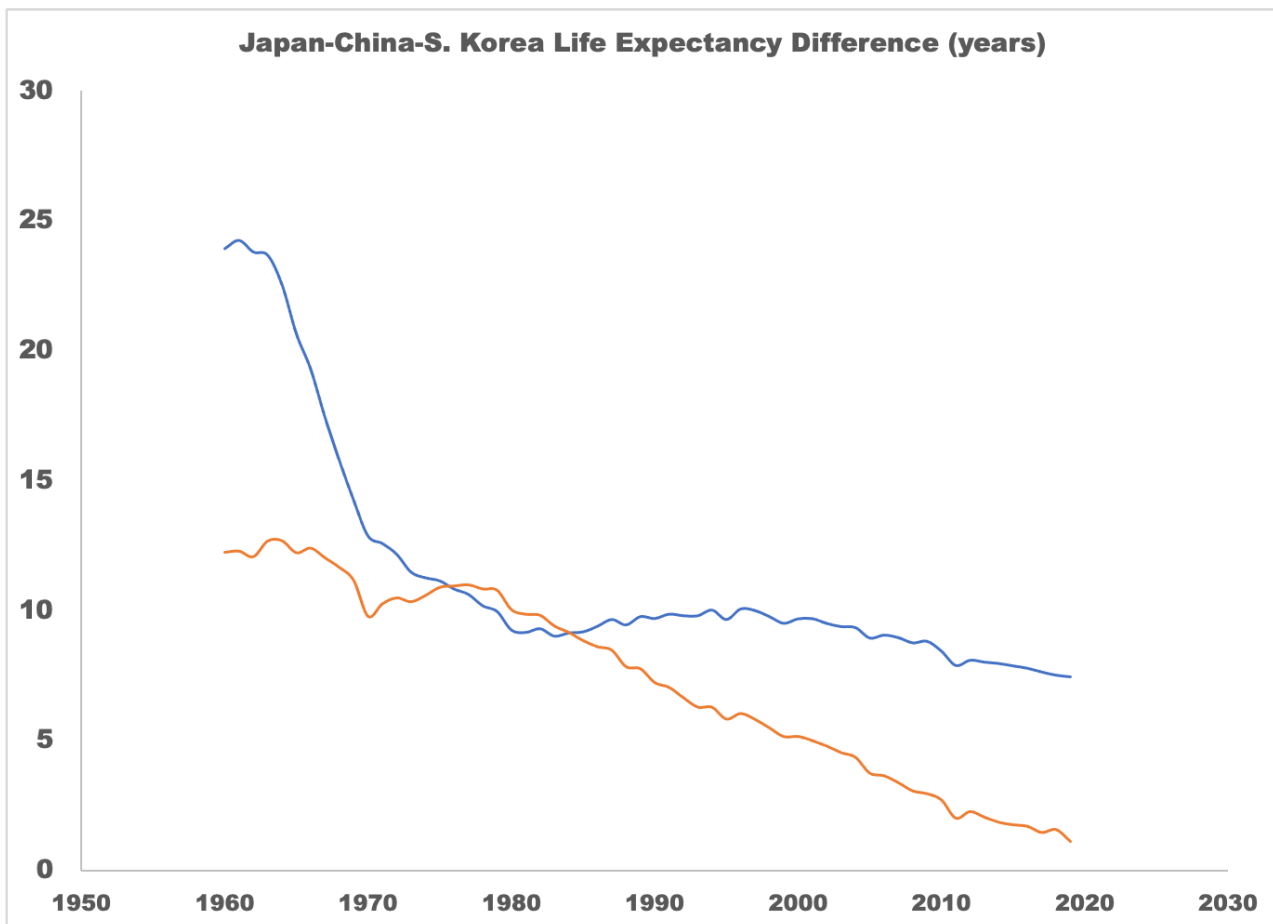
Many aspects of the Chinese economy, for example the auto industry, have already passed into a stage of decline. The Chinese population itself is in the process of peaking because of an extremely sharp decline in the birth rate, which started well before the pandemic. So the rate of growth of the population, which used to be quite large, has now dropped to zero and the Chinese population has started to contract (Fig.3).

This method of running society is not the fastest route of development. Fig. 4 shows the number of years that separates life expectancy in China from that in Japan (blue line), which still has the longest life expectancy in the world. Over the 40-year period of capitalist development in China, under dictatorial regimes, the gap between the Chinese and Japanese life expectancy has decreased by only about a year and a half.

In South Korea, a capitalist state with an extremely vibrant and militant labor movement, which has introduced elements of working class democracy into that capitalist state, the gap between the life expectancy (orange line) has declined rapidly. The gap is now almost closed, even though, South Korea and China in 1980 were at the same level of life expectancy.

Socialist democracy is not the same things as capitalist, representative, democracy. Instead, it is delegated democracy. The Paris Commune was the first example of this system, as were the Soviets during the Russian Revolution, and strike committees in mass strikes worldwide during the 20th and 21st century.

What does delegated democracy mean? It means that delegates are elected only for specific meetings at higher levels, that they report back



**Figure 4.** The gap in years between China's life expectancy and that of Japan has declined only slowly over the past 40 years (blue line) while the gap between South Korea's life expectancy and Japan's (orange line) has dropped rapidly.



continuously to lower assemblies, that they receive mandates about certain issues from those lower assemblies. In the 20th and 21st century geographically-organized, city-wide strike committees and workers' committees, both came into existence during mass strikes and worked to build these strikes.

“This revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.”

**Karl Marx**, *The German Ideology*, 1846

In a revolutionary socialist transformation, these temporary organization arising out of mass strikes must become permanently existing, most come to direct society. For this sort of society to work, there is a necessity for a vast reduction in the workweek, which is possible at present levels of productivity, to allow time for governance, merging the roles of workers and decision-makers. We saw in the impact of the

pandemic lockdowns, how workers had time to think through different conclusions about their own power, about their own futures. This has to be part of day-to-day existence, and that means a vast reduction in the workweek.

Democracy obviously can only be democracy for all. As Jay's article points out, this means we must fight for equal rights for all. Only a growing mass strike movement can defend the rights of immigrants, of women, and of other scapegoated groups. We cannot rely on the courts. We have to rely on movements that can become the government.

To summarize, socialism is a survival program to transfer resources from capital, to the entire world population to solve the economic threats that we face, which are the basis of the deadly pandemic threats and to complete the job of global urbanization. Socialism must involve a rapid transition from fossil fuel, to a fusion-energy-based economy. Socialism must be delegated democratic control of society at all levels with equal rights for all within the movement.

This is the only way to defeat fascism, and to transform the working class itself. The movement must become a school to generate the knowledge the working class needs to run society. As Marx wrote, in the German Ideology, 1846, “*This revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.*”

# Reflections on Socialism for our Times

*Deepika Marya*

I have divided this presentation into four sections. The first one is called current events. The second one is reality on the ground. The third is history. And the final section is looking to the future.

The first event I would like to discuss is the 2007 economic downturn in the United States. The other is Occupy Wall Street in 2011. When the economic meltdown happened in 2007 caused by irresponsible and risky dealings of financial institutions what was amazing was the speed and dedication, with which the government bailed out many of the banks and corporations that were impacted. The government fronted over 700 billion, not only to bail out banks, but also businesses like GM and Ford and very little investigation took place of those who were culpable for causing the disaster. At that point, we witnessed the surrender of the state to institutions of capitalism. So many people lost their homes, the African American middle class specifically was severely impacted as most of the homes that were foreclosed belonged to African Americans. Overall, people were left with little to no support from the government. At that point, as a society, we could not see any alternative to the capitalist system as a society.

The second event, Occupy Wall Street in 2011, was inspired by the uprisings in the Middle East, known as Arab Spring, where people in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and other countries began to question the logic of neoliberal capitalism. While there was a lot of anger and frustration, expressed on the streets during Occupy protests, people were functioning without a clear ideological anchor or a specific set of ideas and frameworks to articulate the future for the

movement that was emerging. It looked like a situation where people organizing the protests were putting radical ideas in practice. But if these ideas are restricted and not organized and linked with shared frameworks to fight back, the Left becomes doctrinal and disappears. Students and workers as motivators of change become invisible and the issues they raise disappear. Can a movement without a clear anchor of ideas or theory lead to transformation of society? It can't. Without a shared link between people and ideas that would take us forward movements disappear. What we can learn from Occupy is that not giving society a clear anchor weakens their activism for it does not have a direction.

