

The political issues in the Standing Rock protests

8 December 2016

Over the past several months, protests at the Standing Rock reservation against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) have won the support of broad sections of workers and young people throughout the United States and internationally. Scenes of protesters being violently confronted by police, attacked with dogs and water cannon and shot at with rubber bullets and concussion grenades have shocked millions.

On Sunday, the Obama administration announced that it would not grant an easement for construction of the final component of the pipeline, which would threaten the only water supply for the Native American reservation. This decision, however, resolves nothing. It is a maneuver whose purpose is to demobilize opposition and disperse the protests, which were attracting increasing support, including from veterans, while leaving the final decision on DAPL to the Trump administration.

There is little doubt that the incoming administration will authorize the pipeline's construction. Trump, who has personal investments in the company leading the project, has already made clear his desire to see it completed.

The direction of Trump's policy was made even clearer by reports Wednesday that he will appoint Scott Pruitt, the attorney general of the state of Oklahoma, as administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. Pruitt is a virulent opponent of the EPA and has close ties to the energy industry.

He boasts on his state government web site of his role as "a leading advocate against the EPA's activist agenda." He would be the first EPA administrator, Democrat or Republican, to be a climate change denier.

Trump's appointment of retired Marine Gen. John Kelly to head the Department of Homeland Security is a signal that his administration will be prepared to use military force against protests within the United States.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party support the struggle being conducted against the Dakota Access Pipeline. The SEP Statement of Principles, adopted in 2008, defends the rights of Native Americans, one of the most oppressed sections of the working class. It declares that the consequences of the crimes committed by American capitalism against Native Americans, including "extreme poverty, a life expectancy 20 years below the national average, absence of adequate housing, and general neglect of the social needs of Native American reservations and communities by government agencies persist to the present day."

The defense of the social and democratic rights of Native Americans, however, depends upon the political mobilization of the entire working class in opposition to the capitalist system. The construction of DAPL is itself bound up with the interests of gigantic energy conglomerates and banks that exploit workers all over the world. They anticipate windfall profits from the completion of a pipeline connecting the Bakken shale oil fields in North Dakota to the global energy market.

There are class divisions within the Native American population itself. While the social problems confronting Native American workers and youth—both on the reservations and outside of them—are confronted by workers of all races and nationalities, a small section of Native Americans has benefited from various economic arrangements with the corporate and financial elite. They are generally conservative in their outlook and politically aligned with the Democratic Party.

President Obama has a direct connection to the Native American leadership. His former special assistant for Native American affairs, Jodi Archambault Gillette, is a member of the Standing Rock tribe. Her brother, David Archambault, is tribal chairman.

Following the White House lead, David Archambault has proclaimed a “huge victory” and asked the thousands of protesters gathered in the encampments along the Missouri River to “go home.”

The other basic issue raised by those protesting the DAPL—the dominance of the oil and gas corporations and the reality of global warming—is likewise unresolvable within the framework of the profit system. Nothing short of the social reorganization of the world economy, so that the planet is no longer held hostage to the profit motive or destructive nationalistic interests, can achieve the reduction in greenhouse gases necessary to prevent disaster.

It is impossible to defend either the immediate interests of the Lakota Sioux people or the global interests of working people to a safe environment on the basis of capitalist politics and the subordination of struggles like Standing Rock to the Democratic Party.

The central task is to break free of the capitalist two-party system and build a mass, independent political movement of the working class. The Socialist Equality Party advances a socialist program to defend the democratic and social rights of Native Americans and all working people.

It begins with the nationalization of the major corporations, including those that control the energy industry, and their transformation into public utilities under the democratic control of the working population. Private ownership of these critical levers of the economy must be ended, along with the subordination of social need to private profit.

Only on this basis can the vast productive capacity of society be mobilized and developed to both protect the environment and provide a decent standard of living for every inhabitant of the US and the rest of the world.

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