

Who are we ?

● The International Workers Committee Against War, Exploitation, for a Workers' International (IWC) was set up at the World Conference held in Mumbai (India) on November 19, 20, 21, 2016 gathering delegates from 28 countries.

● The IWC was set up on the basis of the Mumbai Manifesto against war, exploitation and precarious labour which was endorsed by labour activist and trade union and political organisations officers from 46 countries (*)

● Its continuations committee is composed of labour activists from all political/ trade union backgrounds:

Innocent Assogba (Benin),
Alan Benjamin (USA),
Colia Clark (USA),
Constantin Cretan (Romania),
Berthony Dupont (Haiti),
Ney Ferreira (Brazil),
Daniel Gluckstein (France),
Rubina Jamil (Pakistan),
Apo Leung (China),
Gloria Gracida (Mexico),
M.A. Patil (India),
Mandlenkosi Phangwa (Azania),
Klaus Schüller (Germany),
Jung Sikhwa (Korea),
John Sweeney (Great Britain),
Mark Vassilev (Russia),
Nambiath Vasudevan (India).

(*) Afghanistan, Argentina, Austria, Azania, Belarus, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Ecuador, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Korea, Mali, Mexico, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, USA, Venezuela, Zimbabwe.

UNITED STATES

Labor's Resurgence, Bernie Sanders, the DSA and the Fight for Independent Working-Class Politics Today

An Interview with *The Organizer* Editorial Board Member Alan Benjamin (part I)

Question: There has been considerable talk in recent months about a resurgence of the labor movement in the United States. Could you tell us about this?

Alan Benjamin: No doubt about it: Labor is rising. In February 2018, a teachers' strike wave erupted in the "red [Republican] states" of West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Arizona — all "right-to-work" states where public-sector strikes are illegal. Teachers walked off the job — with overwhelming parent and community support — to demand not only higher wages and improved conditions for teachers, but more funding for public education and an end to the privatization/charter school dismantling of public schools.

In most of these "red states" the teachers' won their demands. The "Red State Revolt" inspired similar strikes among unions nationwide: In May, more than 50,000 workers on 10 University of California campuses went out on strike for improved wages and conditions. The nurses organized by the CaliFormnia Nurses Association walked off the job in a sympathy strike, in defiance of the NLRB's ban on sympathy strikes.

The ruling-class counter-offensive was swift. On June 27, 2018, during the same time that the labor movement was being invigorated by these victories, the Supreme Court issued a ruling in the *Janus v. AFSCME* case that rendered fair-share fees illegal for public-sector workers, thus dealing a huge blow to the ability of unions to finance their activities through membership dues. The bosses' goal, relayed by the court, was to smash the trade union movement once and for all.

But this ruling did not deter the teachers and other unionists from deepening their fightback. If anything, it awakened a sleeping giant. Union members learned from the example of the "red states" teachers' strikes that when workers and their unions exert their collective power, they can prevail.

In the fall of 2018, more than 7,000

Marriott hotel workers hit the bricks in eight cities across the United States to demand a living wage, an end to outsourcing, and improved working conditions. After a two-month heated battle against the Marriott International, now the largest hotel chain in the world, the hotel workers won most of their demands.

Labor's resurgence took a further leap forward in the first months of 2019, when tens of thousands of educators in Los Angeles and Oakland, California — a "blue [Democratic] state" — walked out to demand a fair contract and an end to the charter-school privatization drive imposed by the Democratic Party officials. Their determination to stay out as long as necessary compelled the school administrators and state officials to return to the bargaining table and grant the unions most, though not all, of their demands.

Another clear expression of this new fighting mood in labor was the call by Sara Nelson in January 2019 for a nationwide strike to end the 35-day federal government shutdown — the longest in U.S. history — that forced 800,000 workers to work without pay and without recourse. Nelson is the president of the Flight Attendants' union (AFA-CWA). Her call sent alarm signals throughout the halls of power and prompted the immediate lifting of the shutdown by the Trump administration. This rise in labor militancy, in turn, has buoyed the union organizing efforts in the public sector and in countless other industries — from the ILWU drive to organize Anchor Steam brewery workers in San Francisco, to the BMW-IBT drive of rail workers on the East Coast, to the Uber drivers in Silicon Valley. Union membership has not declined, as anticipated; it has increased.

In another sign of the changing times within the house of labor, one of the traditionally conservative unions — the Painters and Allied Trades union (IUPAT) — voted at its national convention in August a resolution that condemns both the ICE raids

and deportation of 680 immigrant poultry workers in Mississippi and the racist killings of Latino workers and their families in El Paso, Texas.