In order to understand reality, a recent study claims that over sixty percent of young people in the United States have a favorable view of socialism. Another reality is that social movements grow slowly. It is about people coming to them looking for solutions. And people come to them when there's a crisis that makes them vulnerable and look for alternatives. Samir Amin has pointed out, "although underestimated at first, socialism vanished from the horizons from the centers of Europe into the peripheries bringing together socialist aspirations of people in the non-western world through liberation struggles of those people." In other words, Amin asserts socialism is about creating solidarities among people, these could be through national struggles that are revolts

against Imperial states or grounded in desire for alternate political and social forms. That is how socialism keeps up with the times and find echoes in present day movements, calling for transformations in different conjunctions. The struggles today do not have replicate what has happened in the past, people struggling against the realities of colonialism and imperialism. Recently, we saw take place in the global South the peasant movement in India, that went on for over fifteen months against laws recommended by the government that had plans to hand over much of the control of agriculture to corporatized agri-business. The farmers won their demands and the state had to repeal its policies. I want to think about protests in the future where supporters from many parts of the world will step in to support and spread the word so farmers or workers in any part of the world are not struggling alone, they are pieces of larger unrests against capitalism. Socialist movements and protests in the 21st century must be related to aspirations of people who are willing to challenge democratically elected governments that do not represent their voices. This new structure of resistance we see emerging in the Global South is a fundamental condition that has its roots in revolts by the people against the logic of capitalist expansions. People are no longer relying on governments to take the lead because if our anchors for an alternate future remain within our current systems, we cannot expect a liberated future from those systems. How can our movements that are looking towards social justice and equality, have an impact when they continue to be handicapped by existing state practices?

Reforms within regimes of power have frequently broken their promises and degenerated because anti-imperialist projects are a contradiction to imperial powers. One of the ways to engage with capitalist system is to demoralize its suffocating agendas. By demoralizing, I mean, invalidate and reject Imperial forces, through people's rejection of them. We must have armies of people rejecting

imperialist agendas are these not armies of Imperial estates. Only then will socialism's work be realized. Rejection is an important concept here because it stands for modeling and politically turning our backs on imperialists who crush people's aspirations looking for a decent life. Even though the last thirty years have demonstrated the offensive launch of capitalism characterized by neoliberalism all over the world. This offensive, with its economic management through deregulated markets has led to dismantling of social programs and stifling popular sentiments of the people. We know the ruling class will not give up its privileges. they believe in its immoral structures. The challenge before us is that we must learn from capitalism's immoral structures and not repeat them. Our democratic awareness must make us alert to our quasi-colonial existence, and we must stay away from liberal alternatives that quickly take on Imperial dimensions. Solidarity teaches us to stand with, to stand along people, promoting horizontal forms of just practices in contrast to vertical practices that promote competition.

This should be our commitment to the people, because solidarity requires strategies, and actions for disrupting the work of capitalism. In addition, we must ask the next generation what do they believe and stand for. Is their fight also against inequality and injustice? Fighting for people's sovereignty is not a recipe that one can simply adopt. It is an endless process of struggle for direction for advancement of movements. People have to assert the need to develop means for social progress so that they do not get taken away from them and turned into lip service of the state.

In Tony Kushner's play "Angels of America" we are introduced to a character, Alexis Antidelluvianich, who is presented as the oldest living Bolshevik. The latter asks the question, what were glasnost and perestroika. In other words, what was the theory and framework that supported dissolving the Soviet Union. Even a



snake sheds its skin only when there is another skin to replace the previous one. What was Russia's new skin after 1989? The loss of the Soviet Union has been a huge loss to intellectual life across the world and have we witnessed imperialism speak for and define socialism, and its projects to the world. As a result, a big part of our intellectual history where the USSR had opened intellectual spaces not controlled by capitalism have disappeared. Now capitalism alone takes control of our imaginations. It is important for a society that multiple forms of awakenings remain part of our social and political horizons. Now we see people being deprived of a chance to try alternate systems that would allow us to think anew, of a world where everyone gets to live a decent life. After 1989 there is very little discussion that includes the role of the vanguard. The discourse now says, let the people do what they want, which seems to be the popular sentiment cautioning us that spontaneity must be organized in a way that spontaneity and vanguardism are our dialectic.

That does not mean the vanguard has to be in the forefront, but it should be ready to engage with the people. People will not just rise up because sustained movements are not built on pure emotion, rather they require slow, steady direction, tactics, strategy and shared frameworks. This process can be summed up as decadence or revolution, echoing Luxembourg's idea of socialism or barbarism. This humanist alternative controlled by the people is important as it brings people out of the shadows and makes them agents of transformation. It is important people are in control of mapping the way forward towards their emancipation. Internationalism should be a must for the success of socialist projects where the Global North and the Global South work together, giving birth to a new kind of universalism, opposed to other forms of universalisms we are familiar with, including colonialism. We don't want socialism to turn into another slogan like 'fight against poverty'. Such affirmations of goodwill haven't gone

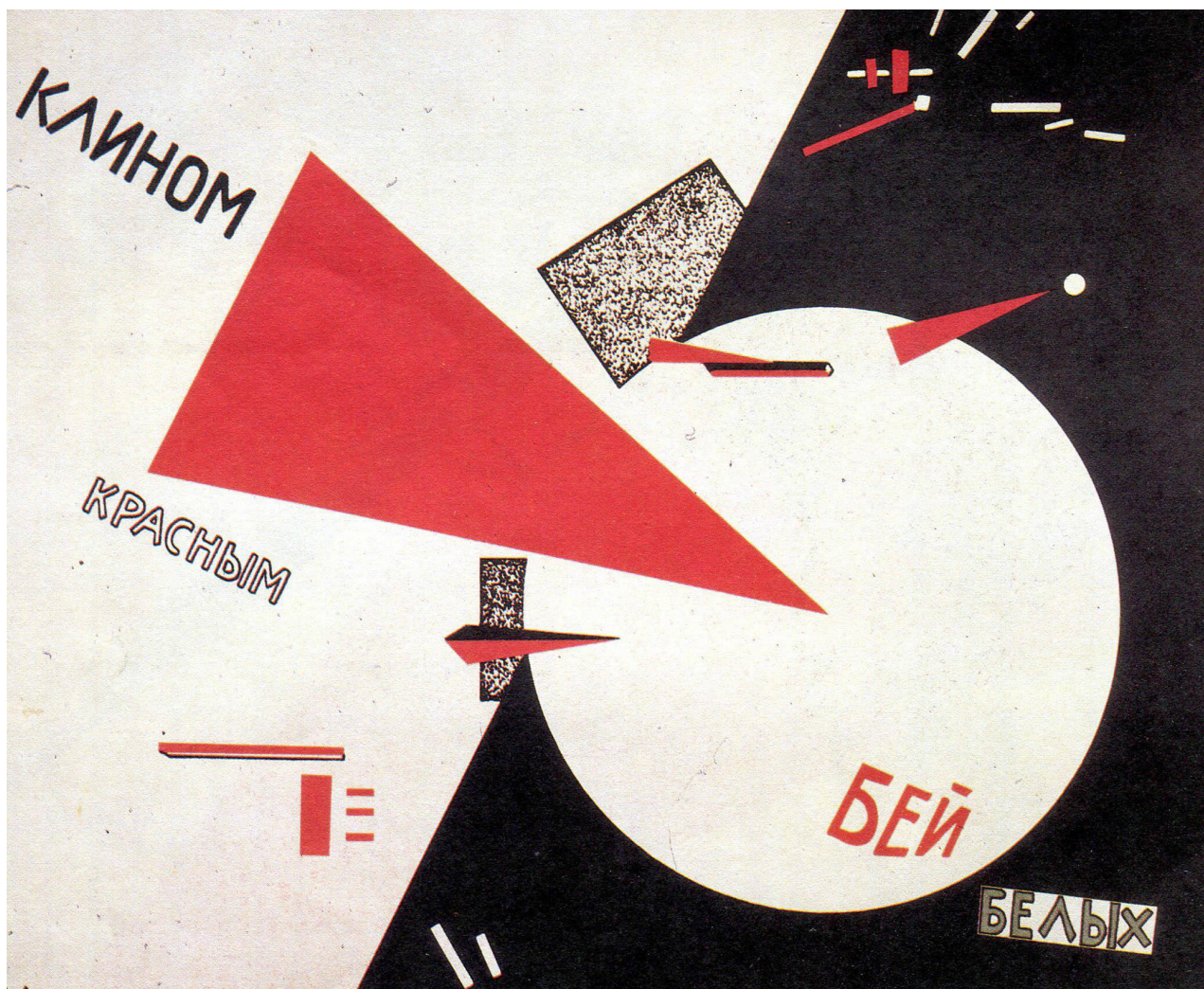
very far. Internationalism should be based on common interests of the people with a common adversary that we come together to fight. Right through history it is people's solidarity that has brought change and progress.

