

Transport and Public Sector Unions: Strike in Support of the BART Workers and Their Unions!

“In Unity there is Strength”: This truth is manifested when unions strike as one, simultaneously. Since the first days of the BART strike, there has been a sense of solidarity and unity coming from union workers, non-union workers, the unemployed, and the youth of our working class communities. There is a wild card in our deck: Many of the Bay Area families who have lost loved ones to police murder, and their supporters, favor militant union action—for the unions, the workers, and their communities. These righteous sentiments of solidarity in the fight for justice can and must give rise, through organizing and mobilization, to a united working class movement for a *common defense* against our *common enemy*.

On July 1st 2013, when BART’s contracts with its unions expired, BART workers defiantly threw up picket lines and began their strike. The struggle brought together workers from three different unions—Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) 1555, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 1021, and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) 3993—which collectively represent BART’s train operators, station agents, and maintenance and clerical workers.

After four and a half days of a solid strike, BART workers should not have gone back to work. When the BART strike started, contracts had also just expired for union workers at the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD), the City of Oakland, and AC Transit. **All those unions should have gone on strike simultaneously when the BART workers went out.** Even now, the ATU 192 workers at AC Transit, and the AFSCME 444 & 2019 workers at EBMUD, still have not settled their contracts. This gives the workers an opportunity to correct the tactical mistake made by the BART unions in returning to work before they had achieved the goals of their strike. To take advantage of that opportunity, AC Transit and EBMUD workers need to *walk out and strike in tandem and solidarity* when the BART workers strike, as is anticipated, starting on August 5. **No Contract, No Work!**

Enter ILWU Local 10—Time to Organize and Apply Labor, Black and Brown Power!

There is a mutual need for support between the labor movement and the oppressed Black and Brown communities. *We have the same enemy*: the rich and powerful who control the economy, and the politicians and police who do their bidding. In this current Bay Area labor battle, the workers and the communities should come together to support each other. The Black and Brown communities should stand shoulder to shoulder on the picket lines with workers fighting to get back the pay and benefits that were stolen from them. Union workers and the oppressed communities should fight together for goals such as decriminalizing poverty and making sure *all* of our children get the high quality education they need and deserve. **The pinnacle of this solidarity is achieved when the unions organize political strikes against the current wave of**

murderous police killings, of which most of the victims are Brown and Black youth.

Fortuitously, one of the unions in our own backyard, Local 10 of the International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU), has long been in the forefront of the U.S. workers movement, organizing political strikes for international working class solidarity, demanding freedom for Mumia abu-Jamal, and other vital working class issues. The ILWU rank and file have also been a major factor in organizing their members, together with the communities, for the benefit and sometimes defense of the workers *and* their communities. Recently, in February of this year, ILWU Local 10 came to the aid of the beleaguered family of Mario Romero, slain by the Vallejo Police on September 2, 2012. They put the Vallejo politicians—*flunkys of capitalism*—on notice about the police department’s harassment and intimidation of this brave family.

We of Labor Black and Brown (LBB), and our comrades in HWRS, saw this as an opportunity to correct the demise and dissipation of the unity between union, Brown, and Black forces that organized the historic October 23, 2010 shutdown of the Bay Area ports to demand “Justice For Oscar Grant.” We don’t believe in merely applauding and speechifying about the proud and important traditions and contributions of the ILWU. We believe that the union movement cannot just stand by while ILWU Local 10 does all the heavy lifting. **Now is the time for the members of ATU, SEIU, AFSCME, and other unionists, to make their own contribution to the historic, pioneering steps the ILWU has taken and truly institutionalize, for the workers movement, the class struggle truth that “An Injury To One Is An Injury To All!”**

Let us not get caught off-guard. The working class needs to be in the mood to “play for keeps.” The upcoming BART strike could and should spread, across unions, communities, and localities. Rank and file radicals and revolutionaries in every union need to articulate to their brothers and sisters the need for *self-organization* of the workers and the oppressed communities, *independent* of the capitalists and their politicians. Now is our chance to build a united movement that can push back against the epidemic of budget cuts, reductions in public services, police brutality, and union-busting exemplified by the defeat

of the struggle against the Wisconsin anti-union legislation in March, 2011. That's what a political strike is all about. **Workers and their allies change the ground rules, acting by themselves and for themselves.**

To do anything politically meaningful will require taking on a fight with the capitalists of Wall Street, of course, but that's not all. We must also be wary of the cowardly political opportunists, from trade union bureaucrats to "progressive" democrats—including an array of fake socialists—who try and disunite and confuse us. They will howl about irresponsible unions and radical workers shaking everything up by fighting not just for money, but for the people, for every worker, every union. They will want to water down our determination to achieve full justice, and try to keep us separated and unprepared for the knock-down, drag-out fight that it is going to take to press our demands.

