

Louisiana needs a statewide anti-Landry movement

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QTCAP and Unión Migrante activists hold up banners at New Orleans May Day

2024, during a speech by a member of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees. SLL photo: Gregory E. Williams

June 1 will mark five months in office for Louisiana's far-right governor, Jeff Landry. In this short amount of time, he and the Republican supermajority state legislature have unleashed a barrage of attacks on the state's working-class and oppressed people.

These range from greenlighting new, cruel methods of execution (such as asphyxiation by nitrogen gas) to deregulating homeowners' insurance, making it easier for giant corporations to raise rates and drop customers. He sent the state's National Guard to the Mexico-U.S. border in Texas, wasting three million in taxpayer dollars to further scapegoat immigrants for the problems caused by U.S. capitalism.

At this point, the anti-Landry movement has yet to fully flower, but the potential is there. Various organizations are keeping up the pressure. And the huge Palestine solidarity movement has kept people marching in the streets of the greater New Orleans area and in Baton Rouge, showing that the will to resist is strong.

Activists set up a pro-Palestine encampment in New Orleans' Jackson Square. Tulane and Loyola students set up a joint encampment about a day later. Both encampments were violently cleared by police, but resistance has continued.

Students and faculty at historically Black Xavier University successfully got pro-genocide U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Linda Thomas-Greenfield, dropped from speaking at graduation.

Concerted action works, even in Louisiana. What's needed is a statewide movement uniting everyone who's under attack.

HB608, the 'trans erasure bill'

Despite having a gay brother who has spoken out against Landry's anti-LGBTQIA+ bigotry, the governor has accelerated the attacks on our communities.

The Queer and Trans Community Action Project (QTCAP) is one organization that has led marches against Landry and showed up to protest at the legislature in Baton Rouge. They have sounded the alarm about the "trans erasure bill." Their statement says:

"HB608, sponsored by Rep. Roger Wilder III, seeks to legally define 'sex' as an individual's gender assigned at birth, functionally and knowingly erasing trans people from the law. This bill would ban trans people's safe access to bathrooms and beds in schools, prisons/jails, and domestic violence shelters."

The statement goes on to say that Wilder and other legislators (with Landry included) claim that this bill is supposed to protect women and girls. This assertion falls flat when we look at Landry's budget slashing: He wants to cut funding to domestic violence shelters by \$7 million.

That's in his proposed state budget, set to go into effect on June 1. The Louisiana Illuminator Reports: "Domestic violence is one of the largest public safety issues facing Louisiana. In 2020, the state had the fifth-highest female homicide rate in the country. More than half of women victims that year were killed by an intimate partner, according to the Violence Policy Center. ...

"A 2021 investigation by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor concluded the state desperately needed more shelter beds for domestic violence victims. Louisiana's 16 shelters had a total of 389 spaces, while Louisiana had an average of 2,700 unmet requests for shelter beds every year."

So, if Landry and company don't really care about women's safety, we have to look elsewhere in order to discover their motivations. To the point, on April 11 of this

year, a House committee struck down a measure to gradually increase Louisiana's ridiculously low \$7.25/hour minimum wage and another measure that granted LGBTQIA+ people legal protection against workplace discrimination. (When he was campaigning, Landry told a reporter that he wants to abolish the minimum wage entirely.)

Who could possibly benefit from these actions besides the bosses who would pay zero dollars if they could and who want to keep their ability to fire workers for any reason whatsoever?

This is one very clear reason that the right supports LGBTQIA+ discrimination on behalf of the capitalists. Respecting basic human rights cuts into the bosses profits. In addition, keeping us divided prevents us from fighting back in a united struggle.

Landry is a paper tiger

Mao Zedong famously stated that imperialism is a paper tiger - fierce-appearing but ultimately flimsy compared to the power of the masses. This was dramatically illustrated when Vietnamese peasants and workers defeated U.S. imperialist invaders, the most powerful and technologically advanced military force in history. That's what's possible with unity.

Likewise, Landry may be a paper tiger. His zombie government does not have a mass base. He simply outspent everyone else. Big donors wanted him.

For example, an out-of-state billionaire, Richard "Dick" Uihlein of Illinois, paid \$450,000 to flood Louisiana with Landry ads during the election. Uihlein owns packing and shipping supply company Uline, and funds far-right causes across the country.

Apparently he thought Landry was a good investment for people like him, and he's likely right; in month two of his governorship, Landry issued an executive order that

corporations receiving tax breaks in Louisiana do not even have to meet a meager job-creation quota, which was the conventional excuse given for the already-outlandish tax breaks.

With his big-money backers, Landry just strolled into the governor's mansion, effectively unopposed by a weak Louisiana Democratic Party that had defamed itself by supporting the abortion ban. He activated his fascist base, but the election still had record-low voter turnout. Only 35.8% of the state's 3 million registered voters even went to the polls, with only 18% of registered voters casting their ballot for Landry.

Meanwhile, there are 4.59 million people in Louisiana, and the vast majority are not rich – far from it. The majority have a stake in fighting the attacks. We just have to figure out how to reach more workers (employed and unemployed). We need to get out in the streets, talk to people at bus stops and laundromats, and anywhere else we can find workers to build this movement.

There's a long road ahead, but we gotta start somewhere.

First-ever Northshore Pride

Here is one bright spot on the horizon. The Northshore (that is, the parishes north of Lake Pontchartrain and thus north of New Orleans) is going to have its first Pride parade. It is scheduled for June 1 in Mandeville, and a month of activities are planned to follow it.

This area has been a major focus of struggle in the state. The Landry-aligned, book-banning, Moms for Liberty clones – The St. Tammany Parish Library Accountability Project – caused havoc in St. Tammany. This was ground zero for the Landry movement's street-level assault on queer and trans people.

But throughout it all, LGBTQIA+ and other progressive community members came

out in large numbers to council meetings. They showed up at libraries to defend these important public institutions. Queer and trans activist and social groups formed.

Northshore Pride is a result of all that and is hopefully a sign of things to come.