As we look to the future, the struggle for socialism in our times is the struggle against military control of powerful nations like the US and its allies. As long as that project is not addressed all advances at a global level will remain vulnerable. It's not enough to keep criticizing capitalism, we must move beyond that and teach the next generation ideas and frameworks that will help them build something different. This is where our focus should be. What should the future look like, and is the next generation up for the challenge? To stand for equality and justice, we must ask the next generation, what do they stand for. Is their fight also against inequalities and injustices? People must express the need to develop their struggle for social justice so that it is not get taken away from them and turned into lip service. Today the struggle for socialism, is the struggle against military control by powerful nations and putting the people at the center of geopolitical debates. As long as this project is not addressed all advances at the global level will remain vulnerable. Right now, the people who are attacked by imperialism are the ones who are active adversaries pushing to put the brakes on imperialism. The projects of the poor and people in the Global South (farmer's protests in India, an example) pushing back against national capitalism defining our social projects. These struggles have no reason to stop growing until their goals are achieved.

Moving forward, what we need is socialism that affirms our common humanity and regards our common goals, such as climate challenges we face right now. For socialism is the reality that will change the nature of power and substitute it with democratic solutions that can bring a clearer understanding of the problems that lie ahead of us.

# What is Socialism?

*Erik Van Deventer*



In this presentation, I will be discussing the broader themes posed for the panel-- the questions of 'What is socialism?', 'What is the role of the class wide program?' and 'What is the worldwide socialist program?' I will say a bit less about tactics because I think that's about the amount I can cover, tactics should be covered in the following discussion. In this talk, I will be using examples drawn from the problems and the social ills of the United States in particular, because that is my area of familiarity, but I'll try to make clear why this has to be addressed in an internationalist way.

What I see is that in the next twenty years or more, we will be in a period of great crisis worldwide-- unfolding environmental catastrophes of still unknown extent, financial instability of the major world markets based on massive debt at unprecedented levels, the falling rate of profit and absence of useful investment in many of the major economies, and general stagnation. We are seeing in some countries, such as the US, a kind of growth without development, where we have extensive building for private purposes, and more and more commodities, but not in a way that improves the lives of the people who



are using these things. This extensive growth brings no qualitative development, and it wastes resources to the point that it threatens the Earth. That is what capitalism is offering us right now.

Along with these matters, we have of course the possibility of major wars. We haven't seen such major wars in some time, but these are very likely at some point.

As well, we have the situation in the last decade or so in which what has been called 'left wing social democracy' is at an impasse. Such social democratic electoral movements attempted to bring left wing parties to power in various European countries, and appeared through the Bernie Sanders movement in the US. But these efforts have stagnated, I would say, experiencing many of the problems of the electoral approach that have existed throughout the 20th century. So I would argue that the 'evolutionary socialist' path is blocked right now as it has been in the past, and its promise of reforms through electoral movements. Of course, we welcome reforms, and can foresee limited exceptions, but the record of these movements indicates the likelihood of continued failure. And I would say the future welfare of humanity depends on our success by some other avenue, because the future conditions for life on Earth will diminish significantly for each year that we continue in this way. The degree of environmental devastation that will eventually face us mounts year by year.

So, this is the context for our first question: 'what is socialism?' Socialism is an economy and society based on the fulfillment of all human needs, rather than the satisfaction of profit as in capitalism. It is an economy based on collective planning, which overcomes the scarcities of the market. In order to fulfill these human needs, the planned economy organizes our work, our human activities, without wage labor-- it eliminates wage labor-- and eliminates class differences. These are the ultimate goals of socialism.

Further, socialism is an international system of economy, not a national development of

particular factories and so forth. But it builds upon such progress as capitalism has offered us through its development of international connections, which socialism should preserve. Internationalist decisions about the economic plan and priorities will be made by and for people across the world, eliminating borders and allowing people to cross them freely. Plans should not be developed by any particular national leader, or favor workers in one region over another.

Aspects of this vision, sometimes termed *communism* or the *higher stage of socialism* are mentioned by Karl Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*, though he did not define the stages of socialism and communism in the way that is sometimes assumed. Rather, he said there would be a very prolonged transition period and that it would be extremely difficult for us to cross the threshold, and make the changes necessary, to actually have a socialist society. He called this the period the *dictatorship of the proletariat*, or what we could call the period of the working class in power. Working class power happens as a result of a revolution and expropriation of the capitalists-- likely we will address the first steps towards this, though not the actual revolution, later in this discussion. Some versions of Marxism would call this transitional period 'socialism,' in which labor based on wages might continue to exist. But whatever the era is called, it has to actually be an active transition that moves towards socialism-- not to state capitalism, nor a ramified welfare state, nor to a bureaucrat-dominated nationalized economy, although elements of those forms of organization could appear on the way.

As such, one of the most important and difficult questions about socialism will be the economic characteristics of that difficult transition. This involves looking into those needs of humanity, and ills of capitalism, that a socialist transition will have to address and overcome. Again, I will take this up particularly with reference to the US, as an example to understand the tendencies and



transformations in which the working class will have to move toward socialism in this century.

What will be the economic foundation for this transition? And where would the US fit in? In 2021 and in the past two years, we have seen the COVID pandemic unleashing, in essence, a breakdown of the satisfaction of human needs in advanced capitalist societies and throughout the world, especially the need for life-- the ability for people to survive. And recently the US has been wracked, apparently, by the problem of inflation, and this phenomenon is characteristic of problems at the level of the international economy. Inflation, especially in the recent period, is not so much a matter of workers receiving higher wages. As has been shown by various reports, prices are rising as a result of markups by capitalists to expand their profits as much as they can. Capitalists are simply charging more to try to capture potential profit rates that they feel they are entitled to, or have lost over recent decades. For the past forty or more years, US capitalism has seen elements of deflation in terms of falling prices for various commodities, often caused by competition from cheaper producers internationally or from more efficient technological and managerial practices, including exploiting and speeding up labor at a higher intensity. Capitalists are trying to capture the loss of profits that has resulted by raising prices as much as they think they can get, under the exceptional circumstances. Because of the opportunity, all kinds of capitalists are building higher profit margins into their prices at the same time, reflected in a great proportion of the observed inflation.

Another cause of price inflation over recent years has been inflation of asset prices: the run up of the prices of stocks, financial assets and especially housing and real estate. Capitalists struggle to deliver sufficient profits to pay returns on inflated volumes of debt and outstanding stock, while real estate rents also reflect the effort to support absurdly high

prices for scarce land and buildings. This has led inflation of rents as a portion of prices and wages, and this increases everyone's expenses, especially workers-- often much more than the effects of particular commodity prices being inflated. On the other hand while commodities, and especially imported commodities, can form a shrinking share of the working class budget, they are no less necessary and can give capitalists leverage to enforce higher prices.

Finally, we see rising prices related to the breakdown of supply chains during the COVID crisis, because of the poor organization of contemporary capitalism. These supply chain breakdowns have shown that US capitalism fails to produce basic commodities that society requires in emergencies, and the prices of all sorts of supplies and components accelerate greatly when the supply chain begins to break down, as it has. Of course such problems can go much further in a major economic crisis.

The issues of inflation and supply chains show crucially how the transition to socialism must be based on an international economy. We don't want to rebuild industrial capacity in the US that duplicates production what was shifted elsewhere through international supply chains, replacing these with an autarkic economy of some sort. And we can't afford that sort of reindustrialization environmentally at all.

Although US capitalism massively exploits labor in other countries-- it is an economy living on the labor of millions of low-paid workers abroad-- most of the work being done in the US is in non-manufacturing sectors, in particular services. These service jobs are what US workers are spending their time on, quite needlessly and wastefully in many cases. US capitalism wastes large shares of its production on internally focused unproductive service tasks that help capitalists to manage the US and world economies, but contribute relatively little in terms of beneficial material improvements for workers anywhere.

I would argue that this lack of usefulness in the labor we are doing contributes greatly to the morbid symptoms that are arising in social life: despair, political derangement, violence, and so forth. Although goods may be available for purchase, the tasks we are engaged in have little direct impact in improving conditions of life, and can be endlessly divided and arranged to suit the managerial needs of far away capitalists. We now see a *cultural impoverishment* of much of the United States, and of other countries as well, where rural areas and urban areas each lack important conditions for human development, and thereby impose distorted and incomplete lives on their inhabitants. The environments in which we exist each have inadequate standards of living in distinct ways. In urban areas, we see a shortage of space, compression of available activities, and constant stress. In rural areas there is more space and ease of movement based on the convenience of cars, but a great lack of cultural facilities and the diversity of human pursuits that used to be widespread in all regions, which we are now more accustomed to expect in cities. This segmentation or sectionalization of our society, reflected in education levels and political attitudes, has quite damaging consequences. It is in large part a consequence of capitalism's drive to manage the labor force, which now infringes into a negative management of culture and politics. One of the things that socialism must overcome is to bridge these divides. So we need a *social reconstruction* of this society, to be able to continue toward a higher level of socialist transition.

Among the urgent tasks we can anticipate in this transition, the first is of course the need to address our reliance on carbon and mitigate climate change. We clearly need to replace carbon emitting electricity generation. We must remove the need to use petroleum for commuting and shipping of goods, and we need public transport and improved rail systems. Transformations in agriculture and industry will also need to be urgently prioritized, even while other political and social transformations continue to be settled.

