

The working class and socialism

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On Monday, US President Donald Trump capped his State of the Union speech by declaring, “Here, in the United States, we are alarmed by new calls to adopt socialism in our country... Tonight, we renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country.”

Just three days after Trump’s anti-socialist outburst, the Bureau of Labor Statistics released a report showing just what is motivating the fear of socialism: the growth of the class struggle. According to the BLS, the number of workers who went on strike last year was the highest since 1986—more than three decades. Last year, more than half a million US workers went on strike, a 20-fold increase over 2017.

The largest work stoppage was last April’s strike by 81,000 Arizona teachers and staff, resulting in 486,000 lost man-days. The strike by 20,000 Oklahoma teachers that same month resulted in 405,000 lost man-days. The BLS added, “Statewide major work stoppages in educational services also occurred in West Virginia, Kentucky, Colorado, and North Carolina.”

This wave of struggles has intensified in the New Year—in the United States, throughout North America, and all over the world. In Los Angeles, tens of thousands of teachers went on strike last month. Seventy thousand workers in auto plants in Matamoros, Mexico launched a major strike that is already disrupting auto production in the United States, and which is spreading to other sections of the working class.

And this is only the beginning.

Since the crushing of the PATCO strike in 1981, the American ruling class has presided over decades of deindustrialization, mass layoffs, and pay and benefit concessions. The trade unions have collaborated in implementing all these measures, selling out every struggle, endorsing every plant closure, and calling every defeat a victory.

This has resulted in the most dramatic upward redistribution of wealth in American history.

Just three people in the US control as much wealth as the bottom half of society. In the ten years since the 2008 financial crisis, the number of billionaires has nearly doubled. Every two days, a new billionaire is created.

Over the past year, the wealth of the world’s billionaires increased by \$2.5 billion a day, while the wealth of the poorest half of humanity fell by a staggering 11 percent.

Nowhere within the political establishment is there any expression of the social and political interests of the vast majority of the population. Trump’s far-right politics is more and more basing itself on the central characteristic of every fascistic movement: the explicit hatred of socialism.

The Democratic Party, for its part, centers its politics on the repudiation of any appeal to the working class. It has instead sought to create a “populist” movement around an amalgamation of racial and cultural identities, based on the fiction that the basic social division is not class, but race and gender. This is the politics of the upper middle class, competing over positions of power and privilege, aligned with dominant sections of the financial oligarchy and the military-intelligence apparatus.

In an effort at political chloroforming, the Democrats have elevated a handful of figures—such as Senator Bernie Sanders and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—whose task is to provide a left gloss for a right-wing party.

In their replies to Trump’s State of the Union speech, however, both made clear that they are not, in fact, socialists. Asked if “socialism” is a “winning message,” Ocasio-Cortez declared, “at the end of the day, it’s not about an ‘ism.’ And I think that’s exactly what the president is trying to do. He’s trying to mischaracterize, frame, associate.”

In his 27-minute-long reply to Trump’s speech, Sanders refused to use the term socialism except as a

pejorative, complaining that the United States has “socialism for the rich.”

Commenting on Trump’s invocation of the “Socialist Menace,” *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman, an apologist for the Democrats, declared, “Right-wing media will portray whomever the Democrats nominate for president as the second coming of Leon Trotsky,” adding, “Let’s just hope that the rest of the media report the clean little secret of American socialism, which is that it isn’t radical at all.”

Krugman here is right. Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez are not “radical at all,” much less actual socialists.

One hundred and seventy years ago, at the birth of the modern socialist movement, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels declared in the *Communist Manifesto* that “It is high time that Communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the Specter of Communism with a manifesto of the party itself.”

Now, when this same “specter of communism” haunts the ruling class, socialists must state clearly what they stand for. Socialists call for not a few reforms, impossible under capitalism, but the seizure of the wealth of the ruling class and the total reorganization of society. We call for the transformation of the major corporations into public utilities, democratically controlled by the working class, to ensure the basic social right of everyone to health care, education, a good-paying job and a secure retirement.

There is an objective logic to the development of the class struggle. The struggles in individual workplaces and communities are bringing workers into ever more direct conflict with the anti-working-class trade unions, requiring the formation of independent factory and workplace committees to unify broader sections of the working class.

Today, the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees and the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* are holding a demonstration to oppose the layoff of thousands of workers by General Motors and other auto companies. It will be a critical step in the organization of the working class, independently of the unions, against the dictates of the corporate and financial elite.

The developing struggles of the working class,

moreover, will take on an ever more explicitly anti-capitalist orientation and socialist character. As Trump and the entire ruling class fear, the logic of working-class struggles is toward a general strike, which will raise the question of political power and the reorganization of society on the basis of social need, not private profit.

The political program that represents the interests of the working class is socialism. To realize this program requires the building of a political leadership. The Socialist Equality Party, along with its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International, is spearheading the fight to arm the objective working-class movement with an uncompromising revolutionary strategy and socialist perspective.

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To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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