Speak Out Now

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It's the Ballot Box or the Streets

What does the future have in store for us? Every day feels like we are waiting for the next shoe to drop: what will be the next funding cut, raised price, round of layoffs, or attack on our rights? Massive cuts to the public services funded with our tax dollars in healthcare, education, housing, and transit are being redirected towards ICE, the police, and military. Our taxes keep footing the bill while, this year, the biggest and most profitable corporations paid the lowest taxes ever recorded. Meanwhile, the cost of our utility bills, gas, and groceries keep going up. Rather than fund jobs and necessary infrastructure, big companies are flaunting their wealth by building giant data centers and rolling out surveillance infrastructure while tens of millions of people are just struggling to make ends meet.

The 2026 midterm elections are approaching, which are supposedly the way to bring us some relief or even real change. But does swapping out politicians to manage a system that is really controlled by the rich and powerful change our fate? We do have other possibilities.

Around the world right now, mass demonstrations and uprisings show us a different path. In France, high school students in the poorer working class areas, tired of the worsening conditions and little promise for a better future, launched weeks of demonstrations and protests in the streets. They unleashed the anger of students in the universities and the broader public. Massive days of action were held on October 17, 22, and 24, with hundreds of thousands around the entire country taking to the streets. The functioning of this system: education inequality, wealth inequality, militarism, and racism are some of the main concerns driving people to take to the streets.

And this is not just happening in France! In Spain, Italy, Greece, Albania, Serbia, Bolivia, India, and elsewhere, mass protests have exploded against rising costs, corrupt governments, increased military, and cuts to public services. In Spain, protests were sparked when an 87-year-old woman was physically evicted from her home in Madrid, where housing has become completely inaccessible to most people. In Albania, protests were originally launched back in February in response to the Trump family trying to take over public land to develop a luxury resort. In India, following the momentum from protests over the summer, demonstrations erupted in response to the removal of around 130 million names from voter rolls.

Around the world, we are facing the same worsening conditions. And the collective actions of people in one place are inspiring and motivating others to take their own action. Those in positions of power realize the threat that these movements could become, and are responding with a heavy hand. In France, the government has tried to ban "illegitimate" demonstrations, and police violently maimed and beat up student protestors and arrested thousands. India locked down its capital and detained leaders of the demonstrations. Around Europe, batons, tear gas, and water cannons against demonstrators have become the norm. The message from those in power and the politicians who do their bidding is clear: we will only tolerate dissent through our system, through the ballot box.

But people around the world are realizing that just voting brings little or nothing when their whole system is killing us. It is becoming increasingly clear to many that elections for politicians put up by the rich and powerful have no real impact on our day-to-day lives. In India, the massive protests in July forced the resignation of a corrupt minister of education. The Spanish protests forced the government to reverse their eviction. Though these measures do not yet go far enough to really see sustained change, they show the potential of our power.

And this is not just happening elsewhere, we can see that when we respond and connect in workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods, this is where real change will come from. Look at how pushing back against ICE here in the U.S. really happened. It wasn't politicians, it was us in the streets – in LA, Chicago, and especially in Minneapolis. The massive, organized resistance in the neighborhoods and in the streets forced the federal government to withdraw many ICE agents from Minneapolis. The increasing mobilization against data centers and surveillance, has forced politicians to back off of their support for projects headed by the billionaires.

We are not going to give up our right to vote and to voice our opinions. But our real power comes from our collective action. Real democracy will come from us showing our power in the streets and organizing in our workplaces, neighborhoods, and schools to make decisions about what is needed, not to plead with politicians. If our needs aren't met, then it is up to us to stop their business as usual and shape our own future.

Reports From Speak Out Members Around the U.S.

Bay Area, California:

ICE Surge in CA: We Must Be Ready to Respond!

We are seeing a wave of heightened ICE activity throughout California ahead of the midterm elections. In the Central Valley, ICE has been conducting traffic stops on roads to agricultural fields, and more than 100 people have been arrested. In San Francisco, an agent in plain clothes ran across the street with his gun drawn to arrest a man, and in the East Bay, two immigrants were arrested so violently they required hospitalization -- one being unable to stand and the other with six cracked ribs.

In both East Bay cases, community networks rallied to track where each person was taken, monitor the hospitals, get them in contact with their families and legal aid, and lead to one release. When those in power want to intimidate and disappear our neighbors with violent public attacks, it's up to us to keep us safe!

The Triangle, North Carolina:

NC Legislature Finds a New Way to Help Landlords

North Carolina Legal Aid provides a valuable service to the working class families living paycheck to paycheck. When landlords or debt collectors sue for back rent or credit card debt, Legal Aid lawyers can help the defendants fight against claims which are often exaggerated with illegal fees and charges.

NC's state legislature recently cut the subsidies on which Legal Aid services depend. Landlords and credit card debt collectors will benefit when fewer defendants have lawyers, making the court system even more the tool of the wealthy. We think that the best defense against the power of the rich is strong working class organization. Nevertheless, cuts in Legal Aid show what side state government is on.

We live in the wealthiest country in the world, and it is our labor that has created all of this wealth. We aren't the ones who benefit from this. The super rich — the bosses of the big corporations and banks — keep the wealth and make all the decisions. Working people do the work that makes society run, and we can organize to unite our forces. When we do, we have enormous power to change things and make a better world.

Baltimore, Maryland:

Stop the Endless BGE Increases!

Baltimore Gas and Electric (BGE), the utility company for the Baltimore region, announced that it wants to add a $9 monthly fee to city residents' electric bills. This is in addition to the proposed $8 monthly increase for all BGE customers! BGE says the fees and higher rates are necessary so they can increase their profit margins from 9.5% to 10.4%, and to pressure the city government into giving them free access to the underground network of cables. Plus, the federal government blocked a regulation that would allow the power grid to protect homes from blackouts by temporarily off shutting power to data centers.

We need electricity in our homes to survive. But to BGE, the data center billionaires, and their friends in the federal government, it's just a tool to hoard more profit.

Newark, New Jersey:

ICE is a Threat to Us All

On October 16, in the town of Red Bank, ICE agents in unmarked cars pursued a car. After chasing it a few blocks, another unmarked ICE vehicle approached from the front, leading to a collision between the two cars. As smoke rose from the vehicles, one ICE agent pointed his gun at a man and his two partners arrested the driver and passenger. As is often the case with ICE activity, local police hadn't been notified, and an ICE pursuit led to a dangerous situation involving vehicles. Once again guns were drawn for no reason.

As ICE thugs operate as a rogue force with no accountability, they not only harm those they are hunting, but also endanger countless others. ICE, CBP and DHS are a threat to us all.