Second, in the US we will have to address the severe housing shortage, partly through new construction of new housing so workers are not so horribly crammed together and paying so much for rent. Perhaps more rapidly, this will mean redistribution of the spaces that we have: redistribution of the large and capitalist properties, both residential and commercial.

Third, we need to address the wasteful use of our time in advanced capitalist labor markets. As tasks that are only useful because of the specific social arrangements of capitalism, often services as mentioned previously, can be called *socially necessary unproductive labor* under capitalism. This is work needed for the functioning of business and government, specific to the capitalist system as a social organization, but not valued in itself for its usefulness to our lives. Such work does not directly improve our quality of life and sometimes harms it, and would not remain useful in a better society. Examples include the police, security, and the military, but also much of what lawyers do, insurance, banking, advertising, retail, and many more such activities. I think we should work out a method to measure exactly what portion of labor is taken up by such tasks, to give some perspective on the waste and degree of change needed in the economy. In socialism we will not continue to have these jobs, or they will be unrecognizable in their operations and purposes. There will be certain kinds of work using 'white collar' skills involved in planning the economy during the transition, but these will not take the same form that capitalism has created or is now training people to do.

Meanwhile capitalists are trying to reduce all of these forms of work with technology: automation, computer applications that replace secretarial work, digital surveillance, etc. For example, Amazon eliminates perhaps millions of retail jobs, which is in a way efficient and almost desirable to the future society. We don't need people sitting around in retail stores and other declining sectors, but we certainly don't

want people working in Amazon warehouses, in the way that that is organized. Capitalism itself is destroying or making insecure much of this unproductive workforce, but offers no jobs or worse jobs as alternatives. Capitalists then create layers of management to capture more profits and force workers into new kinds of unproductive work. So now we have the medical management industry, the sectors of gig-based service and supply chain jobs, and the proliferation of corporate, educational and social services bureaucracies. It doesn't seem that capitalism ever really reduces the amount of unnecessary labor-- or rather the necessary but useless labor. Capitalism has come to demand whole professions of specialists, who devote their time to applying for grants, justifying expenditures, and putting lines on their resumes, rather than the socially useful goals of their education. Obliging workers to set their priorities in these terms interferes with creativity, education, and the advancement of science. We rarely have a choice about these kinds of work, as they are enforced by strong competitive, managerial and technological oversight.

These recent transformations of capitalism mean that socialism will need an even more radical break from existing economic patterns. Workers will need to gain control over their work processes, so that they can choose how to use time efficiently and produce things with good quality and rewarding conditions. For example, teachers must be freed from the bureaucratic curricula and the testing requirements of contemporary schools and universities, which both reduce the quality of education and make their working days very onerous. Medical work must be restructured to allow more direct and effective responses to health problems, and care-related occupations improved and integrated into restored social services and cultural activities. What we need is a comprehensive plan to eliminate some of the kinds of work invented by capitalism, replace some with more useful ones and eliminate whole sectors of the economy that are wasteful and oppressive.

The lockdowns of the last two years, and the phenomenon of 'necessary workers,' have shown just how little of the labor in the US is really crucial from a perspective of human needs. The middle class work-from-home phenomenon, largely involving those would be classified as unproductive workers in Marxist value theory, shows areas of labor that could be done in a more efficient way with a better form of organization, even in late capitalism. And vast spans of working people's time can be freed by avoiding specific capitalistic forms of the service economy, by making their own coffee and meals and so forth, based on control over their own time and having the space and resources to handle their own needs. Equally, this crisis has shown that more of our energies must be made available to meeting social needs that are not presently being met.

I believe we will be discussing a demand for jobs for all, and I certainly support that. But these will need to be new *kinds* of jobs. More directly, what we've seen is that people are choosing to work less, even without retaining their wages. And they *should* have a 35 hour week, indeed a 32 hour week, a 30 hour week, and a 20 hour week at the same wages. That is the direction that capitalism is going-- the direction capitalist production systems go in when they replace and eliminate some forms of labor-- but capitalism is impeding the possibility of workers actually seeing these shorter weeks, at least with a living wage.

In the past year we've seen what's called the 'Great Resignation'-- of workers, especially young people, seeing that there is no purpose or growth in the kinds of careers that are available to them. They sometimes find that a higher standard of living can be possible with less work, even with lower income. And seeing no larger task or destination for our society's projects, there is no reason to contribute any more than necessary. Capitalism seems to be in stagnation and approaching a dead end, except perhaps for tech companies and millionaires. It



is increasingly seen as a sort of decadent society, and this leads, both among capitalists and other classes, to nihilism and sociopathic selfishness. And much of politics then becomes premised on this nihilism and the selfishness. Replacing useless labor with activities we ourselves control for useful ends is the only way to avoid further deterioration. My hope is that addressing inequalities, curtailing wasteful labor and use of resources, and providing time for personal growth will mitigate the psychological and political morbid symptoms of the present age.

This has to be a goal we pursue in the context of a socialist transition and the achievement of power for the working class, as none of these changes are within the power even of active and unionized workers in capitalist firms, or of a supportive social democratic government. My view is that the economic struggle of American workers for higher wages in unions is of course very positive, but has shown limits that will be difficult to overcome in time. Organized labor's direction towards negotiation with management and relying politically on the Democratic Party has not led to material improvement, let alone working class political organization or progress toward socialism. This is not to say we should not support labor organizing and militancy as a strategy, but we have to be realistic that other ways of engaging in social struggle may be more promising. The urgency of our problems does not allow us to be complacently optimistic about multi-decade timelines of labor regeneration and social democratic reform.

Beyond treating the ills of unproductive labor in capitalism, what tasks should be set for a transition to socialism? Reconstruction of society can be a useful way of understanding the extent and depth of necessary changes, given the inadequacy of the development capitalism has imposed. First, I would emphasize that internationalism is key-- we should decide these directions by international planning, upon the success of workers' political struggles in multiple countries. The associated producers

of socialist future, i.e. the working class around the world, should be involved and should have a say, including in choosing what the US economy does and controlling what productive decisions are made. The plans for a socialist transition should be made useful to the rest of the world, because the needs of development in the US and northern countries have been relatively more satisfied.

There is of course no democratic process, much less a rational socialist planning system, to determine what the world's workers may need as far as transitional steps in the global north. However, we have some clear indications. Some economic changes are obvious and will have to be satisfied under any rational plan. We have to reduce and mitigate carbon and its effects, including through clean energy and perhaps public transport, shipping and rail infrastructure, and so forth. We need to use our productive capacity to improve standards of living worldwide. And we have to accommodate more people here, especially during the course of climate change, with a higher standard of living-- and that means *open borders*. The same would be said for Europe and Japan.

Especially after the past two years, it must be clear that workers will need to reconstruct healthcare worldwide as a central feature of a program of socialist reconstruction. This involves provision of medications, technology and medical workers by the most industrialized countries, and building safe water and housing situations throughout the world. This will also involve the extension of medical training, as will be the case of all useful areas of specialized education.

We need to reconstruct US agriculture, which wastefully uses a disproportionate share of arable land in the world and is disastrous in its effects on the climate. Reconstructed agriculture should use less land, but more efficiently, eliminating some of the more wasteful types of farming we have now, such as cattle ranching and planting corn to feed pigs. Instead we

should produce higher quality food products to feed more people, perhaps even requiring more labor, and at higher wages.

And we need to reconstruct our advanced industry, supplying tools that may be needed for development throughout the world. This will mean diverting production away from weapons, excessive aerospace and automotive production, luxury commodities, and many other kinds of production that the relatively advanced manufacturers of the US still dominate. These advanced sectors have the potential to increase the availability of many technologies, and hence quality of life, if put to a more rational use.

I would pose planned socialist reconstruction as a matter of *reparations*-- and not only as a moral imperative, although that can be justified. Reconstruction will be a means of correcting the destructive aspects of the capitalist economy, and reparations are due to descendants of enslaved people and dispossessed indigenous communities as well as many other victims of imperialism around the world. Reparations should not simply redistribute capitalist property, financial assets, or money, but rather give meaningful control over the accumulated resources of the economy to those who have been exploited in the creation of these resources, as well as a leading role in decisions of our socialist planning in the future. Such changes will release the fuller capacities of humanity and the full potential of workers, so that their active lives can be useful and rewarding. To have available the greatest range and quality of our efforts, it is a matter of collective interest that we should distribute the power of control in our system of decision making, and not leave it concentrated either with capitalists or bureaucrats. This is the condition for everyone's ability to have a socialist future in which we can engage in more rewarding and self developing activities than mundane work, and also *set tasks* beyond what capitalism has been able to accomplish.

