

Why Marx21?

The tasks for the left today

Today humanity faces two different but equally serious threats: On the one hand the rise of Trump, the Far Right and racism internationally. And on the other hand catastrophic climate change. And the clock is ticking for both threats, requiring an urgent response from the revolutionary left to apply the strategic lessons from movements across the world. We must support and help organize anti-racist and environmental movements and develop anti-capitalist politics that challenge the system at its core.

Both of these threats are directly related to capitalism's failure to resolve the crises it generates. The scapegoating of refugees, Muslims, and all immigrants in Europe and the US are characteristic of the depth of the crisis. Long-held humanitarian beliefs such as the right to seek asylum and of opening the borders to provide relief to people fleeing wars have been directly challenged by xenophobic and racist governments. From Italy's Salvini to Trump, this recent attempt to blame the victims for the failings of the ruling classes and capitalism have directly contributed to a normalization of racism and in turn has provided the far right and fascists with the political space in which they are recruiting, openly organizing, and murdering people.

We have seen that broad social movements can isolate and push back the far right and the fascists in a number of countries in Europe. Greece's Golden Dawn was the first frightening example of



an openly neo-Nazi party entering parliament. But today Golden Dawn is entering a period of deep crisis, mainly as the result of the anti-fascist movement KEERFA (Movement United Against Racism and Fascist Threat), who have fought to isolate them as they are facing a long trial for their racist murders and violent attacks in Greece. Similarly, in Austria, the FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria) coalition government collapsed partly under the pressure of the anti-fascist movement there. In the UK Tommy Robinson faced a humiliating defeat in the recent European Parliament elections. Robinson himself complained that he lost

because wherever he showed up, people would call him a Nazi.

What we have seen is that organizing broad anti-racist campaigns can stop the fascists. This needs to be a lesson that we amplify here in the US as well.

System change, not climate change

A recent report by scientists has raised the alarming prospect that we only have two decades from the "point of no return." Millions of species are facing extinction. The poor all over the globe will be at the frontline of the effects of climate

change. Hurricanes Katrina in New Orleans, Maria in Puerto Rico, the recent Cyclone Idai that devastated Southwest Africa, are just some recent examples of racism and climate change colliding. More refugees are to be expected in the near future — climate refugees. Meanwhile Europe, the US, and Australia are all building fences, walls, and camps to prevent migrants getting to safety.



Yet Trump continues to call climate change a hoax and give huge tax cuts to the fossil fuel industry. As it becomes clear to hundreds of thousands across the globe that capitalism cannot regulate itself and start reducing greenhouse emissions, a new generation of activists has emerged. Young and old took action recently in what has come to be known as Extinction Rebellion. A direct action movement has emerged, which has shifted the climate movement with strikes and protests.

To hundreds of thousands, it is starting to become clear that capitalism cannot resolve the climate crisis and that doing something meaningful will most likely require ending capitalism. But how? Here is where the left needs to intervene with the understanding of the urgency of the situation and learn from the victories of workers we have recently seen in the US.

The left in the era of Trump

Despite the deeply reactionary and savage state of affairs in the Trump era, we have seen some very encouraging developments. The meteoric rise and the Democratic Socialists of America and the popularity of socialism among young people is a sign of the tectonic shifts that are happening in the US. The fact that the Democratic Party, one of the the two parties of the ruling class, has now to deal with a social democratic insurgency within its ranks speaks volumes. Regardless of the limitations of such a strategy, the fact that it is happening inside the Democratic

Party shows clearly the opening that exists for socialist and radical ideas in the US.

Revolutionaries need to be able to relate to this leftward shift and not sit on the sidelines and simply point out its strategic limitations, but actively participate in the struggles and pull activists to the left, towards radical anti-capitalist politics. At the same time we have seen a series of teachers' strikes spread like wildfire across the "red states" and win important concessions and victories that we had not seen in decades. Last year alone more workers went on strike in the US since the 1980s. The fact that a strike wave with the very high participation of women can spread across the US even in these dark times and win says a lot about what is possible for the labor movement and the left today.

Not a time to agonize but to organize

Marx21 aims to bring together activists who want to fight for the politics of socialism from below, inside the movements and in the struggles of today.

We draw inspiration from the comrades around the globe in the International Socialist Tendency (IST) who are involved in the day-to-day organizing against fascism, against racism, and building unifying campaigns in the unions and our neighborhoods.