The IUPAT resolution states, in part: "The ICE raids and the white-supremacist attack that killed 22 people are both acts of terror against working people. In the labor movement, we know that racial solidarity and class struggle solidarity is what advances the rights of all workers in this country. We will not allow any vigilante, politician, government, or boss to divide us."

Yet another expression of this growing resistance is the expansion within the trade union movement of the Labor Campaign for Single Payer Healthcare. Despite AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka's failure to support Single Payer, an increasing number of unions are calling for "Single Payer Now!", and many of the unions are organizing labor-community coalitions to build support for Single-Payer. (Trumka says that we will "ultimately" need such a plan, but in the interim, we need a "transitional approach" that protects the employer-based plans negotiated by unions and the self-funded plans of the craft unions.)

The Southern Workers Assembly, which unites trade union and community organizations across the South, is one such example. The SWA explains its campaign as follows: "The SWA believes that by building a workers-led, Southern movement for Medicare for All (Single Payer) it can help to draw non-union workers into our movement, and build union-workplace organization – through workplace-based committees – across the South."

Question: Has this labor resurgence extended into the political arena, and if so what form has it taken?

Benjamin: Yes it has. The forms it has taken are multiple, but one of the most significant, in my opinion, is the launching by Bernie Sanders during his election campaign of the Workplace Democracy Act — "a plan aimed at doubling union membership over the next four years." Mind you, the Democratic Party leadership will do little more than give lip service to this or that plank in the plan, if that, but

trade union leaders and activists at all levels have applauded this plan loudly and are already "organizing to make sure it is implemented," to quote a retired South Carolina union official.

Included among its 16 points, the Workplace Democracy Act calls for the following:

- * Providing unions the ability to organize through a majority sign-up process, allowing the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to certify a union if it receives the consent of the majority of eligible workers.

- * Enacting "first contract" provisions to ensure that companies cannot prevent a union from forming by denying a first contract.

- * Eliminating the "Right to Work for Less," which has allowed 28 states to pass legislation that impedes drastically the efforts of unions to organize workers.

- * Banning companies from ruthlessly exploiting workers by misclassifying them as independent contractors or denying them overtime by falsely calling them a "supervisor."

- * Giving federal workers the right to strike.

- * Denying federal contracts to employers that pay poverty wages, outsource jobs overseas, engage in union busting, deny good benefits and pay CEOs outrageous compensation packages.

- * Banning the permanent replacement of striking workers.

- * Protecting workers' pensions.

- * Stopping corporations from forcing workers to attend mandatory anti-union meetings as a condition of continued employment.

- * Allowing for secondary boycotts. The plan reinstates a union's freedom of speech to take action to pressure clients and suppliers of companies opposing unions.

These demands are what the labor movement has been fighting for since the end of World War II — to no avail. No politician has lumped them all together in one plan, as Sanders has done. But this poses the \$64,000 question: How will this Workplace Democracy Act see the light of day?

When Bill Clinton was in office, he

enacted NAFTA, the anti-labor "free trade" agreement that accelerated the massive flight of union-scale jobs to low-wage sweatshops, or maquiladoras, south of the border. The Democrats controlled both houses of Congress at the beginning of Barack Obama's first term in office. Obama had campaigned across the nation's Rust Belt for the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), which would have given unions the ability to organize through a majority sign-up process. But Obama buckled under the pressure of the captains of industry and finance, who run and control the Democratic Party just as they control the Republican Party — and EFCA was dropped like a hot potato.

The same fate awaits the Democratic Workplace Act under whatever candidate, Democrat or Republican, is elected. And you can be sure that Bernie Sanders will not be the Democratic Party nominee in 2020. The party's establishment, regrouped in the Democratic National Committee, or DNC, rigged the primary against Sanders in 2016 and is already in the process of rigging the primary once again. This includes maintaining superdelegates on the second round of voting to block a Sanders' nomination, promoting "progressive" Elizabeth Warren to undermine Sanders and channel his base toward mainstream Democratic Party politics, and modifying the party's financing rules to sap Sanders' independent funding sources.

The Democratic Party establishment needs Bernie Sanders to help them sheepdog young and working class voters back into the Democratic Party to defeat Trump. But that's the extent of it. And Sanders has agreed to play by their rules. He has pledged — just as he did with Hillary Clinton in 2016 — to support whatever candidate "wins" the Democratic Party nomination, be it Joe Biden, Elizabeth Warren or anyone else. He also has agreed to drop his own Our Revolution independent funding campaign. In a word, Sanders has gone out of his way to demonstrate that, despite his "independent" and "socialist" credentials, he is a loyal Democrat, that is, a loyal supporter of one of the twin parties of the bosses.

(to be followed)