I will close with a brief quote from the *Communist Manifesto*, as an indication of why socialist organization must replace the capitalist system: "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." This is an argument of solidarity. It reflects altruism but it is not solely an altruistic argument. For it argues that as a matter of solidarity, we must see that everyone is able to develop in order for each of us to develop ourselves. First, because societies in poverty cannot preserve the environment, which must be among our first priorities. Second, because the existence of exploitation, anywhere, means there will be powerful enemies to social progress, and these will be powerful enemies to socialism. So we must remove that exploitation to make progress. And finally, the positive implication of the passage is that we should set social tasks higher than we are presently capable of, not only to free our time to pursue the arts and leisure, but to work toward projects socially and on a large scale, which we can imagine are possible.





# How Do We Build a Socialist Movement?: Lessons from Luxemburg

*Jay Arena*

The union of the broad popular masses with an aim reaching beyond the existing social order, the union of the daily struggle with the great world transformation, that is the task of the social democratic movement, which must logically grope on its road of development between the following two rocks: abandoning the mass character of the party or abandoning its final aim, falling into bourgeois reformism or into sectarianism, anarchism or opportunism.

Rosa Luxemburg, "Reform or Revolution", Chapter X

To address our central question "what is socialism?" necessarily requires an engagement with the kind of movement we need to get there. For Luxemburg, as it was for Marx and Engels, ends and means are inseparable. Therefore, I begin by examining several relevant works by Rosa Luxemburg and

draw out the key arguments she makes about how socialists should organize. I then turn to how I and other International Luxemburgist Network (ILN) activists worked to apply her ideas in various struggles in the New Jersey/New York area since the 2008-2009 Great Recession.



## Socialism and the class-wide program

In *Opportunism and the Art of the Possible*, written in 1898, Luxemburg makes two key points regarding the fight of socialism. First, she emphasizes the need for socialists to come together on a common, *democratically-agreed-upon*, program— not a laundry list, but a coherent alternative—to make advances away from the capitalist misery we confront and toward socialism. Second, she argues that we have to uncompromisingly fight for this program. In whatever terrain of struggle we are in, whatever capitalist-produced outrage we are confronting, we always come back with one answer—our program. This, she emphasizes, is the only way we make any gains. In the excerpt below, from her 1898 work, she drives home that message:

The basic question of the socialist movement has always been how to bring its immediate practical activity into agreement with its ultimate goal. The various ‘schools’ and trends of socialism are differentiated according to their various solutions to this problem. And Social Democracy is the first socialist party that has understood how to harmonize its final revolutionary goal with its practical day-to-day activity, and in this way it has been able to draw broad masses into the struggle . . . Stated briefly and in general terms, it is that the practical struggle has been shaped in accordance with the general principles of the party programme. This we all know by heart; should anyone challenge us, our answers are as clever as they always were. Now we believe that, despite its generality, this tenet constitutes a very palpable guide for our activity.

Fighting for the entire program, for what we want, she emphasizes, is how our movement obtains concessions and makes advances.

Precisely because we do not yield one inch from our position, we force the government and the bourgeois parties to concede to us the few immediate successes that can be gained.

In contrast, we lose when

we begin to chase after what is ‘possible’ according to the principles of opportunism, unconcerned with our own principles, and by means of statesmanlike barter, then we will soon find ourselves in the same situation as the hunter who has not only failed to stay the deer but has also lost his gun in the process.

That is, in the contemporary context of the United States, we—the “gun”, our movement—only make gains—“stay the deer”— when we fight uncompromisingly for what we want. Conversely, when we settle for what has been termed permissible by the Democrats and their satellite organizations, we don’t make any gains, and worse yet, we weaken or even destroy our movement.

In “Social Democracy and Parliamentarism” (1904), Luxemburg extends her discussion on how the socialist movement unites its “immediate practical activity” with the ultimate goal of socialism, by explaining how the fight for the program should be advanced in the electoral arena. She does this by first critiquing the position taken by a group of French Marxists who reject socialists engaging in the electoral field and instead advocate “purely economic struggles of the worker.” Luxemburg counters that the socialist movement must engage the electoral arena with democratically-decided-upon candidates beholden to carrying out the movement-party’s program. Furthermore, in the campaign, and once in office, the movement representatives must coordinate their legislative work with the struggle in the streets and the factories. That is the way they gain any real leverage.

This “inside-outside” approach is crucial to making advances, including by confronting and reversing “declining bourgeois parliamentarism,”—of special concern today across the U.S, Western Europe and beyond. This is accomplished, Luxemburg emphasizes, not by “conceal[ing] and abandon[ing] the

proletarian class struggle, but the very reverse: to emphasize strongly and develop this struggle *both within and without parliament.*” To effectively defend democracy from attacks by the Right, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary efforts must be coordinated.

... the foundations of parliamentarism are better and more securely protected in proportion as our tactics are tailored not to parliament alone, but also to the direct action of the proletarian masses. The danger to universal suffrage will be lessened to the degree that we can make the ruling classes clearly aware that the real power of Social Democracy by no means rests on the influence of its deputies in the Reichstag, but that it lies outside, in the people themselves, ‘in the streets’, and that if the need arise Social Democracy is able and willing to mobilize the people directly for the protection of their political rights.

Luxemburg counterposes this Marxist approach to electoral politics to the one taken by the French socialist parliamentary leader of the day, Jean Jaurès.

On the one hand the workers are given the most exaggerated hopes and illusions regarding the positive achievements the (sic) might expect from parliament in general. The bourgeois parliament is praised not merely as the competent instrument of social progress and justice, of the elevation of the working class, of world peace and of such wondrous things; it is even represented as the agent competent to realize the ultimate goal of socialism. Thus all the expectations, all the efforts, all the attention of the working class, are concentrated on parliament.

The critiques that Luxemburg levels against the French parliamentary socialists are very applicable to the practices of the Democratic Socialists of America. One is the lack of coordination between DSA members in Congress and other bodies, and struggles in the streets and factories. Second, is the lack of any democratic control over the public positions and votes of DSA office holders. The most glaring example was Congressman Jamal Bowman

voting for billions more in military aid for Israel, and providing other forms of political support, in direct contradiction to the democratically arrived at positions of DSA in support of Palestinian rights.

### *Mass Strike and the Road to Socialism*

Luxemburg’s 1906 classic, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, based on her study of, and participation in, the 1905 Russian Revolution, provides further direction on socialist praxis. Luxemburg defines The Mass Strike—also the title of the ILN’s journal—as the “form of the revolutionary struggle . . . the living pulse-beat of the revolution” against capitalism and for achieving socialism. It is, she emphasizes, “the method of motion of the proletarian mass, the phenomenal form of the proletarian struggle in the revolution.” Through Mass Strike processes in the U.S., such as in 1877, 1886, 1934-1937, is how working class has made major advances.

The mass strike, for Luxemburg, is distinct from a general strike that we still see in Europe, Latin America and India, where trade union leaders call out workers for one- or two-day strikes against austerity measures or other attacks. In contrast, she argues the Mass Strike cannot be “called” by trade union or socialist party leaders. She harshly critiques a “mechanical-bureaucratic conception” of the mass strike as the “product of organisation at a certain stage of its strength.” Rather, for Luxemburg, the mass strike is a “living, dialectical” process in which “the organisation arise[s] as a product of the struggle.” This “bottom up” process is exemplified by 1934 San Francisco general strike, where the leaders of most of the city’s labor unions, far from initiating the strike, were forced to capitulate in the face of a rank-and-file strike movement bringing in larger layers of the working class. Therefore, for Luxemburg, the mass strike movement—what she also terms “mass strikes” underscoring their hydra-like, expanding nature—are “real people’s

movements” that bring in the “widest sections of the proletariat”—unionized, nonunionized and the unemployed. In the rapidly moving context of a mass strike both economic and political demands are raised, with struggles around economic demands laying the ground work for political ones, and visa-versa. As Luxemburg explains in her recounting of the 1905 Russian Revolution, “Economic struggle is the transmitter from one political center to another; the political struggle is the periodic fertilization of the soil for the economic struggle”

While Luxemburg emphasizes the mass strikes cannot be “called”, this does not mean socialists just have to wait for them to appear, nor that organization is unimportant. Key to preparing the soil for mass strikes to emerge and expand is socialists convincing workers of their common interests in a program that unites political and economic demands and mounting, as explained above, uncompromising fights for them. If this preparatory work has been done—including building democratic organizations in which “we are all leaders”—when mass strikes do break out, socialists will be better positioned to “seize the occasion” by beginning the “lively agitation for the extension of the demands” and the mass strike process.

### **Luxemburgism: Theory and Practice**

In this section I review how, over the last decade, ILN activists have attempted to apply Luxemburg’s ideas in various struggles in the New York/New Jersey area. The first case was that of the “Demands Working Group” of the Manhattan outpost of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. OWS was a U.S. expression of the global mass strike that emerged in the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis. The Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings of late 2010– 2011, and their spread to Wisconsin, and later back across the Atlantic to Burkina Faso, Greece, Spain and later to the U.S. Occupy movement, represented, as labor historian Jeremy Brecher argues, an “unrecognized global mass strike.”