We believe political tools such as the United Front are key for the left going forward in order to deal with the short-term and the long-term challenge of changing the world and fighting for a socialist future. We hope that everyone who agrees with this outlook will join our growing network and fight for this anti-capitalist perspective in the movements and in the streets. We need the broadest possible unity in our struggles but also clear revolutionary politics.

Photos:

An antifascist demonstration in Athens Greece, organized by KEERFA heading to confront a Golden Dawn rally last month.

Extinction Rebellion in Edinburgh in April

Striking Teachers Show Us How to Win

Since February 2018, striking education workers have put class struggle back on the political agenda in the United States. It began in West Virginia when teachers and other public school workers from all 55 counties in the state refused to work, demanding an end to low pay and spiraling healthcare costs.

Puncturing decades of the decimation of the American labor movement, their 12-day strike set off a chain reaction across the country. Many years of fury over pitiful public education investment, unlivable wages, slashed pensions, soaring class sizes, expensive healthcare, monotonous standardized testing, cuts to support staff, runaway privatization, rampant racism, and low taxes on the wealthy boiled over into strikes and walk-outs across the country.



Teachers in Oklahoma, Colorado, Arizona, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Virginia, California, and Oregon followed West Virginia's example. Bus drivers in Georgia joined them. Tennessee teachers are still holding "sickouts" in Nashville, and New Haven, California teachers are still fighting the school district over their demands. Ohio might be next, where teachers voted in late May to strike if negotiations fail.

Not every teachers' strike so far has won their demands, but many did. Their fight is a lesson for everyone that wants free, accessible education for all. The teachers show us that if you fight, you can win.

Fighting the privatization agenda

Several of the teachers' strikes have included demands about pay.

In a country that spends billions of dollars on wars and private prisons while

teachers buy their own classroom supplies, work two jobs, and even sell their blood to make ends meet — their fight for pay raises seems pretty reasonable.

But many striking teachers argue that their strikes aren't really about pay. They are fighting the privatization agenda that has starved schools of funding for many years and diverted resources to privately run, publicly funded charter schools. Charters can be run by nonprofits, but their general trend is toward corporate control. In Michigan, for example, for-profit companies now operate 80 per cent of charter schools.

Charters have the ability to select which students they admit, which leaves the most vulnerable students in the under-resourced public school system. In North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Michigan, and Texas charter schools have also deepened racist segregation. In New Orleans the proportion of black teachers also fell from 70 to 50 per cent as privatization following Hurricane Katrina was rolled out across the city.

Centering anti-racism

In some places the teachers put social justice as the front of their struggles, making demands that are not usually considered “bread and butter” issues for unions like wages and conditions. The Los Angeles teachers’ strike in early 2019 is a case in point.

The school district is almost 90 per cent students of color and the vast majority of the public education workforce are women of color. Thanks to the concerted effort of left wing activists in the teachers’ union, the strike was widely understood by both teachers and the community as a fight to defend the last public space that kids of color can access in the US. The union won a reduction to racist “random” searches in schools and a dedicated attorney for immigrant families. The random searches need to stop, not just decrease — but winning the reduction is a step towards ending racism in the schools. Winning the attorney is different than the teachers’ original demands for a \$1 million immigrant defense fund, but it signals to immigrant families that their schools stand with them against deportation and vilification.

I helped organize a community solidarity campaign called Tacos for Teach-

ers, along with activists in the International Socialist Organization, Democratic Socialists of America, and California Educators Rising. Not only did we raise almost \$50,000 to deliver tacos to thousands of striking teachers across the district, we raised the profile of immigrant rights in the city and against Trump’s racist border wall.



Women on the frontline

Industries dominated by women are leading the current strike wave — over three quarters of teachers in the US are women. Service, hotel, and health workers (also woman dominated workforces) have led this labor upsurge too. Women are often encouraged to work in these areas, where we face chronic low wages, degrading conditions, and sexual harassment. The ruling class expects us to raise the next generation of workers (at home and in the classroom), take care of the sick, and cook and clean. The capitalist system relies on the idea that women are naturally suited for this kind of care work, hoping that we will be compliant and passive in the face of our exploitation.

But women are leading the charge to win a better world free from this kind of oppression — making gains for every gender. Irish women fought their government’s abortion ban and won. Spanish women led a popular International Women’s Strike last year. Migrant women at the US-Mexico border recently went on hunger strike against slow asylum processes. Workers at Google fought workplace harassment last year and won many of their demands. These are organized expressions of resistance against a system designed to benefit a tiny elite who profit off the rest of us. We should take inspiration from the US teachers’ strike wave as we prepare to fight state abortion bans and anything else the sexist Trump administration throws at us.