This is the same sell-out bureaucracy that dis-organized the rank and file union membership that tried to stop the union-busting in Wisconsin. In February and March of 2011, behind the backs of the tens of thousands of workers occupying the Wisconsin State Capitol building, the Wisconsin Republicans and their Governor Walker pulled a legal fast one, in effect decertifying public employee unions. And the unions did nothing but cry "foul" and then meekly surrender. The union bureaucrats diverted the organizing into impotent electoralism, mounting a "Recall Scott Walker" campaign—a disingenuous and pathetic move, and one that predictably failed!

No wonder that the following year, 2012, the Republicans passed a similar union-busting law aimed at the United Auto Workers (UAW) in Michigan. Yet rather than calling on workers to fight back with strikes and sit-ins until the law was defeated or withdrawn, the UAW leadership merely mouthed opposition to the law. In reality, the union officials were more concerned with the threat to the UAW's dues base than with the attack on the rights of workers as a class.

Strike While the Iron is Hot

After all the dirty tricks, parliamentary sleight of hand, and divide-and-conquer nastiness that the capitalists have been beating us up with, it should be ABC to any union leader or any union radical that NOW is the time

- **No trust in the union bureaucracy! For elected rank-and-file committees to conduct the strike!**
- **Elect committees of rank-and-file workers and representatives of the Black and Brown communities and the unemployed to organize political strikes against police brutality and attacks on unions and workers!**
- **Organize Workers' Councils to express and realize our demands and needs!**
- **Convene Delegated Rank-and-File Labor, Black and Brown Tribunals; let the masses put killer cops, environmental polluters, and corporate tax evaders on trial!**
- **Organize and deploy Labor Black and Brown defense guards. No more police murder and harassment!**

to take this opportunity and unite the rank-and-file to smack them back! Take back all the take-backs!

Across the nation, the banksters who wrecked the economy are safely back in their saddles (made of our money). Meanwhile, the police have free rein to kill our children. Now they are even stalking the families of those whose lives they have taken! On top of that, our schools and social services agencies have nowhere near the resources necessary to do their jobs.

We need to rescue our children and our schools! All the problems we have come about because the system gave away our money to Wall Street, and we are paying for it with our children's futures! And the politically bankrupt union bureaucracy helped. They tell us to vote, not fight. They let us blow off steam with solidarity at **lunchtime** (!) rallies. They want us to work with and within this anti-worker, racist system that is at the mercy of its destructive and greedy capitalist class. We can't count on them for leadership—we have to become our own leaders!

Today, the BART and AC Transit workers are counting on the respect and support of the poor, and of the best of Oakland's working class, to help them win fair contracts. By the same token, **now** is the moment when the Bay Area transit unions, the Oakland City Workers, and the ILWU can be pulled together in a movement that works *both* to stop the police murders and defend the victims' families *and* to support the workers' struggle against attacks on our rights and our standard of living.

The next few weeks, if the BART strike stays unresolved, will be critical. Now is the time for class conscious or concerned workers to seek revolutionary solutions, strategic political collaboration in united fronts, and opportunities to unite the unions and the people around a program for common class struggle. We say **now**, because these opportunities are fleeting. **Now**, because many union members got their minds right about solidarity and are in a mood to fight.

How about a movement that openly says what it wants, and how it thinks workers can win? We say: "Shut the Bay Area down with a strike by all transit and municipal workers until all the unions' demands are met, and all the take-backs and concessions are rescinded!"

Labor Black and Brown: <https://www.facebook.com/laborblackbrown>

Humanist Workers for Revolutionary Socialism:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Humanists-for-Revolutionary-Socialism/80134436166>

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