Thus, informed by Luxemburg, ILN activists of course recognized that we could not “call forth” this mass strike wave. But we could intervene in this fast-moving process, and this is what informed ILN activist Eric Lerner’s intervention to organize the “Demands Working Group” (DWG) of OWS/Zuccotti Square, one of many bottom-up initiated “working groups” that were forming at the time. In mid-September (2011) Eric announced the group’s first meeting at the OWS’s nightly “General Assembly” (GA)—the mass democratic organ forged by the mass strike. Eric and others also distributed flyers about the meeting at the encampment and on various email lists. The first meeting of the DWG, held in the square, gathered a couple dozen people, including this writer. We began discussing various demands that we could all agree and present to the broader movement. Through several subsequent meetings we fashioned and grouped the various demands into a coherent program that we entitled: *Jobs for All—A Massive Public Works and Public Service Program*. The specific demands included:

- All who live where have equal rights
- All who love here have the right to Free quality public education, health care, transportation, housing and clean energy.
- All who live here have a right to good jobs at good wages
- Paid for by taxing the wealth and income of the billionaires and ending all US wars.

After having developed the Jobs for All (JFA) program, the DWG organized a larger gathering in the famed Tompkins Square Park. The seventy five people or so in attendance debated and eventually agreed on the JFA demands using a “modified-consensus” method of 75%—as opposed the GA’s 90%—approval for passage. The next step was the OWS GA meeting. In the lead up, the DWG did various forms of outreach to educate and build support for JFA, including a forum at the New School entitled “Should Occupy Wall Street Demand Jobs for All?” as well as continuing regular meetings of the



DWG. During this campaign building up to the GA vote, the DWG faced attacks, in particular, from the OWS leaders of the so-called leaderless group, including by literally being deplatformed from one of the OWS websites. The OWS leaders were vehemently opposed, informed by their anarchist ideology, to making demands on the ruling class and their state. In addition, the anti-democratic nature of the GA, including the 90% margin required to pass any measure, and the various rituals that offered numerous opportunities to block action being taken, created further obstacles to advancing the mass strike process through the “lively agitation for the extension of the demands”

This inability to push forward the mass strike process—a barrier created by the “anti-demands” ideology of the OWS’s leading ideologue, David Graeber, and his disciples—by projecting a broad set of demands that could enlarge the movement increased OWS’s vulnerability. The state now went on the offensive. After a mobilization of supporters beat back an earlier threat in October, in the early hours of November 15 the “NYPD, including officers from the Counter-Terrorism Bureau, staged a federally coordinated raid” of over 1,000 cops that cleared the square, arresting over 200 activists and throwing their tents, laptops and other items into dumpsters. Finally, in early December, with the encampment cleared and the winter cold having set in, the JFA demand did finally come up for a vote. With approximately sixty people in attendance, the proposal received over 60 percent of the votes, but because it did not reach the 90 percent threshold the JFA demand was not adopted by what at that time was a rapidly retreating movement

*People’s Assembly on the Fight for Jobs, Equality, Peace and Justice in Newark, New Jersey*

Another attempt at applying Luxemburg’s ideas was the People’s Assembly in Newark, New Jersey, held in October 2013. The origins were a yearlong picket for a national jobs program

organized by the Newark-based community group, the People’s Organization for Progress (POP). After its completion, the ILN, POP, the Newark Education Workers reform union caucus, and other groups came together to organize a popular assembly. Meeting over several months, the planning committee developed a set of demands, consistent with the yearlong picket, of Equal Rights, Jobs, and Free Public Services for All. We placed particular emphasis on ALL, as the demand included explicit language including immigrants, the formerly incarcerated, and combating kind of oppression that would block the universality of the program.

About 150 activists representing various northern New Jersey-based organizations attended the assembly, which opened with an introductory speech by a student activist involved in 2012 Quebec student strike. After a lot of debate, discussion, and some amendments, we came to agreement on the Equal Rights, Jobs, and Free Public Services for All set of demands. The weakness was the failure to come to any kind of agreement on concrete actions to actually win them. A central stumbling block was on the electoral front. ILN participants proposed, in Luxemburgian fashion, to run democratically-chosen independent candidates beholden to campaign on our program and fight to implement it—in coordination with the movement— if elected. But since many of the participants were tied one way or the other to the Democrats, we could not gain agreement on running candidates. Nor could we even get support for having groups in their various terrains of struggle—ranging from peace to health care—to raise the program as the solution to their particular issue. As one ILN activists put it “Many outrages, one program.” Despite their willingness to participate in the assembly, many groups were still unable to fully break from their single issues silos and solutions.

*The CUNY Popular Assembly*

Some of the same difficulties faced at the Newark

popular assembly reappeared in the 2016 City University of New York (CUNY) counterpart. By 2016, workers at CUNY had gone over six years without a contract. In the face of the utter bankruptcy of the Professional Staff Congress's—the faculty union—lobbying and bargaining strategy, a rank and file movement emerged to propose a way forward. An opening was provided to connect with various dissident forces when the PSC leadership called a union-wide meeting to present their faux fight back plan that provided for no real input from members. Through the meeting this writer, a CUNY education worker, made contact with two leaders of a newly formed grouping called “CUNY Struggle”, composed mainly of graduate students who also had teaching responsibilities. After meeting with them I proposed that we hold, informed by Luxemburgism, a “Popular Assembly” to develop and agree on a class wide struggle fightback program. That is, to break out of the narrow collective bargaining framework the PSC bureaucrats were and tied to and make the struggle of the CUNY workers the fight of the entire working class.

The CUNY Struggle leaders agreed, but we soon encountered even more problems than with Newark assembly. First, the two key leaders objected to even developing a coherent set of demands in the planning meetings before the March 2016 assembly. Thus, when we finally got to the assembly, those gathered developed, haphazardly, a laundry list, rather than a coherent program. Second, and in an even bigger setback from Newark, the clock was basically run out by the CUNY Struggle leadership during the demand formation portion of the assembly, and therefore we never even got to the action component. Despite talking a radical line, the CUNY Struggle leaders fundamentally, like the union bureaucrats who they were ostensibly in opposition with, did not see a class wide program as “realistic”. Rather than defend their position, they instead, like the PSC bureaucrats, used behind the scenes maneuvers to prevent an open debate.

### **Campaign to Close the ICE Concentration camps**

After Donald Trump's election in 2016, an activist with the group Cosecha called a meeting of various groups and activists in northern New Jersey working on immigrant rights. Out of this meeting emerged a new coalition—the Resist Deportation Machine (RDM) network. The RDM's mission was to unite—rather than work in isolation—immigrant rights forces in the face of stepped-up attacks under the Trump regime. ILN activists, working in the Jobs and Equal Rights for All campaign, argued that if we were serious about resisting the deportation machine that meant closing the ICE concentration camps. Three northern New Jersey, Democratic-run, counties held contracts with ICE to operate some of the largest camps in the country, while a fourth dungeon was run by a private contractor.

Some of the groups that attended the first RDM meeting, mainly NGOs in the orbit of the Democrats, were not in agreement with closing the ICE camps. But the RDM, as a group, did commit to ending the contracts. The RDM also eventually agreed to a “points of unity” platform similar to what was agreed at the Newark conference, but the central focus was an uncompromising fight to close the ICE concentration camps. And, in a major victory, by 2021—four years after RDM's formation—all of the Democratic-Party run camps had closed, while the landlord renting to the private contractor was suing to break the lease!

This victory was a product of the movement, consistent with Luxemburgism, fighting uncompromisingly for the demand. RDM used a polarizing, “which side are you on”, from of struggle. We denounced local officials—forcing some to break their silence by uttering some opposition to the camps—and NGO advocacy groups for their support, direct or indirect, for the camps. We held numerous militant pickets, including a blockade of the County offices that led to seven arrests of RDM activists. Therefore, even with many NGOs running cover

for the Democrats by providing humanitarian justifications for keeping the camps open—“we want to keep detainees close to their families”—and other “progressive” naysayers arguing it was impossible to defeat the Democrats, the movement prevailed. Further strengthening the local struggle was that the movement to close the camps had become a national insurgency, of which RDM in northern New Jersey was an integral part.

Another component of the movement was electoral. The ILN activists in the movement proposed we run our own candidate, based on our agreed upon program, with a primary focus on closing the camps. We proposed the movement challenge a powerful Democratic “party boss”—Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo—who ran the largest ICE camp in New Jersey and was influential in state politics. But there was resistance to this proposal from various elements within RDM. The Cosecha leaders rejected it along syndicalist lines—“we should not get involved in politics”. Other groups, taking a position similar to the French Marxists Luxemburg critiqued, argued it only led to reformism. The Greens only support Greens. Finally, DSA supporters and their local

chapter failed to even entertain the idea since it clashed with their “dirty break” theory of only—at least until the far-off future break—endorsing, and expending resources to support, “insurgent” Democratic Party primary challengers.