Clare Lemlich

Photos:

Teachers in West Virginia from all 55 counties went on strike in February 2018.

Tacos for Teachers was inspired by education workers who sent pizzas to the picketlines in West Virginia. In Los Angeles we fed thousands of people and inspired similar campaigns around the country

Stonewall at Fifty – Reclaim Pride

This June marks the 50th Anniversary of the Stonewall Riots that ushered in the modern gay liberation movement. This year there is an alternative to the corporate sponsorship, commercialization, and de-politicization of the annual “Pride” celebrations. Join the Queer Liberation March, June 30th, re-tracing the root of the original Stonewall anniversary demonstration, from the Stonewall Inn on Christopher up to Central Park.

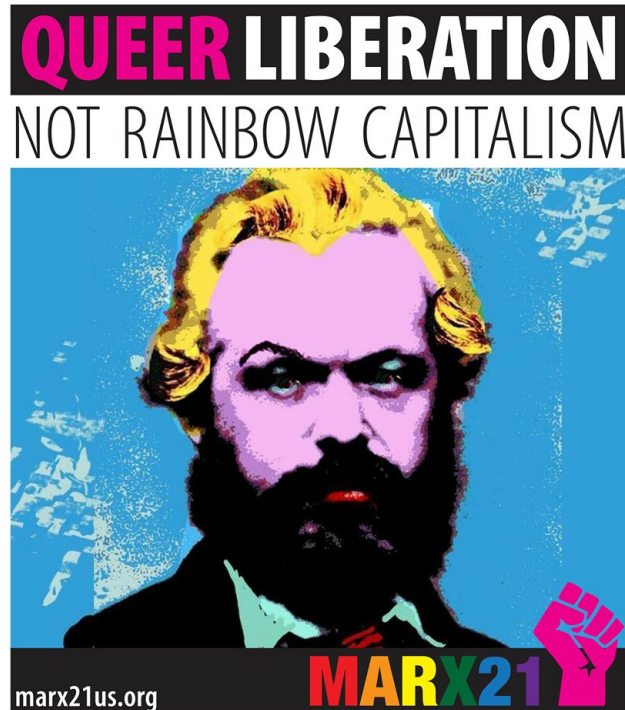
Stonewall was several days of rioting against a police raid, against a homophobic and oppressive society, and against a range of other oppressions and exploitation. It was led by a multicultural crowd of poor and working class gay men, lesbians, drag queens and transvestites (to use the language of the day). They pushed beyond the existing staid “homophile” organizations of the day, who would not have included most of them anyway. This was 1969, and the mood was influenced by the New Left of the day, the movement against the war in Vietnam, the Black Panthers, etc. As the Latina trans activist and Stonewall participant Sylvia Rivera put it, “we had done so much for other movements... Everyone was involved in the women’s movement, the peace movement, the civil rights movement. We were all radicals.” Soon after Stonewall Sylvia joined other participants to form the Gay Liberation Front, which stated “We are a group of revolutionary men and women formed with the realization that complete sexual liberation for all people cannot be won until all the existing social institutions are abolished.”

In this phrase, they were rediscovering the Marxist critique of the Bourgeois family, its enforced role in social reproduction within the system of capitalist exploitation, and a Marxist theory of LGBTQ+ liberation. From the late 19th Century through the 1920s the early history of the gay liberation movement was tied to the socialist movement. That

thread was broken by Stalinism in Russia and the affiliated parties, and by Hitler in Germany, and it's remains further repressed by McCarthyism in the

US. It took a resurgence in the left to help start over. Today we see new, frightening, attacks on trans people and on gay and lesbian rights we thought we had already won. But we also see a resurgence of the link between socialism and LGBTQ+ liberation, in many contradictory, sometimes confused, but promising directions.

See our website Marx21US.org for articles by Jay W. Walker of Reclaim Pride on the Queer Liberation March, "An End to Corporate Control of Our Pride," and by Eric Fred on Stonewall, Socialism, and Sexual Liberation. "



Marx21 is a network of revolutionary socialists across the United States. We stand in the tradition of socialism from below: the idea that workers can only emancipate ourselves through our own struggles. Marx21 is loosely connected with other like-minded socialist groups around the world in the International Socialist Tendency.

***Please join us for our next event:
Climate Crisis and Socialist Strategy
July 19th 7-9PM***

***The New School University Center Room 513
63 5th Ave, New York, NY 10003***