Nonetheless, the ILN and other supporters drafted and selected the author to run as an independent candidate in the 2018 race for Essex County Executive. Consistent with Luxemburgist principles, we used the electoral campaign to advance the struggle to close down the camps, as well as to champion and underscore the need for our entire program. The campaign won about 2-3% of the vote, and in areas we campaigned in heavily the percentage reached nearly double digits. The outcome underscored that in one-party, Democrat districts, such as those that prevail in northern New Jersey, where Republicans are not a force, socialists running on a democratically-decided-upon, class wide program could easily reach double digits. This would make socialists the main challenger to the Democrats, all of which would position us to gain concessions, strengthen the movement-electoral strategy, and further prepare the soil for mass strikes—the road to socialism.

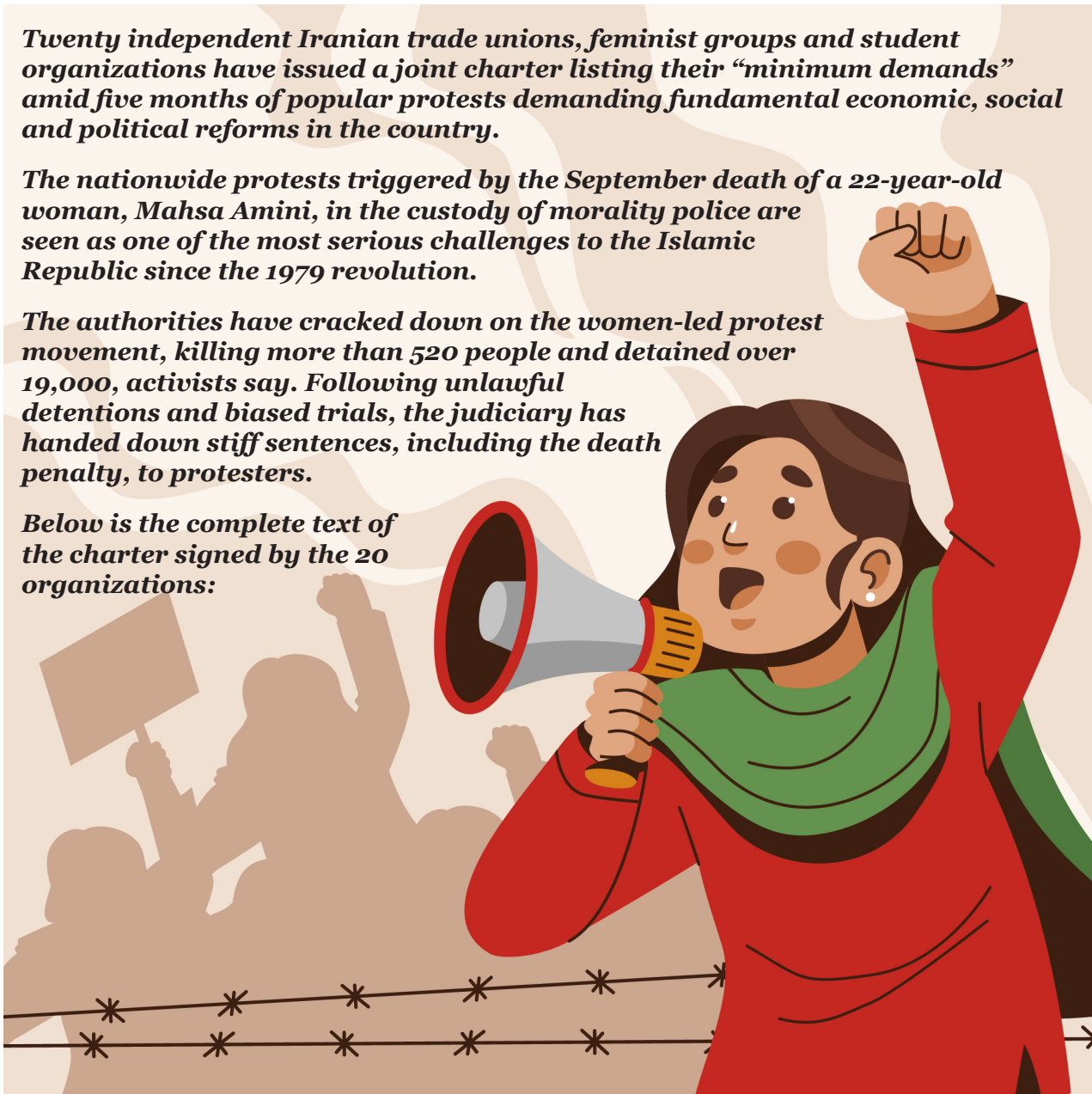


***Twenty independent Iranian trade unions, feminist groups and student organizations have issued a joint charter listing their “minimum demands” amid five months of popular protests demanding fundamental economic, social and political reforms in the country.***

***The nationwide protests triggered by the September death of a 22-year-old woman, Mahsa Amini, in the custody of morality police are seen as one of the most serious challenges to the Islamic Republic since the 1979 revolution.***

***The authorities have cracked down on the women-led protest movement, killing more than 520 people and detained over 19,000, activists say. Following unlawful detentions and biased trials, the judiciary has handed down stiff sentences, including the death penalty, to protesters.***

***Below is the complete text of the charter signed by the 20 organizations:***



## Woman, Life, Freedom

***Free and noble people of Iran!***

On this 44th anniversary of the 1979 revolution, our economic, political and social bonds as a country have fallen into such depth of crisis and disarray that it is impossible to imagine any clear and realisable prospect of resolution within the framework of the current political superstructure.

As a result, the oppressed people of Iran – women and young people who demand freedom and equality – have, at extraordinary risk to themselves, transformed streets across the country into the scene of a historic, pivotal battle to end the prevailing inhumane circumstances. For the past five months,

despite bloody state repression, they have not stopped for an instant.

The banner of the revolutionary protests today raised by women, university students, high school students, teachers, workers, justice seekers, artists, queer people, writers and all oppressed Iranians across the country, from Kurdistan to Sistan and Baluchestan, attracting unprecedented international support, is a protest against misogyny and gender discrimination, interminable economic insecurity, the bondage of the labour force, poverty and misery and class oppression, and persecution along national and religious lines. It is a revolution against all the forms of religious and non-religious dictatorship foisted upon us, the collective people of Iran, for over a century.

These transformative protests are the product of great and modern social movements and the uprising of a generation which refuse to accept defeat and are determined to bring an end to a century-long history of backwardness and the marginalisation of the dream of a modern, free and prosperous Iranian society.

After the two great revolutions in modern Iranian history, it is now the major progressive social movements – the labour movement, the teachers' and retiree movements, the movement for equality led by women, students and young people, the movement to abolish the death penalty, and others – which are now positioned to act along popular and grassroots lines and play a historic and deciding role in shaping the political, economic and social institutions of the nation.

As such, this movement intends to forever end the imposition of power from above and touch off a societal, modern and humane revolution to free the people from all forms of oppression, discrimination, exploitation and dictatorship.

We the trade and civic organisations and institutions who have signed this charter, with a focus on the unity and solidarity of social

and labour movements, as well as on the fight to end the existing inhumane, destructive conditions, consider the realisation of the minimum demands below to constitute the primary directives and outcomes of the people's revolutionary protests, as well as the sole way to establish a new, modern, humane society in the country. We ask all the noble people whose hearts are committed to freedom, equality and liberation, to carry the banner of these minimum demands to the summits of the fight for freedom, from the factory and university to the schools and neighbourhoods and on the global stage.

1. The immediate and unconditional freedom of all political prisoners, the decriminalisation of political, labour and civic activism, and public prosecution of those who ordered and those who carried out the repression of grassroots protests.
2. Unconditional freedom of belief, expression and thought, freedom of the press, political parties and local and national labour and grassroots groups, freedom to organise, strike and demonstrate, and freedom of social media, as well as audio-visual media.
3. An immediate end to the handing down and carrying out of sentences of death, execution and retribution, and banning all forms of psychological and physical torture.
4. The immediate declaration of full equality between women and men in all political, economic, social, cultural and family respects; the unconditional abolition of laws and forms of discrimination based on gender and sexual orientations and identity, official recognition of the LGBTQIA+ community, decriminalisation of all sexual orientations and identities, and unconditional adherence to women's rights to make decisions about their own bodies and affairs, and the prevention of acts of patriarchal control.
5. Religion is a private matter for individuals and must not play a role in the country's

political, economic, social and cultural destinies and laws.

6. Ensuring safe working conditions, secure employment and immediate wage increases for workers, teachers, employees and all active and retired workers with the presence, involvement and agreement of representatives chosen by their independent nationwide organisations.
7. The abolition of laws and all treatment based on discrimination and oppression along national and religious lines, and the creation of appropriate infrastructure to support the just and equal distribution of state resources for cultural and artistic growth in all parts of the country, in addition to the creation of necessary and equal facilities for teaching and learning all of the languages present in Iranian society.
8. The dissolution of organs of repression, limitation of the powers of government, and the continuous and direct involvement of the people in the handling of the nation's affairs through local and national councils. The right to dismiss holders of all governmental and non-governmental offices at any time must be a basic right of electors.
9. Confiscation of the assets of the natural and legal persons and state, parastatal, and private institutions which have pillaged the shared assets and wealth of the people of Iran either directly or through state rentierism. The proceeds of these confiscations must immediately go towards the modernisation and reconstruction of the educational system, pension funds, the environment and those areas and segments of the Iranian public deprived and marginalised under the Islamic Republic and the regime of monarchy.
10. An end to environmental degradation, the implementation of decisive policies to revive environmental assets damaged over the past century, and the restitution to the public of all natural areas (including fields, beaches, forests and foothills) whose privatisation deprived the public of their rights to them.





11. The banning of child labour and guarantees for the livelihoods and education of children regardless of their family's economic and social status. The creation of universal welfare through robust unemployment insurance and social security for all working adults and those unable to work. Free education and healthcare for all people.
12. The normalisation of foreign relations at the highest levels with all countries worldwide, on the basis of mutual respect and equitable relations. Banning the acquisition of nuclear weapons and striving for global peace.

In our view, these minimum demands can be immediately achieved with Iran's current and potential underground resources, its conscious, capable people, and a generation of youth and teenagers highly motivated to enjoy free, happy, and prosperous lives.

The demands set out in this charter represent the main themes of our demands, the signatories to this charter, and we will address them in more detail as we continue our struggle and solidarity.

- Coordination Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations
- The Free Union of Iranian Workers (@AzadEttehad)
- Union of University Organisations of United Students
- Defenders of Human Rights Centre
- Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Workers' Union
- Organising Council for Contract Oil Workers' Protests
- House of Teachers of Iran (*Khaafa*)
- Bidarzani
- Voice of Iranian Women
- Independent Voice of the Ahvaz Steel National Group
- Defenders of Workers' Rights Centre (@kanoonmodafean)

- Trade Association of Kermanshah Electrical and Metal Workers
- Coordinating Committee for Assistance in Creating Workers' Organisations
- Union of Retirees
- Iran Retirees' Council
- Organisation of Progressive University Students
- Council of Freethinking Students of Iran
- Alborz Province Painters' Union
- Committee for the Pursuit of Creating Workers' Organisations of Iran
- Council of Retirees of the Social Security Administration (*Basta*)

*Original translation by Paymon Azmoudeh (@paymonaz). Edits and changes in this text by Bahram Soroush (@bsoroush). February 15, 2023*

# Take Back What The Billionaires Have Stolen!

*The Path To Victory In the Global Strike Wave*



In April 2023, the world is ablaze with workers' collective anger and collective action. A global strike wave on a scale not seen since 1968 is sweeping Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. In France, Germany, the UK, Iran, Israel, Sri Lanka, Peru and elsewhere, repeated general strikes have mobilized millions of workers in the past month. **On a single day, March 27, there were simultaneous general strikes in France, Germany and Israel,** while in the previous history of the workers' movement there have never been even two simultaneous general strikes.

Occupations of the universities, high schools and some refineries are spreading in France, as

in May, 1968, when 10 million workers were on strike and thousands of factories occupied. In Israel, large sections of the military have sided with the strikers while in Iran, the top generals are alarmed by widespread refusal by members of the army to fire on protestors. In these three countries, the mass strikes are challenges not just to policies but to the regime.

The basic issues throughout the global strike wave are the same—the fight against attacks on workers' wages, pensions, educational and health systems and against the blatantly authoritarian methods used to impose these massively unpopular attacks. In Iran and Israel, workers are fighting the same theocratic/kleptocratic

regimes dressed in different religious colors. Elsewhere, the strike wave is battling assaults that are naked of any ideological or democratic disguise—imposed by decree in France, by coup in Peru.

The capitalist regimes that have launched these attacks on working-class standards of living worldwide say that there is no money to support pensions, wages, health and education. They are lying. The world capitalist class, the billionaires, that control these regimes have the money and they have stolen it from us. Since 2008, and especially since 2020, **the governments controlled by the capitalists have stolen trillions of dollars in public funds and brazenly, publicly, given them to the banks and other financial institutions, and through them to the billionaires.** These trillions have been the sole source of funds for the bankrupt financial system.

Now a third round of theft is starting. In just the first week after the default of the Silicon Valley Bank in early March, the Federal Reserve, the Swiss National Bank and other central banks poured more than half a trillion of public funds into a new bailout of the billionaires and their bankrupt banks.

The unified voice of the Iranian revolutionary movement has raised the demand to **take back what has been stolen.** In the Charter of Minimum demands adopted Feb. 16, 2023 through a democratic process by 20 popular organizations leading the revolution, the central economic demand, #9, is “**Confiscation of the assets of the natural and legal persons and state, parastatal, and private institutions which have pillaged the shared assets and wealth of the people...** The proceeds of these confiscations must immediately go towards the modernization and reconstruction of the educational system, pension funds, the environment.” The charter has called on workers everywhere to join with them “**to carry the banner of these minimum demands to the summits of the fight for freedom, from the factory and university to the**

**schools and neighborhoods and on the global stage.”**

The world working class can unite behind this slogan raised by the Iranian revolution to say in one mighty voice “**Take back what the billionaires have stolen.**” Seize the banks, don’t bail them out! Take into public ownership the entire failed financial system. Take back all the trillions that the billionaires have stolen and use them to fund increased wages, good jobs for all, pensions, free education, free health care, a gigantic expansion of free housing, clean energy and a restored environment—the critical needs of humanity!

History has shown that when strike movements begin to raise positive demands, demands for what we want, not just what we oppose, the ruling class trembles. The escalation of demands makes concessions more and more costly to them and spreads the movement further and further. The adoption of sweeping positive demands leads to victories.

Activists in every country can support and contribute to the victory of the global mass strike wave by **joining with the Iranian revolutionary organizations in calling on their own mass organizations to adopt the slogan “Take back what the billionaires have stolen” in their own struggles.**

In France, the adoption of the demand to **take back what has been stolen** for the needs of the workers, can become the central unifying call as the movement passes to the offensive. The democratic debate and adoption of this demand by general assemblies and committees of action is a first step in establishing the program for the emerging revolutionary movement and the institutions of working class power. The movement has already taken the first steps in this direction by targeting Blackrock, the main conduit of much of the theft.

Concretely, we can demand that the orderly seizure of the banks can be carried out by central banks simply selling *en-mass* their trillions of holdings in corporate bonds. The very start of



this process will instantly erase the solvency of all major financial institutions, which have been propped up only by the mass infusion of public funds. The insolvent institutions can then be seized by the governments.

Of course, the seizure of the banks and other financial institutions will be only a first step in redirecting the real resources to real needs. For that process to happen fully, the workers' movement will have to develop the new democratic organs that will control both the financial institutions, and the vast swaths of the rest of the economy that they now own. But such democratic institutions of economic control will emerge from the very struggle for these demands.

In the United Kingdom, the discussion and adoption of this slogan can weld the already powerful strike movement into an unstoppable force.

Even in the United States, where no mass movement yet exists, there is enormous potential that the outrage from the emerging mass bailouts, in tandem with nationwide austerity attacks, including throwing 15 million people off of Medicaid, can be focused by this slogan into unified actions of mass protest and strikes. In the US, as well as elsewhere, activists can propose that their mass organization democratically discuss and adopt "Take back what the billionaires have stolen" as a goal of the organization that can become a fighting demand in local and regional struggles.

For example, in New York State, the (Democratic) Governor has launched an assault on public education, saying there is not enough money. But a 5% per annum wealth tax on just the richest 1% of New York taxpayers would raise more than \$160 billion per year, allowing a 70% increase in the state budget and funding free quality education at all levels for all, free health care and a massive increase in public housing. If unions, student and community organizations united on the slogan "Take back what the billionaires have stolen", a wealth tax could be the embodiment, as a concrete demand, of a unified state-wide movement. Such a tax would raise about \$8,000 per year per capita, \$25,000 per household anywhere in the US.

"In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold." The global strike wave is beginning to show that power. Let's use it now to take back what the billionaires have stolen.

Statement of the International Luxemburgist Network, April 29, 2023

co-signers: Jay Arena (College of Staten Island; member, ILN), Eric Lerner (scientist, LPP Fusion; member, ILN), Hoang Minh Uyen LY (researcher, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; member, ILN), Kazem Nik-khah (Worker-communist Party of Iran), Peter Ranis, (Graduate Center, CUNY, emeritus), Avram Rips (Special Education Itinerant Teacher, NYC), Bahram Soroush (Worker-communist Party of Iran), Leah Weich, (Politics for Human Community)